



Policy recommendations for strengthening MIL in France, Spain and Romania: insights from the “YouVerify!” project

1. Introduction

The aim of this policy brief is to comparatively assess current media and information literacy policies and initiatives in three EU member states (France, Romania, and Spain), and to identify the potential for improvement.

The assessment and resulting recommendations are based on the research data gathered in the project “YouVerify!”, funded by the European Commission, within the Media Literacy for All Programme (2020) and operated by SNSPA in Romania, UNED in Spain, the AFP and Savoir*Devenir in France, with the latter coordinating the project. The project aimed to scale up and disseminate competences in image and video verification across Europe. Its goal was to address the crucial challenges brought by disinformation and help young people develop both knowledge and know-how to make the difference between genuine and manipulated images and videos. The project builds on current tools and research and capitalizes on the advances of previous Youcheck! project (2019) by focusing on critical visual literacy training so as to scale up and disseminate competences in image and video verification across Europe.

Other activities of the project included:

- Creating the MOOC “Disinformation Step by Step” focused on verification and refutation competences, hosted in ECO DIGITAL LEARNING platform;
- Developing an enhanced 2nd version of the Serious Game “Fake News detective” with additional missions that will focus on digital visual competences;
- Training on Deep Fake detection tools and addressing emerging AI issues via the InVID WeVerify plug-in and its new functionalities;
- Establishing an EU wide dissemination network, involving medias, private and public sector actors as well as civil society NGOs to reach a larger audience;
- Providing indicators for country readiness in establishing policies for disinformation in the EU, with cross-country comparisons (in compliance with EU Directive on Audiovisual Media Services that requires country reporting on media education every 3 years).

2. Current MIL policies in the EU

The fake news phenomenon is multifaceted and needs to be tackled in various ways by a wide range of stakeholders: public institutions, authorities, NGOs, schools, and libraries, to name a few. Disinformation cannot be entirely eradicated but ensuring that new generations and their educators develop 21st-century skills, like critical thinking, understanding the present digital media ecosystem and identifying fabricated digital content, are paramount for every society with healthy democratic processes.

In the last decade, the EU institutions placed a significant focus on media and information literacy (MIL). In 2007, the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive* (AVMSD)¹ provided a definition of the term “media literacy” and a reporting obligation of the media literacy levels in all EU member states to assess the needs of the citizens. A *European Parliament Resolution* (2008)² and a *Commission Recommendation* (2009)³ that put media literacy in the center of the new type of education for the citizens followed AVMSD⁴. A revised version of AVMSD⁵ required video-sharing platforms to offer media literacy measures and tools to raise their users’ awareness of this vital topic.

Since 2007, a *European Commission Communication* stressed the importance of a critical approach to media sources for young people and e-skills continued to be a top priority in the future strategies, such as *European Commission’s Digital Agenda* (2011)⁶. In 2013, *The European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens* (DigComp)⁷ accentuated the need for digital skills through media literacy in schools (primary and secondary education).

*Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027*⁸ of the European Commission has as the primary objective the enhancement of the digital skills and competencies. Educational policies for media literacy emerged, such as changes in curricula, integration of non-compulsory courses (Germany, Romania), Training the Teachers programs (Sweden, Romania, the Netherlands etc), partnerships with other key actors (e.g., NGOs, libraries, museums) (Finland, the Netherlands), e-learning and game-based materials (France,

¹Commission of the European Communities. (2007). *COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A European approach to media literacy in the digital environment*.

²European Parliament. (2008). *Media literacy in a digital world European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2008 on media literacy in a digital world*.

³Commission of the European Communities. (2009). *COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION of 20 August 2009 on media literacy in the digital environment for a more competitive audiovisual and content industry and an inclusive knowledge society*.

⁴Audiovisual Media Services Directive. (2010). Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://www.edf-feph.org/audiovisual-media-services-directive/>

⁵European Commission. (2018). *The revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive*.

⁶European Commission. (2011). *Digital Agenda: building a flourishing digital economy - Scoreboard outlines progress so far*.

⁷NESET II. (2018). *Teaching media literacy in Europe: evidence of effective school practices in primary and secondary education*. Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AR2_Full_Report_With_identifiers_Teaching-Media-Literacy.pdf

⁸European Commission. (2021). *Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)*.

Denmark), and integrating the digital skills in the fundamental national education plans (Finland, Spain)^{9, 10}.

