

PROJECT SUMMARY

Media and Information Literacy: for human rights and more democracy (MIL)

Project Title	Media and Information Literacy: for human rights and more democracy
Project Area	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Budget	681,869.16 Euro
Funding	Voluntary contribution from Norway and Luxembourg
Implementation	Division for Co-operation on Freedom of Expression Information Society Department – DG I
Duration	1 September 2020 – 31 December 2022 (28 months)

I. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

Technological developments – the rise of on-line media and other internet platforms – have dramatically increased access to a growing range of information from diverse sources. This has created new opportunities of communication and of participation in the public debate. The ongoing evolution continues to raise concerns, in particular in relation to freedom of expression and media pluralism as one of the key cornerstones of a democratic society. Internet intermediaries have acquired considerable control over the flow, availability, findability and accessibility of information and other online content.

Various research, including a needs assessment study commissioned as part of this project, has shown that over the past years, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there have been individual, project-based MIL efforts, even though there are, as yet, no systematic education programmes on media, information, news or digital literacy in BiH. Initiatives from some NGOs (supported by international donors) are using non-formal education methods; these are supported by a small number of experts in the field. During the past few years, these initiatives have gained more visibility and interest from a wider spectrum of stakeholders, even though they have as yet to yield tangible, sustainable results.

The 2020 Progress Report of the European Commission find that in BiH, “online platforms are often used to [...] spread disinformation.”¹ This presents risks for the way in which individuals interact with information, including the risk that individuals select or are exposed mainly to information that confirms their already held views and opinions, rather than critically confronting a multitude of ideas from which they inform their opinions. This is further reinforced by exchanges, through on-line channels and social media, with other mainly like-minded individuals (a phenomenon sometimes referred to as a “filter bubble” or “echo chamber”).

Following this, selective exposure to media content and the resulting limitations on its use can generate fragmentation and a more polarised, and even radicalised, society. Highly personalised selection and presentation of media content are of a particular concern if the individual users are not aware of these processes, or do not understand them. Over the past two decades, the importance of media and information literacy (hereafter: MIL) has become an increasing focus of debate and attention.

¹ See European Commission 2020 Bosnia and Herzegovina Report. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/bosnia_and_herzegovina_report_2020.pdf.

Following this, research confirms “media literacy is one of the key competences for living and working in a digital and mediatised fast-changing and continually evolving world, as well as for active citizens and participation in both social and democratic processes.”²

While no standardised definition of MIL exists, recent CoE research summarises it as follows: “Media and Information Literacy (MIL) include the cognitive, technical and social knowledge and skills which enable citizens to effectively access media content and critically analyse information, empowering people with the knowledge and skills to understand how media is produced, funded and regulated as well as confidence and competence to make informed decisions about which media they use. MIL is key to understanding the ethical implications of media and technology, and to communicate effectively, including by interpreting, creating, and publishing content.”³

Currently, [UNESCO, with funding from the European Union](#), is leading an effort to develop a MIL strategy at BiH state-level. UNESCO reports that as of March 2021, this strategy development process was at an advanced stage, and that the adoption of such a state-level strategy, led by the [Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH](#), was expected by the end of 2021. The CoE, acknowledging the need for a state-wide MIL strategy as the best framework to develop MIL in a systematic, sustainable way, is committed to collaboration and coordination with other members of the international community. In light of the strategy development process and once adopted, in its implementation, there is a need to further strengthen the understanding, skills, and capacity of MIL stakeholders in BiH in relation to their role – in line with Council of Europe and other international standards and good practices.

This project will make a contribution to increasing media and information literacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in line with international, and specifically Council of Europe standards, and in particular in regards to the media literacy-related provisions of the [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2018\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership](#).

This will be achieved through strengthening BiH key MIL stakeholders’ capacity to understand and contribute to the creation; subsequent implementation; and monitoring and evaluation of a strategic, state-wide MIL framework. It will do so by a) making national stakeholders aware of international and CoE standards and best practices on MIL and b) through research and the creation of specific MIL content, increase the awareness of these stakeholders of the importance and complexity of MIL, in particular in the context of BiH.

II. PRIMARY SOURCES AND LITERATURE

The identification of CoE MIL project objectives, its outputs and activities, have been informed by the the following standards, research and assessments.

Council of Europe Standards

- The [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR), in particular Article 10 protecting the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media.
- [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2016\)5 on Internet Freedom](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2020\)1 on the Human Rights Impacts of Algorithmic Systems](#), 2020
- [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2013\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media](#)

² See Regulatory Authorities for Electronic Media and Media Literacy: Comparative Analysis of the Best European Practices, at <https://rm.coe.int/regulatory-authorities-for-electronic-media/1680903a2a>.

³ Council of Europe study DGI (2020)1. ‘Supporting quality Journalism through Media and Information Literacy’. p.3. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-015120-gbr-2018-supporting-quality-journalism-a4-couv-texte-bat-/16809ca1ec>

- [Recommendation 1931 \(2010\) and Resolution 1751 \(2010\) on Combating sexist stereotypes in the media](#)
- [Recommendation 1557 and Recommendation 1799 \(2007\) on the image of women in advertising](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2018\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership](#)

Regional and Council of Europe-wide research:

