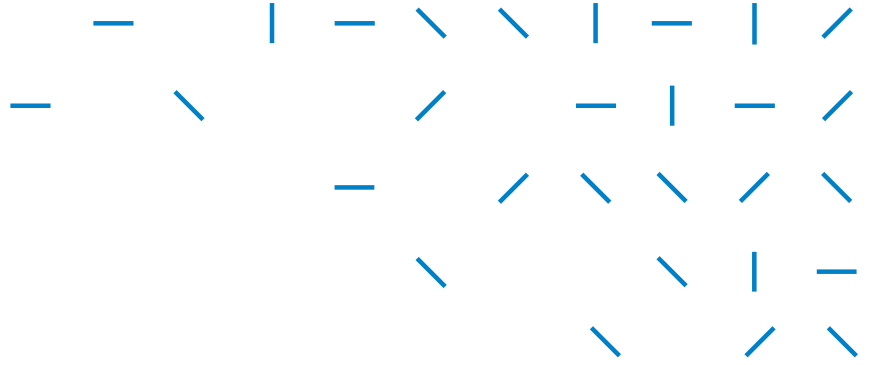Baltic Centre for
Media Excellence

MDF
მედიის განვითარების ფონდი
MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

MEDIA LITERACY SECTOR MAPPING
IN GEORGIA, LATVIA, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE

Georgia
Country Report

2021

Contents

Introduction

Media literacy is a core element of information consumption in a rapidly changing media environment. In such an environment, high media literacy within the audience also generates a demand for quality journalism and helps quality media to survive and develop, as well as to remain trusted. Critical thinking and responsible media use are among the most essential elements in order to strengthen the cognitive dimension of societal resilience to stand up against disinformation and other types of aggressive information. To a different degree, the selected countries are facing multiple challenges connected to the information environment. However, in all these countries, media literacy is seen as a tool for facilitating and saving democratic processes.

Although the term "media literacy" does not have a single definition, and could be interpreted in different ways (for example, to fit in with a donor's agenda), the definition used for the purposes of this analysis is put forward by the European Commission: "Media literacy refers to all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media. These capacities allow us to exercise critical thinking, while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process". [1]

By using this umbrella definition, the research team introduced and designed the **A-A-A approach** on mapping media literacy developments, which means focusing on **A - actors**; **A - audiences** and **A - activities**. Given the dynamics of developing the media literacy sphere, the team focused on a set of country specific recommendations in the following dimensions: cross-sectoral cooperation and networking; evaluation of media literacy activities; sustainability and funding; media involvement. The executive summary starts by providing background information. The general findings are listed afterwards. Selected threats and strengths are followed by general recommendations.

Methodology

Detailed mapping of media literacy actors, audiences and activities was created using the following methodology, which included:

- Desk research;

- Semi-structured in-depth expert interviews;

- Online survey.

The **desk research** included an analysis of policy papers, traditions of development of media literacy, and significant changes in the trajectory of the development of the environment that have occurred. The focus of the analysis was to evaluate changes within the last three years. However, it includes relevant historical background on media literacy policies; media education development and disinformation resilience development; and the redirecting of responsibility from one institutional body to another.

For the **semi-structured interviews**, the scheme of selecting experts was created. This included selecting at least three experts from the following clusters: government related; non-government related; academia and media related; supporters and donors related. 11 experts were interviewed by using the same interviewing guide with five subsections of questions.

Survey - **the online survey** was created to collect qualitative data on activities and audiences used by different

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[1]   https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2541

media literacy actors. In the survey active actors were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The survey included four sections, including the profiling of selected media literacy activities. The research team used available conferences and meetings to collect additional information needed to make an analysis, which focused on 1) cross-sectoral cooperation and networking; 2) evaluation of media literacy activities; 3) sustainability and funding; 4) the role of media in increasing media literacy.

1. General Context

1.1. Policy Regulations

Georgia's media and information literacy policy, which emphasises promoting critical thinking and informed media consumption, is defined by the legislation regulating education and broadcast media. It is primarily aligned with UNESCO and EU definitions. Furthermore, issues related to political propaganda and disinformation, which require a specific understanding of media literacy skills, as well as cyber security challenges, are reflected in the policy documents developed by the Georgian government and the National Security Council. Prior to the 2020 elections, it is noteworthy that a Facebook fact-checking programme was launched in Georgia, aiming to counter disinformation and provide alternative information to social network users through the cooperation of industry with the local third-party fact-checking organisations.

National Developments

The initial reflection on media literacy issues, at the legislative level in Georgia, occurred during their integration into the National Curriculum in 2011. The initiative placed media and digital literacy on the list of prioritised transferable competencies aimed at developing media literacy skills in schools in all subject groups. Even today, digital and media literacy remains an integral part of the educational policy document, as inseparable components of literacy in general, (National Curriculum, 2018). The National Curriculum defines media literacy as the combination of skills required for perceiving, interpreting, utilising and creating multimedia texts; as well as orienting oneself in the realm of media, making the right choice ("filtering" information) and critically evaluating the acquired information. Given the immense role of schools in developing critical thinking, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on media-related issues have been advocating for the introduction of media literacy as a compulsory subject in the school curricula. (Media Development Foundation (MDF) et al. 2018). Nonetheless, some of the respondents surveyed showed no explicit approach towards the issue, considering both approaches acceptable (i.e., compulsory subject and/or integration of media literacy in form of a transferable competency into other subjects).