Other initiatives of the European Commission are:

- the creation of a Media literacy expert group and a High-Level Expert Group for fake news and online disinformation^{11, 12};
- The *European Media Literacy Week* (in this week, EU member states' stakeholders and actors can organize local/national events about media literacy)¹³;
- The *European Digital Media Observatory* (a hub for fact-checkers, academics, and other relevant actors to support policymakers)¹⁴;
- opening calls for projects in the field of media literacy and financing several programs under the "media literacy for all" category;
- promoting and changing the school curriculum to introduce media literacy as a core competence across EU member states and in PISA tests.¹⁵

Media literacy public policies were implemented with the contribution of the European Commission, European Parliament, and UNESCO. The latter provided support for creating infrastructure and choosing frameworks to facilitate the media literacy programs: *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers*¹⁶, developing guidelines for preparing national MIL policies and strategies, creating a global framework of MIL indicators, and a *MIL University Network*¹⁷. The *UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework*¹⁸ is another component that would encourage the research and reporting of the MIL indicators in member states to illustrate a clear image of what needs to be the main points for future public policies in this field.

⁹European Audiovisual Observatory. (2016). *Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28*. European Audiovisual Observatory.

¹⁰NESET II. (2018). *Teaching media literacy in Europe: evidence of effective school practices in primary and secondary education*. Publications Office of the European Union. Retrieved from https://nesetweb.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/AR2_Full_Report_With_identifiers_Teaching-Media-Literacy.pdf

¹¹The EU Media Literacy Expert Group 2006-2010. (2011). *Nordicom-Information*, 33(1-2). Retrieved from https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/334_ASEU%20media%20literacy%20expert%20group.pdf

¹²Meetings of the Media Literacy Expert Group. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/meetings-media-literacy-expert-group>

¹³European Commission. (2019). *European Media Literacy Week*.

¹⁴EDMO. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://edmo.eu/media-literacy/>

¹⁵Media Literacy. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/media-literacy#%7B%2290176705%22%3A%5B%5D%2C%2290176804%22%3A%5B%5D%7D>

¹⁶UNESCO. (2011). *Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000192971>

¹⁷Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue University Network. Retrieved 23 May 2022, from <https://www.unesco.org/en/communication-information/media-information-literacy/milid-network>

¹⁸UNESCO. (2013). *Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework: Country Readiness and Competencies UNESCO Global Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000224655>

European states that are advanced in implementing media literacy policies are Finland, Denmark, the UK, France, Germany, Ireland, and Spain. These states have a legal framework for media literacy, with national authorities responsible for the implementation and supervision of MIL-related issues. A leading “force” in the MIL field is Finland, where media and information literacy is as a key competence in the educational curricula and activities¹⁹. Having a public institution/actor accountable for monitoring and evaluating the degree of performance for MIL policies is crucial for good implementation. Lacking an institutionally supported implementation, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Latvia, and Romania are at an initial stage of media literacy interventions, with no official authority responsible for these projects and programs²⁰.

Analyzing public policies for MIL across Europe, the following typology emerges

Table 1. A typology of MIL policies across Europe

Studies and research	reports, statistics, articles, conferences, webinars, exchanges between experts/specialists in the field
Dedicated structures for developing frameworks and implementing MIL interventions & events	Expert groups, Media Literacy Week, etc.
Policy documents	plans, recommendations, agendas supported by the European institutions, e.g., Digital Education Action Plan
Financial incentives and partnerships	funding, sponsorships, communicating with libraries, schools, universities, research institutes, increasing the digitalization level and digital skills of citizens overall + critical thinking
Measures for countering disinformation	fact-checking, cybersecurity, media regulation, The Digital Service Act
Education policies	changes in curriculum, optional courses, resources and materials for students and teachers, e-learning platforms, serious games and game-based learning, national systems for training teachers, NGO interventions

3. Cross-country finding on MIL in France, Romania and Spain

The insights presented in this section are based on the evidence collected in the YouVeirfy! Project, through:

- A. a series of 30 interviews conducted between January and March 2022 in the three mentioned countries (10 respondents/country), with the participation of policy makers, experts in the education/communication field and journalists.
- B. the qualitative analysis of open questions received in an online survey (between December 2021-January 2022) with participants of the MOOC “Disinformation Step by Step” (N=270).

3.1. Expert interviews

Current state of media literacy measures

From an expert perspective, fake news sparked a growing interest since the 2016 presidential campaign and Brexit. More and more researchers and experts from universities and NGOs are researching what this phenomenon implies and its effects on individuals and society. A keen interest is surfacing in the academic environment, with a deep focus on how the youth interact and engage with fake news.