- [Regulatory Authorities for Electronic Media and Media Literacy: Comparative Analysis of the Best European Practices](#), 2018
- [European Audiovisual Observatory report on Mapping and needs assessment of media literacy practices in Europe EU-28](#), 2016
- [Supporting Quality Journalism through Media Information Literacy. Council of Europe Study, 2020.](#)
- [Turcilo, L and M Obrenovic: A Companion to Democracy: Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation: Causes, Trends, and Their Influence on Democracy.](#) Heinrich-Boell-Foundation Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020.
- [Algorithms and Human Rights](#), Study on the Human Rights Dimensions of Automated Data Processing Techniques and Possible Regulatory Impact, Council of Europe Study, 2017
- [Responsibility and Artificial Intelligence](#), Council of Europe Study, 2019
- [Guide to Human Rights for Internet Users](#), 2014
- [Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec\(2013\)1 on gender equality and media](#), 2016
- [Information disorder-toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking](#), Council of Europe Study, 2017

Papers, reports, and studies:

- Position Paper [National Media and Information Literacy Policies and Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Time for a Strategic Approach](#), 2018
- [Pregledna studija o politikama i strategijama medijske i informacijske pismenosti u Bosni i Hercegovini](#), 2018 (in Bosnian)
- Cengic, L: [Media Literacy in the Family and Recommendations for Implementation of Projects on Promotion of Media Literacy in the Family in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), 2019
- Needs Assessment Report (December 2020).
- Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA) 2020 Annual Report (publicly available on CRA website)

III. OBJECTIVE, OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Impact	<p>To contribute to increasing media and information literacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in line with international and Council of Europe standards, and in particular in regards to the media literacy-related provisions of the Recommendation CM/Rec (2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership.</p> <p>One proxy impact not related to MIL is that this project can contribute to strengthening a state-level institution in BiH (i.e. contribute to the legitimacy of the state, as opposed to fragmentation in ethnic entities).</p>
Intermediate Outcome 1	<p>Strengthening BiH key MIL stakeholders' capacity to understand and contribute to the creation; implementation; monitoring and evaluation of a strategic, state-wide MIL framework.</p>

Immediate Outcome I	Strengthened knowledge, skills and capacities of the CRA to advance European standards for regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation aimed at improving the performance of and trust in the media, including as part of an overall policy and strategic framework for Media and Information Literacy in BiH.
Output 1.1	MIL stakeholders in BiH are aware of Council of Europe standards as expressed in CM/Rec (2018)1 and best practices in CoE member states to implement these standards, and understand their role in the strategy development process, and the implementation of the strategy-to-be.
Output 1.2	MIL stakeholders' capacity to translate CoE standards into solutions appropriate to their institutions is increased.
Output 1.3	Contribution to the development of Action Plan for the Implementation of MIL state-wide strategy (dependent on state-wide strategy being adopted).
Output 1.4	Contribution to the development of a monitoring, learning, and evaluation framework for the MIL state-wide strategy (dependent on state-wide strategy being adopted).
Output 1.5	Available baseline study and recommendations concerning level and different social groups on MIL existing policies and practices in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Intermediate Outcome 2	Increased awareness of MIL stakeholders of the importance and complexity of MIL in the specific context of BiH; and stakeholders' capacities to create and promote MIL content.
Immediate Outcome 2	University students and professors, policy makers, media actors and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina enhance their media literacy skills and active citizenship skills.
Output 2.1	In-depth research studies and developed by the CRA (including through consultations with a wide group of media literacy stakeholders); and implemented.
Output 2.2	Research results are presented for public debate by CRA through outreach events; the research findings feed into the state-level MIL strategy process and the implementation of the strategy.
Output 2.3	Content tailor-made to BiH MIL needs is created including from the research and is adopted for various MIL audiences.
Output 2.4	CRA and other MIL stakeholders are able to conduct social media and awareness campaigns around MIL-related issues.

IV. PARTNERS AND BENEFICIARIES

The project will work primarily with the Communication Regulatory Agency (CRA) of BiH, an independent state-level institution regulated by the Law on Communications. In particular the project will work via CRA's dedicated Department for Content and Media Literacy created in late 2019. The CRA has implemented MIL-related activities for 12 years, specifically focusing on the protection of minors in the audio-visual sector, and online safety. The Agency has become the leading institution advancing MIL in BiH, and is representing BiH in the Council of Europe's standard-setting committees

related to media and information society,⁴ and actively participates in different pan-European and global networks⁵ and working groups. The CRA is in a position to convene and coordinate efforts with the existing BiH informal network of MIL practitioners, as well as advancing the debate around MIL in the country, and disseminating MIL resources across a wide spectrum of stakeholders, thereby increasing awareness, and a common understanding of the concept of MIL.

While the CRA is the main partner, the project will benefit, directly and indirectly, other institutions in the existing MIL landscape. Various institutions with a stake in MIL will be included in the project's activities as direct and indirect beneficiaries.

V. IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATION AND PROJECT TEAM

The Council of Europe's project team is composed of one Senior Project Officer (SPO)/Project Officer (PO) and one Project Assistant (PA), based in Sarajevo; and a Project Officer (PO) in Strasbourg, France. The BiH team is based in the premises of the Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo, and is the direct counterpart of the BiH beneficiaries, while being supported and guided by both Council of Europe headquarters, namely the Office of Directorate General of Programmes (ODGP) and Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DG I).

Overall project management and supervision is ensured by the Division for Co-operation on Freedom of Expression at the Information Society Department of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The Project Officer in Strasbourg will oversee the project's implementation and ensure daily follow-up of actions while providing support and coordination between the field office and headquarters.

Workplan and Calendar of Activities detailing all project actions, engagement of international and national experts and of responsible government institutions has been developed. The Council of Europe will ensure the active participation of local professional skills where available, and a suitable mix of European and local experts in all project activities.

VI. CONTACT

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⁴ Council of Europe's Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) and its Committee of Experts on Media Environment and Reform (MSI-REF).

⁵ See [European Platform of Regulatory Authorities - EPRA](#) and [UNESCO's MIL Alliance](#).