Until 2017, media literacy aspects were predominantly mandated by the Ministry of Education, however, the amendments made to the Georgian Law on Broadcasting in 2017 gave the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) responsibility for policy implementation. GNCC represents a standing independent legal entity under the public law established on the basis of state property and regulating broadcasting and electronic communications. The 2017 amendment also defined the concept of media literacy, which now encompassed a combination of knowledge and skills necessary for the effective and safe consumption of various media and communication channels and technology, including; creating, receiving, processing and transmitting information through these channels; interactive participation in receiving and transmitting information, its perception, understanding, critical evaluation, etc.

Following the law, in 2018, the Commission developed a media literacy development strategy and a three-year action plan. The policy documents developed by the GNCC received criticism from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for several reasons (2018): The document development process was not inclusive, as it did not address the existing challenges, including those concerning security and hybrid threats from Russia. In addition, the documents struggled to meet the needs of various target groups, including the most vulnerable ones - national minorities who mostly rely on foreign informational environments due to the language barrier. Moreover, they did not include measurable indicators. (MDF et al. 2018).

Some shortcomings of the policy document were also acknowledged by the GNCC representative during the interview, stating that the agency has already commenced updating the existing documents, which would require introducing more explicit indicators and specifying the planned measures.

Similarly, some of the media experts interviewed and representatives of professional organisations do not share GNCC's approach to the target audience. The criticism has been invoked by the fact that instead of only being focused on strengthening the resilience of media consumers, the media literacy programmes of the regulatory institution also include aspects of educating journalists and creating a platform for media critics. Given the distrust towards the institution and the current practice discussed in the next chapter, experts addressed the dangers of biased interference of the regulatory body in the content-related matters of the media and the creation of alternative self-regulation institutions of journalism (GIP, Assessment by Civil Society, 2020). Notably, media self-regulation in Georgia has a mixed nature. While the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics is a membership-based organisation that reviews complaints against all types of media, the Georgian law obliges broadcasters to consider citizens' complaints on violations of the Code of Conduct in an individual format of self-regulation. The GNCC has no discretion to interfere in the substantive issues defined by the Code, responding only to procedural violations. Institutional distrust is also exacerbated by the fact that the GNCC advocates for a legislative initiative to shift specific self-regulatory issues from the Code of Conduct to regulation, which is perceived as an attempt of censorship by the NGOs (Media Advocacy Coalition, 2019).

Securitization of Media Literacy

"2017-2020 Strategy for EU and NATO Integration Communication" by the Georgian Government highlights Russia's use of hybrid warfare elements during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, including its propaganda information campaign and cyberattacks. The document also states that propaganda and disinformation intensified in 2014 after the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The stated goal of the communication strategy is, on the one hand, to counter Russian propaganda and, on the other hand, to raise the awareness of the Georgian population about the European Union and NATO.

Another policy document recognising Russian propaganda along with cyber threats as a security problem is the National Cybersecurity Strategy and the Action Plan for 2021-2024. The document acknowledges Georgia as a target of propaganda, false information and cyber-terrorism by the Russian Federation. It claims that the information warfare creates a fertile ground for manipulating public opinion, which poses a significant challenge to national security.

In addition, the document addresses the further challenges to information security posed by the growing reliance on e-services during Covid-19. An example was the cyber-attack on the Richard Lugar Laboratory, which is under the mandate of the Ministry of Health of Georgia, followed by the leakage of documents onto social media (Myth Detector, 2020). This made the country's vulnerability in this direction particularly acute.

Cybersecurity Strategy tackles the importance of developing cybercultures and building the capacity of information societies and organisations to deal with threats and incidents in cyberspace. It considers digital and media literacy as opportunities to achieve the goal.

International and Regional Developments

The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) is involved in various international platforms working on media and information literacy. GNCC has been a member of the European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) since 2013 and its Media and Information Literacy taskforce (EMIL). Alongside 19 countries, Georgia was among the co-authors of the UN General Assembly Resolution on Raising Awareness on Media and Information Literacy dedicated to annual Global Media and Information Literacy Week (UN, March 25 2021). GNCC and local CSOs are also closely cooperating with UNESCO and are engaged in its annual global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) week celebrated worldwide since 2011.

Besides events-based cooperation, local NGOs, who are engaged in different international formats, are working with UNESCO and the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) to translate MIL educational resources into local languages. MDF has joined IFCN's initiative to translate UNESCO's handbook on model curriculum as an essential addition to the teaching syllabus for journalism educators, practitioners and other interested parties (UNESCO 2013). This publication on teaching disinformation and fact-checking is available in 23 languages, including Georgian and is incorporated into the teaching curricula of Georgian media schools.