In what the current measures are concerned, respondents in **Romania** stressed that domestic measures to fight against disinformation are at the beginning, with many initiatives in media literacy education and isolated measures such as awareness campaigns, fact-checking platforms, and media regulation projects on their way. The international context is very important, the European Commission and Parliament are leading many initiatives of media literacy and fighting against disinformation, with EU member states following those guidelines and applying them. It is crucial to emphasize that all those initiatives should be promoted to the public and localized to the national background, digital infrastructure, and educational system. *“Maybe the National Audio-Visual Council can regulate social media, but it will be hard. The accent should be put on the youth and its competencies”* (ROP03). Critical thinking is a paramount ability for navigating the present times and media literacy interventions can be implemented in schools’ educational programs or optional courses. Media literacy interventions are not limited to children but to high school students as well: *„In high schools, we have „Media Education”, where they develop fact-checking abilities and understand how to spot fake news”* (ROP02). Media literacy measures are also mentioned by Romanian respondents as part of higher education: *„In addition to the fake news courses that already exist in the curriculum, we will have a new master's degree starting next year. Its foundations are being laid right now, along with the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences and FJSC”* (ROE02). Media literacy interventions have proven benefits in the learning path of the students, and, after that, the advantages are seen even at the adult age: *„We are part of the International Fact-checkers Network, and it*

seems that education and media literacy is the only thing we know that does not hurt." (ROE04).

Other types of educational interventions against false information are projects supported by the Centre of Independent Journalism and workshops and training on legal education (ROP02). Handbooks and materials are created by the few media literacy specialists in Romania (ROE03). NGOs and other independent associations are focused on measures such as training and workshops focused on youth and teachers: *"Our colleagues from the Independent Journalism Center have a pilot program that covers 100 schools. They train the teachers who will incorporate media literacy concepts in their subjects."* (ROE04).

In France, media and information literacy measures are "imperious necessity" because of its amplification and virality (FRP01). Media literacy is needed, partly because of the lack of human resources among the regulators (FRP04). It should be taught as a discipline, like math, all along the curriculum. There is a need for dedicated full-time teachers, not just "at random" as it is done now. CSA/ARCOM publishes a yearly report on what they do for MIL, and they have a dedicated taskforce of experts that works with them (FRP04). This discipline goes hand in hand with digital education (coding), to raise the competences for the digital economy for all (FRP01) and also with journalism and teachers and librarians training (FRP02, FRP03). The key actors of the perimeter of culture are libraries and media libraries (FRP02). The *"Plan Bibliothèques"* was aimed at them. *Libraries are an "asset", the "premier cultural equipment" , "they are present all over the territory, they are free and their public is very diversified. Librarians are trained to do "mediation", they have very rich and complete collections, including of the press"* (FRP02).

The Ministry of Education from France has a specific structure to deal with Media and Information literacy (MIL) as a whole, including disinformation, the CLEMI, an operator that proposes teacher training, educational resources, tools, and communication campaigns such as the "Semaine des medias et de la Presse à l'école" which is quite important. A specific effort is made toward the youngsters (FRE01).

The French Ministry of culture supports associations working on MIL. *"The calls for proposals have become very much focused on the creation of tools, training of trainers, and evaluation, but there are very few projects which are submitted. Since last year, because of the pandemic, the Ministry has also put forward the problems of scientific disinformation"* (FRE02). The Ministry of culture has also developed a MIL training programme (EMILE) for its agents and high-ranking decision-makers in all sections and missions of culture (FRE04).

The Ministry of culture developed a plan for libraries, quite active in developing actions to fight disinformation, often with schools, but also with their own publics including adults and seniors, with workshops, events, publications. (FRE02, FRE03). The Ministry of the Interior also supports MIL initiatives via its Marianne Fund (FRE02).

Lots of associations such as Savoir*Devenir, MIL associations, popular education mediators and journalists develop advocacy, actions and tools to fight against disinformation (FRE04).

A number of tools are being developed in France to help fight disinformation by the Ministry of Education and many actors in the non-formal educational or associative fields. Most are targeting the youth, which is a bit of a problem, since adults should be a key target. One part of the issue is that young people are easier to reach (at school), adults less so, even in libraries (FRE03, FRE01).

The Spanish experts mentioned that their government has put in place some measures in education to combat misinformation, without going into details, but there is a certain sense of negativism about how they work from a media literacy perspective. There are however measures taken at unesco.org in reference to the health issue, especially in the wake of COVID-19 and all the misinformation that arose during the pandemic caused by this virus (SPE01).

Effectiveness of existing MIL initiatives/ policies

Respondents in all the three states shared different opinions regarding the effectiveness of the solutions for disinformation implemented so far.

In Romania, the general agreement was that there are core entities of research and educational initiatives, but the public institutions are not one of the leading forces in popularizing media literacy and many of the measures are centered on students acquiring new skills and competencies, excluding other age segments. One Romanian respondent emphasized the need for better-trained professors who could properly teach critical thinking: *“We are part of the CRED project, a project of the Ministry of Education in which we are partners, a very rigorous program of curriculum habilitation for all the professors who will teach those new subjects, from primary to secondary school. They said that progress with students was recorded but in two situations: better-performing children were either those who already had a basis of curiosity and critical thinking from primary school or those who had a culture of support in their school, with other subjects, from other teachers”* (ROP02).

