



Statements of the International Conference on Media Literacy and Media Self-Regulation

25-26 April, 2024
Kyiv

Background

Set against the dynamic backdrop of global digital transformation and the complex media environment shaped by conflict, the International Conference on Media Literacy and Media Self-Regulation took place on 24 and 25 April 2024 in Kyiv and online, gathering over 140 participants from Ukraine and abroad. The event was co-organised by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine, the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine, International Media Support, United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine, UNESCO in Ukraine, and the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine.

The primary aim of the conference was to enhance media literacy and strengthen media self-regulation frameworks to ensure that media freedom and integrity are maintained in Ukraine and beyond. Amidst the challenges of misinformation and the exigencies of war, the conference focused on developing resilient media policies that are adept at navigating contemporary and emerging challenges.

The objectives of the conference were manifold:

- To provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss and develop strategies that bolster media literacy at the national and regional levels.
- To showcase and evaluate best practices and innovative approaches to media literacy and self-regulation, particularly in conflict zones.
- To foster collaboration among different sectors including government, media organizations, educational institutions, and civil society to promote informed and engaged citizenry.
- To assess and devise metrics for evaluating the impact of media literacy initiatives and the effectiveness of self-regulation.

The main findings of the conference, which will guide further work on the enhancement of media literacy in Ukraine and self-regulation, are outlined below for the use of the event co-organisers and key stakeholders engaged in the discussions.

FIRST DAY: Media Literacy

1. Media literacy at the state level: issues, solutions, strategy

- Strengthen communication with online platform representatives to detect and block Russian disinformation and prevent the persecution of journalists on social media for their professional activities.
- Since undermining trust in media is a goal of hybrid warfare, it is crucial to focus on the connection between media independence and media literacy. Russian disinformation targets journalists and media, underlining the importance of independent media as the foundation of a democratic society.
- Consider the support to the development of artificial intelligence and other new technologies that should drive state information security strategies, fact-checking and media literacy efforts.
- Enhance the coordination of and support to media literacy initiatives not only nationally but also internationally, as disinformation is a global issue that requires collective efforts.
- Integrate media literacy into educational programs at all levels and for all types of educational programmes.
- Consider the imposition of sanctions on media platforms that become complicit in the dissemination of disinformation.
- Enhance media monitoring to detect spread of disinformation by media outlets and ensure enhanced self-regulation efforts within the media community to prevent disinformation spread.

2. Media literacy and media: beyond fact-checking

- When developing new initiatives and projects, it is essential to conduct quality research on target audiences. Programs that clearly understand the needs of their audience and them will undoubtedly be effective.
- Media literacy initiatives should focus on establishing a connection between media and the audience, and not on the protection of the audience from media.
- Media literacy projects need to engage new stakeholders and reach broad audiences, including media sector representatives, experts, and educators. This will help to scale up the foundations of critical thinking and media competence.

3. Effective media literacy: how and what to measure

- Numerous projects from various sectors work on media literacy and building resilience to disinformation by debunking myths and stereotypes, yet do not position themselves as media literacy projects. Therefore, support to such initiatives should be based on the problem the project addresses, rather than its positioning as a media literacy project or not.
- It is necessary to assess both quantitative and qualitative performance indicators in supporting projects. Project implementors should have clear understanding of their desired end results, rather than simply offering solutions based on what a person or a organisation is good at.
- Media literacy projects should be people-centric. Therefore, it is important for project to demonstrate how specific tools to be introduced will impact people.
- It is essential to that projects are relevant to the context in which they are implemented. Partners for development are willing to accommodate changes and address more urgent threats that may arise for the target audience during the implementation period, provided these align with the project's thematic direction.
- It is crucial to ensure that media literacy initiatives should reach as many people as possible with the maximum frequency of exposure to specific types of information or messages. Projects need to maximise qualitative coverage, ranging from initiatives with million-person reach to those tailored for small villages and towns where reach may be small but equally important.
- More focus should be made on qualitative research, particularly on studies of behavior change in information handling. Such studies typically involve at least three stages: content analysis, which forms the basis of interaction; quantitative interactions analysis; and studying comments and sharing. It is also important to consider whether individuals make decisions based on such content. Engaging experts from various fields is crucial for developing scientifically grounded evaluation methodologies.
- It is necessary to conduct research on the impact of media literacy on social cohesion and resilience to misinformation in both short-term and long-term perspectives.