In France, it is believed that MIL should be institutionalized and administrations, elites at the highest level of the state need to overcome their own deficit in media literacy, as the first step towards confidence and trust (FRP01) and preventing erratic measures. According to FRP01, it is important to understand that data are *“major strategic assets that are much coveted”*. MIL still must prove its efficiency to convince about their real priority, as there is little visibility on the impact of MIL at school or elsewhere. The overall problem is with the evaluation of actions and projects and their impact measurements: everyone does a bit of self-evaluation, but few structures have the means, the time, and the expertise to do serious evaluations (FRE02, FRE03, FRE01).

MIL should not conduct fight against radicalization together with fight against disinformation, as it risks being put into political sphere and limit the gains that can be obtained (FRJ01).

Moreover, MIL should not be reduced to fight against disinformation (FRJ02), as it is essential, in the face of not very effective legislation, to foster responsibility on production of information and the sharing of contents (FRJ02).

In Spain, it is believed that everything will improve with good education and legislation and that a more selective environment has been created, such as the Wikimedia Foundation which includes speeches to combat disinformation, but the society is far from reaching a level of self-criticism. The experts consider that the measures are effective, but that they do not reach all sectors of society, except for some groups such as journalists fresh out of university (SJ01), the tools currently available to fight disinformation are “*still a bit unwieldy*”, preventing a normal user to go through all the processes required to uncover a fake news story (SJ02). According to SJ03, disinformation turned people from being cautious to distrustful, even if people should be critical, not distrustful.

Improvements for the existing measures

In Romania, systemic problems, like functional illiteracy and dropping out, need to be accepted and then solved, if media literacy is to have a real impact on the individuals, either from newer or older generations. “*The solution is to do something so that the overall quality and access to education would increase in Romania*” (ROP03). From an educational viewpoint, an improvement could be seen in “*taking time to properly train the professors to teach critical thinking skills in the classroom*” (ROP02). Collaboration is extremely important in shifting the paradigm of how people interpret and evaluate every piece of information they encounter: “*This fake news analysis should be institutionalized through a private-public partnership, to have the monitoring part, the research part, and the fact-checking part. All of this will also require media coverage and an immediate reaction to any fake news that comes up. (...) Another thing that is important to keep in mind is the audience. We need to create age-adapted messages and integrate many experts in this approach (experts in communication, media, political sciences, psychologists, social assistants)*” (ROP01)

Media literacy interventions in the college/school curriculum are one of the most popular methods in tackling disinformation, in EU member states and Romania as well. For effective measures to have a positive impact on the citizens, Romania needs a healthy informational ecosystem and a stable political and socioeconomic background. “*We need to solve the root cause of the problems and not just to fight against the effects. I am pointing out the economical inequalities and struggles that remained and were accentuated by the*

financial crises from 2008 to 2009, a political class that is not interested in the needs of its citizens, a mass media that is not independent and has established relationships with political leaders, it is more like a speaker for authorities and not the watchdog that monitors and sanctions the authorities. As long as these issues are not addressed, I think it's like putting a Band-Aid over gangrene” (ROP03).

French experts pointed out at the importance of MIL and the effectiveness in the long term of even homeopathic actions in this direction (FRE04). Relying on external resources and European projects may be solutions to meet this need. Evaluation and impact studies are a major preoccupation (FRE01), that is why MIL should be a form of mandatory discipline (FRE01), with dedicated hours and dedicated teachers (FRE02). Information literacy should not be reduced to fake news, but address what information is (FRE01). In order to fight disinformation, the scope of actions should be enlarged, as “*one shot*” narrow actions against fake news will not be efficient if they do not rely on a solid media and digital culture (FRE03). For French journalists, education to media practice is key and learning should start at the youngest age, to avoid massive amplification (FRJ02). There is also the need to “*end the partitioning*” between Ministry of culture and Ministry of education (FRJ01).

In Spain, it is believed that, when education and basic values come together, they will better fight against disinformation (SJ02). A full effective answer will be when teaching in school how to detect good and bad news and to think critically. When the factors of education, social responsibility and legislation come into play, many advances will be seen in the future against disinformation, especially if all the measures are integrated into the information world from the very beginning (SJ01). More control and mechanisms should be provided for younger people who are beginning to consume news, as this is not going to disappear easily. Fake news is going to be a very important political tool to discredit the opposition, so young people need to be educated to learn how to distinguish it (SPJ01).

Alternative measures (not taken so far) in the field of MIL

The respondents in Romania talked about adapting international MIL projects to the Romanian socioeconomic context. Fake news has a strong impact not only because it is heavily manipulated or just because people lack critical thinking skills, but also due to the degradation of the state’s role and the democratic processes. Disinformation is a new industry and media literacy becomes a full-time job for every citizen willing to keep their decisions unaltered by hostile forces. As the digital landscape is continuously changing, the battle against disinformation should be adapted and updated, targeting all types of individuals. Flexibility will be the differentiator between states that will have effective media literacy and legislative interventions and those who will not: “*the best measure is to remain open to test*

as many things as possible in this area” (ROE04). Journalists also emphasized the decisive role of education and MIL in Romania, especially when it works in synergy with other types of measures, such as regulation (ROJ01). Compulsory media literacy courses would help secondary education students understand how to read, assess and fact check news and information, especially since new technological means will make manipulation of images and videos harder to detect. As technological advancements move the focus from written text to visual communication, educational interventions should be centered around visual literacy (ROJ02).

French participants consider that there is the political will to fight disinformation, and the trend is positive. There should be MIL training of the decision makers at the highest levels (FRE04), but also taught as a discipline in school, dealing with disinformation, media literacy and digital culture at large (FRE01, FRE02) as well as part of the life-long training of all citizens. While MIL is perceived as a key, fact-checking is seen as not being so efficient at the societal level (FRE02). Pedagogy at schools and university should be re-thought to develop competencies necessary to develop critical thinking and fight disinformation (collaboration, peer to peer learning, mutual support, creativity) (FRE03). The French journalists emphasized that a new relationship of trust between journalists and audiences should be created (FRJ01, FRJ02), along with an extensive dialogue on information, on its contribution to the common good, to the individual good, to better knowledge, beyond MIL in the classroom (FRJ02).

In Spain, the majority agreed that the alternative is education, especially of the young people *“to have criteria and critical thinking”* (SPJP02). In Spain, the alternative way to reach out, especially to young people, is to send messages on social networks, because fake news and warnings should be in the same place. It is believed that special care must be taken with the most vulnerable groups, such as older people or immigrant groups, who are likely to be manipulated. Connecting with them through awareness-raising or educational campaigns can be key to avoiding this. There is also a strong emphasis on education, which is the basis for the new generations in detecting hoaxes.

The respondents were then asked what actors should implement the aforementioned measures. In Romania, the key actors (including institutions) to address the disinformation phenomenon, are NGOs, journalists, and educational associations, with support coming from the public actors, who can formulate directives, public policies, and laws that could establish media literacy proposals at the national level: *“The Ministry of Education will be an important one in this battle against disinformation. Of course, we should involve NGOs, organizations from civil society and, why not, even private businesses because they can aid by sponsoring some interventions or campaigns”* (ROP02).

In France, the key actors to address the disinformation phenomenon in relation to MIL were: The Ministry of Education (with a real political will to make MIL a compulsory discipline – FRE02); specific agencies and operators such as CLEMI, Canope or DGSE, but also teachers (FRE03, FRE01); The Ministry of Culture (FRE02, FRE03, FRE04); an inter-ministerial agency (as better coordination of the states could be important – FRE02); civic society (since MIL and the fight for freedom of speech and opinion is also and maybe mostly a matter of philosophy and militancy - FRE03, FRE04).

In Spain, the main actors should be public policymakers and the academia, with the former investing money into projects that put the truth into practice. School and education are still the most repeated idea, along with the state, because it must regulate and control what can and cannot be said and done. Governments are also emerging as a recurrent response, having to make good legislation concerning education and punishing the creators of fake news.

Policies to effectively fight disinformation: the importance of education

Media literacy interventions and media education are considered by our Romanian respondents “*the golden standard*” in fighting disinformation, as the hyper-digitalized youth need to know how to identify, analyze, and check fake news. As media literacy is a long-term measure, with proven results, Romania should become more aware of its importance and seriously launch beneficial projects for the newer generations: „*Increasing the role of media education in the school curriculum and allocating resources needed for the youth, on their educational path. [...] At this moment, this field of media literacy is a „nice to have”, not a „must-have”, as it should be*” (ROE04). Other actors (the EU, national media, and the academia) that could highlight the importance of media literacy for every citizen can influence the political sphere into taking “*more initiatives in the area of digital education or critical thinking*” (ROE02). There is a great need for educational policies to build resilience to online disinformation, such as “*turning media literacy and media education into a permanent course in the curriculum for at least a few years in a row. [...] It would be very useful for this to become permanent. The curriculum should probably be developed with the help of experts who have proven effective in countering disinformation*” (ROJ03). The experts in Romania highlighted the importance of education and research in fighting disinformation, with a focus on creating educational opportunities for the teachers to limit the negative effects of fake news in society: “*We need a monography of the national situation by region. (...) The main problem is that we must first train the teacher... they are the ones who will have to teach more about the online area and to be aware of the risks of the online space so, that later, they could teach children*” (ROE02). Journalists in Romania consider that MIL interventions should be strengthened, ranging from compulsory courses within the formal education system, to education through the media (information verification handbooks,

dedicated TV programs, podcasts), “*with the contribution of influencers and other public opinion leaders*”.