SECOND DAY: Self-Regulation

1. Achievements and challenges in self- and co-regulation, defining of needs and commitments

- It is necessary to make more efforts towards systematic communication between government officials responsible for regulating the industry and representatives of journalistic initiatives advocating for and developing self-regulation.
- It would be beneficial to investigate the feasibility of establishing an authority (council, board, assembly, working group) that would include leading state regulatory bodies (such as the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting, State Committee for Publishing, etc.) and prominent self-regulatory initiatives from the industry. The Verkhovna Rada Committee on Freedom of Speech should also be involved in this body's work. This authority should serve as a point of connection between relevant bodies, facilitating prompt clarification and alignment of approaches to co-regulation issues when needed. The authority should monitor the development of co-regulation in accordance with the legislation and initiate discussions on unforeseen co-regulation issues that arise in the industry.
- It is essential to consider international experience in creating quasi-non-governmental organizations whose activities focus on self-regulation in various sectors. This experience can be used in Ukraine to both alleviate the burden on government bodies from excessive responsibilities and support grassroots initiatives through their establishment.

2. Professional standards and editorial policies as important factors of self-regulation. Incentives more instrumental than punishment

- It is necessary to encourage editorial offices (editorial groups, media holdings) to develop unified editorial standards that encompass provisions for self-regulation. It is important to facilitate the exchange of experience among editorial teams in creating and applying consolidated editorial rules.
- Furthermore, it is crucial to promote and disseminate the experience of Institute of Mass Information regarding the establishment of lists of quality media outlets («Quality Lists» and «Trust Lists»). These lists should serve as benchmarks for the appropriateness of editorial policies and play a significant role in creating audience demand for quality content.

- It would be beneficial to establish collaboration between editorial teams and professional associations in the field, which have influence over colleagues working in various sectors of the industry. The same applies to cooperation between editorial teams and grassroots organizations in the media sector that oversee specific dimensions of industry activities (such as the Commission on Journalistic Ethics, Independent Media Council and others).

3. Gender equality policies in media as reflection and engine of societal changes in building equality societies

- It is necessary to encourage and, where possible, facilitate discussions on gender (and related) policies in media, and disseminate information about the progress and outcomes of such discussions.
- Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure that editorial policy guidelines encompass sections on gender equality policy and to facilitate the exchange of experience among editorial teams in developing and implementing such policies.
- It would be beneficial to consider creating a guidebook on gender equality policy for editorial teams, which could serve as a handbook and a resource for disseminating best practices in implementing sound gender equality policies in media. To compile such a guidebook, the experiences of the Commission on Journalistic Ethics, in promoting awareness of the Journalism Ethics Code and efforts to increase its use in editorial work, and NGOs specialised on the issues (i.e. «Women in Media»), focused on ensuring and protecting gender equality in the profession, could be leveraged effectively.

4. Communication with audiences as an important self-regulation factor

- It is crucial to consider the feasibility and possibility of implementing the position of «reader editors» in editorial offices, editorial groups, or media holdings. These positions would focus on continuously addressing and satisfying audience requests, as well as creating favorable conditions for the audience to demand quality journalism. Where financially feasible, such positions should be established.
- It is essential to demonstrate to the audience the impact of their engagement with the industry — using methods of maintaining communication with the audience and creating products based on topics derived from this interaction. It's important to highlight the visibility of audience participation in shaping editorial policies, including through the publication of letters to the editors, inquiries, and other forms of engagement.