In France, educational policies should focus on making media literacy as a full-fledged subject, adapted to age and school cycle (FRP01, FRP04), to create “trust” in science to fight disinformation. All actors in the field of MIL should be regrouped in a collective, within a flexible and agile structure (FRJ01, FRJ02) beyond Ministry of education, cross-sector, at national level (FRJ02) and take inter-ministerial action, following a European impulsion for coordination (FRJ02). As for the media literacy projects, there should be done a mature evaluation of them, not so much of funds spent, but of what has impact, before proceeding further and target the next strategy for support. On the other hand, a dedicated space where all the MIL resources can be identified for all actors to use and train (FRP04) should be created.

The experts in France mentioned measures that should be taken at the national level: making MIL a mandatory discipline at school (FRE02); dedicating time and means to MIL at school, by making it part of the curriculum (FRE01); training teachers (FRE01); training librarians so they feel legitimate in developing MIL actions (FRE02, FRE04); improve support and help coordinate the existing network of MIL actors (FRE02); forbid media concentration (FRE03). Education should be fostered as much as possible, by making MIL “*a national cause*” and “*a discipline*”, along with “*the discourse to be had about the individual responsibility of everyone*” (FRJ02).

In Spain, it is considered that teaching critical thinking from an early age can help against disinformation. Teachers also play a fundamental role by educating the future adults in “*critical judgement and free thinking in which they develop skills that allow them to compare information*” (SPJP01). An education law including media education and social punishment was also suggested, so that lies cannot be used as a justification. All interviewed subjects talked about changing laws regarding impunity for creating fake news and media education.

3.2. MOOC participant survey – analysis of open questions

We conducted an online survey (between December 2021-January 2022) that focused on two dimensions: feedback about a particular media literacy intervention in which participants were involved and understanding their perspective on disinformation. We had 270 participants that took a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) about media literacy and disinformation (the 1st session of the MOOC entitled “Disinformation step by step”). The MOOC could be taken in three languages (English, French and Spanish), so that the distribution of respondents was made according to the spoken language, not by nationality. Items regarding the fake news phenomenon were open-ended questions and, based on the

answers, we conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to better apprehend the negative effects of fake news and solutions that can be implemented to limit the disinformation.

According to the answers, disinformation can affect all age categories because generating and sharing fake news, intentionally or even unintentionally, can damage the critical thinking of the elderly and youth. The second open question of the questionnaire-based survey was about the solutions to disinformation, where the majority of the participants in the MOOC indicated Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as the most important measure to be taken in order to fight disinformation, followed by legislative measures (English and Spanish-speaking people) or communication and awareness campaigns (French-speaking respondents). Fact-checking tools were also mentioned among the measures against disinformation, especially by English and Spanish-speaking people. Some respondents mentioned more than one type of measures, while others did not provide any answer. A rather large number of respondents, especially among the English-speaking ones (16), did not make any suggestions or admitted they did not know the answer.

MIL was seen as a mandatory measure for the education in schools and universities, for journalists, as well as a solution that should be taken at the personal level, by following certain rules before believing certain information, such as conducting a thorough research on the topic, using a diverse media, and trusting only reliable sources. This kind of measure could be implemented as MOOCs or trainings about selecting good sources of information and distinguishing the difference between accurate and false data. It should target a large audience or certain categories of people considered more exposed to disinformation, such as children, students, or the elderly. An effective MIL should build first one's critical thinking and develop a "truth-focused mindset" and it should be based on "ethical principles when sharing information" (R20, English), as well as on "peer-to-peer learning & communication about disinformation" (R106, Spanish).

One French-speaking respondent highlighted the importance of organizing "practical sessions" to train future educators in order to promote MIL and fact-checking to the people around the country and afterwards analyze the results in citizens' behavior towards disinformation (R4, French).

Some respondents focused on the connection between MIL and the communication and awareness campaigns that should be done on "TV shows with people specialized in disinformation" (R29, English). Communication and awareness campaigns are mentioned among the solutions to disinformation within a national strategy towards disinformation, implemented through "a communication strategy made by truly professionals" (R64, English), expressed as a "singular official voice" (R117, Spanish). The success of a communication campaign was thus linked to the creation of a group of experts on new media or of "an official group at the Ministry of National Education" whose main goal would be "to analyze the disinformation phenomenon at any level and in any form, and to come up with a

plan in order to reduce the impact and educate citizens to recognize and counteract disinformation” (R40, English). A first step in this approach includes a pre-survey on people’s tendency to believe, according to which awareness campaigns should be developed. They could illustrate the real consequences of disinformation on the people, and they should be promoted during “open conferences organized in urban and rural areas” (R8, French).

4. Conclusions and recommendations

A summary of the expert opinions collected through the interviews and the public perceptions collected through the survey’s open questions can be consulted in Table 2, followed by key recommendations stemming from this analysis, authored by the YouVerify team.

Table 2. Summary of responses

Country	Success factors (currently present)	Barriers (currently present)	Areas for improvement
Romania	International context - The European Commission and Parliament are leading many initiatives of media literacy/ providing guidelines	MIL in its early stages; At the moment, MIL is a „nice-to-have”, not a „must-have”	Initiatives should be promoted to the public and localized to the national background, digital infrastructure, and educational system Increasing the role of media education in the school curriculum and allocating resources needed MIL through the media (information verification handbooks, dedicated TV programs, podcasts),
	Contributions in the field from HE; support/ experience from the civil society	Initiatives uncoordinated; public institutions are not one of the leading forces in popularizing media literacy	Need to be institutionalized through a private-public partnership the EU, national media, and the academia) can influence policymakers into taking more initiatives in the area of digital education or critical thinking the contribution of influencers and other public opinion leaders
		Lack of trained personnel for MIL	Compulsory media literacy courses with trained educators in secondary education

Country	Success factors (currently present)	Barriers (currently present)	Areas for improvement
			The curriculum should be developed with the help of experts who have proven effective in countering disinformation
	-	Systemic problems, such as functional illiteracy and dropping out	Improve the overall quality and access to education
	-	Insufficient of flexibility of MIL interventions	As technological advancements move the focus from written text to visual communication, educational interventions should be centered around visual literacy
	Indication of public support (The majority of the participants in the MOOC indicated Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as the most important measure to be taken in order to fight disinformation)	-	-
Key actors: are NGOs, journalists, and educational associations, with support coming from the public actors, who can formulate directives, public policies, and laws that could establish media literacy proposals at the national level (especially the Ministry of Education)			
France	-	MIL- not a stand-alone discipline across the curricula	<p>MIL should be a form of mandatory discipline with dedicated hours and dedicated teachers;</p> <p>Pedagogy at schools and university should be re-thought to develop competencies necessary to develop critical thinking and fight disinformation (collaboration, peer to peer learning, mutual support, creativity)</p> <p>MIL should be institutionalized and administrations, elites at the highest level of the state need to overcome their own deficit in media literacy</p> <p>educational policies should focus on making media literacy as a full-</p>

Country	Success factors (currently present)	Barriers (currently present)	Areas for improvement
			<p>fledged subject, adapted to age and school cycle</p> <p>MIL as part of the life-long training of all citizens.</p>
	-	little visibility on the impact of MIL at school or elsewhere; problem of evaluation practices (and appropriate resources for evaluation);	<p>evaluation and impact studies must become a preoccupation</p> <p>a mature evaluation of MIL, not so much of funds spent, but of what has impact, before proceeding further and target the next strategy for support</p>
	<p>Dedicated structures (within The Ministry of Education + CLEMI + support from Ministry of culture + Ministry of the Interior)</p> <p>there is the political will to fight disinformation</p>	<p>Insufficient coordination</p> <p>need to <i>"end the partitioning"</i> between Ministry of culture and Ministry of education</p>	<p>All actors in the field of MIL should be regrouped in a collective, within a flexible and agile structure beyond Ministry of education, cross-sector, at national level and take inter-ministerial action, following a European impulsion for coordination.</p>
	<p>Links with actors outside the public sector</p> <p>MIL initiatives in relatively advanced stages; wide variety of stakeholders involved</p>	the scope of actions still narrow	<p>Relying on external resources and European projects</p> <p>dedicated space where all the MIL resources can be identified for all actors to use, and train should be created</p>
	-	Lack of proper training	<p>training teachers;</p> <p>training librarians so they feel legitimate in developing MIL actions</p>
	<p>Indication of public support (The majority of the participants in the MOOC indicated Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as the most important measure to be taken in order to fight disinformation)</p>	-	-

Country	Success factors (currently present)	Barriers (currently present)	Areas for improvement
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Key actors: The Ministry of Education; specific agencies and operators such as CLEMI, Canope or DGSE, but also teachers; The Ministry of Culture; an inter-ministerial agency; civic society.

Spain	government has put in place some measures in education to combat misinformation	measures are effective, but that they do not reach all sectors of society	More control and mechanisms should be provided for younger people who are beginning to consume news Reach youth on social networks; special care must be taken with the most vulnerable groups, such as older people or immigrant groups
	--	tools currently available to fight disinformation are still unwieldy	-
	-	Public perceptions: distrust at the level of the public opinion (instead of critical thinking)	-
			Implementing an education law including media education
	Indication of public support (The majority of the participants in the MOOC indicated Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as the most important measure to be taken in order to fight disinformation)	-	-

Key actors: public policymakers/ the Government, academia

Key recommendations

Insight 1: significant differences in terms of an emerging framework for MIL interventions among the countries' studies

Key recommendation 1: adapt measures to the stage (early/ advanced/ very advanced) each country is in and capitalize from an exchange of experiences and lessons learned.

The data suggest that France, Romania and Spain each go through particular challenges in the implementation of a MIL framework, with France being most advanced in this area, and Romania and Spain still in more early stages. This diversity of the domestic background, of the influence of particular success factors and barriers call for a careful tailoring of measures and approaches. Initiatives should be promoted to the public and localized to the national background, digital infrastructure, and educational system. However, the need to adapt international best practices/ standards to the domestic context does not exclude the need for cross-country collaboration. MIL stakeholders and policymakers should create additional opportunities for joint initiatives for research and practice in the field of MIL, under the umbrella of public-private partnerships and programmes.

Insight 2: In order to have a decisive contribution to countering disinformation, MIL needs to be formalized in the education system, and be provided with adequate resources. Key recommendation 2: Increase the role of media education in the school curriculum and allocate financial and human resources needed.



MIL should be a form of mandatory discipline with dedicated hours and dedicated teachers, and the curriculum should be developed with the help of experts who have proven effective in countering disinformation. Pedagogy at schools and university should be re-thought to develop competencies necessary to develop critical thinking and fight disinformation (collaboration, peer to peer learning, mutual support, creativity). Educational policies should focus on making media literacy as a full-fledged subject, adapted to age and school cycle, in tune with current disinformation trends (i.e. an emphasis on visual literacy).

Other types of MIL interventions can be implemented by the civil society, such as MIL through the media (information verification handbooks, dedicated TV programs, podcasts).

- Additional comments for **Romania**: Systemic problems, such as functional illiteracy and early leavers from education and training can decisively hinder MIL efforts. Efforts need to be made to improve the overall quality and access to education as a precondition for the success of MIL.
- Additional comments for **France**: MIL initiatives are in relatively advanced stages, with a wide variety of public and private stakeholders involved, but the scope of actions still narrow. The level of ambition of MIL initiatives can be scaled up by relying on external resources and European projects, and by creating a dedicated space where all the MIL resources can be identified for all actors to use and train. Train librarians so they feel legitimate in developing MIL actions.
- Additional comments for **Spain**: strengthen the governmental focus on MIL, including (possibly) through amendments to the Law of education and scale up current initiatives.

Insight3: MIL measures are effective, but they fail to reach important segments of society. Key recommendation 3: consider less obvious, but vulnerable target groups.

MIL policies should go beyond targeting students in primary, secondary or higher education, to make MIL part of the life-long training of all citizens. Other target groups to consider are: public servants and elites at the highest level of the state who need to overcome their own deficit in media literacy; social networks users; vulnerable groups, such as older people or immigrant groups.

Insight 4. There is a persistent lack of coordination among stakeholders in the field of MIL, and between public and private initiatives.

Key recommendation 4: establish clear intersectoral mechanisms and a MIL collaboration framework with permanent connections between public and private actors.

- Additional comments for **Romania**: Valuable contributions in the field from HE and support/ experience from the civil society exist, but the initiatives uncoordinated, and public institutions are not one of the leading forces in advocating for media literacy. the EU, national media, the academia, influencers and other public opinion leaders can influence policymakers into taking more initiatives in the area of digital education or critical thinking. MIL needs to be institutionalized as a national priority through a private-public partnership.
- Additional comments for **France**: Dedicated structures exist within the public system, and there is the political will to use MIL to increase resilience to online disinformation, but there is insufficient coordination among stakeholders. All actors in the field of MIL should be regrouped in a collective, within a flexible and agile structure beyond Ministry of education, cross-sector, at national level and take inter-ministerial action, following a European impulsion for coordination.
- Additional comments for **Spain**: evaluate the extent to which governmental measures and civil society measures harmonize; identify opportunities and challenges for better coordination.

Insight 5. There are no comprehensive standards for evaluating the impact of MIL interventions, which can delay evidence-based policies in this area.

Key recommendation 5: design a system of relevant Key Performance Indicators and implement a unified methodology for measuring the impact.

- Additional comments for **Romania**: evaluation and impact studies must become a preoccupation. Since there is little public visibility on the topic, there is need to organize public consultations first, with all relevant stakeholders; use the future MIL evaluation methodology & set of indicators to produce a nation-wide, exhaustive assessment of current MIL practices and their success;
- Additional comments for **France**: There is little public visibility on the impact of MIL at school or elsewhere. It is mainly a problem of evaluation practices, and appropriate resources for evaluation. There is need for a mature evaluation of MIL, not so much in terms of funds spent, but of what has impact, before proceeding further and target the next strategy for support.
- Additional comments for **Spain**: tools currently available to fight disinformation are still unwieldy, and there is need of information on the reach and effectiveness of government measures. Evaluation and impact studies must become a preoccupation.



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