Before the 2020 parliamentary elections, Facebook launched its third-party fact-checking programme in Georgia. The fact-checking programme is among Facebook's three approaches (remove, reduce, inform) used for addressing problematic content within the family of its apps.

Under the framework of the fact-checking programme that aims to combat viral disinformation on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, the company collaborates with local fact-checking organisations certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). The process is carried out according to the following steps: 1. uncovering disinformation, 2. verification, and 3. reducing its spread. The fact-checking organisations are primarily involved with verifying and identifying disinformation while reducing dissemination remains at the discretion of Facebook. By enabling independent fact-checking organisations to mark posts as false, Facebook allows the audience to receive alternative information. It even reduces the spread of posts marked as false by fact-checkers. In Georgia, Facebook cooperates with the Media Development Foundation's "Myth Detector" and Georgia's Reform Associates' FactCheck.ge.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Myth Detector and FactCheck.ge joined the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance and WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Hub, as verified signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) of the Poynter Institute, alongside 100 fact-checkers from more than 70 countries around the world. The Alliance was created to fight the infodemic and the rampant misinformation globally with joint efforts and shared resources.

Experience sharing practices at the international level include MDF's membership in the Deutsche Welle Akademie Media and Information Literacy Expert Network (MILEN), promoting MIL initiatives in four continents and advocating policy improvement, as well as the inclusion of local education resources in global databases promoting best practices worldwide (EduCheckMap, DW Akademie).

1.2. Actors

Although combatting political propaganda and disinformation entails acquiring media literacy skills as well, the present study focuses primarily on actors that work directly on media and information literacy issues.

The experts interviewed named the non-governmental sector and international organisations as key actors in the field of media literacy, highlighting the MDF, the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, IREX, Atlantic Coun-

cil's DFR Lab, the Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) and People in Need. Several educational institutions were also highlighted and among the donors mainly the US Embassy, USAID and the EU in Georgia were named.

Based on desk research and conducted interviews, one can divide the media literacy actors of Georgia into the following groups: 1) Government and the Regulatory Commission (GNCC), 2) Educational and Academic Institutions, 3) Non-governmental and Professional Organisations; 4) Media; 5) Local and International Support Organisations.

Government and the Regulatory Commission

The role of coordinating government agencies around hybrid threats is undertaken by the Government of Georgia, which is the leading coordinating body for strategic communication on EU and NATO integration. Furthermore, deterring disinformation and propaganda is among the competencies of the government's Strategic Communication Departments and the Information Centre on NATO and the European Union, which is under the subordination of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The information centre mainly holds informational meetings with the population around EU and NATO-related myths and foreign policy priorities. As for governmental StratComs, to some extent, they aim at raising awareness around media literacy within the society, but most of the time, they are more focused on pursuing information campaigns against the government's political opponents and critical media and less on responding to disinformation from the hostile country, making them a subject of constant criticism by the NGOs (ISFED, Myth Detector, 2020).

Among government agencies, the Ministry of Economy is responsible for ensuring the safe use of the internet and protection from its harmful effects, while the Ministry of Justice, namely, through LEPL (Digital Governance Agency), tackles cyber security.

The field of media and information literacy primarily concerns the Ministry of Education and Science, the Teacher Professional Development Centre, and the National Communications Commission (GNCC), which regulates the broadcasting sector. In addition, the GNCC has a statutory coordinating function of state and non-state actors. The commission's competence is defined by the law, making it responsible for the development of a media literacy strategy and action plans, conducting research, promoting educational projects and coordination.

The Commission of 2018 established the Media Literacy Development Support Department, which focuses predominantly on media literacy. A "Media Academy" was also established, which combines the following three platforms: "Media School" - raising the qualification of media managers, journalists and producers; "Media Critic" - evaluation of media products; and Media Lab - supporting and funding start-ups in digital media. The activities of "Media Critic" are primarily directed against the media that is critical of the government and less against their pro-governmental counterparts. This explains the sceptical attitude of some respondents towards the regulator, as well as the critical assessments of international and local organisations. Both international (Reporters Without Borders (RWB), 2021) and local organisations (IDFI, 2021, MDF, Myth Detector 2020) label the "Media Critic" as politicised, which underscores its attempts to discredit journalists. The 2021 World Press Freedom Index of RWB states that the Commission gradually acquires a censorship function, citing Media Critic as an example. The report notes: "Its online platform, called the "Media Critic," examines media content and tends to discredit independent journalism."

Education and Academia

In addition to the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for integrating media and information literacy competencies into formal education, GNCC and several local non-governmental and international organisations (Media Development Foundation (MDF), the EU, PH International Georgia) work to train teachers and

provide them with educational resources. Furthermore, informal media and digital literacy programmes are being implemented by a number of non-governmental organisations.

Non-Governmental organisations have introduced several media literacy-oriented programmes into Georgian academia: As part of a one-year teacher training programme at Ilia State University, MDF has introduced a course about media and information literacy in schools to train future media literate teachers. In addition, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) has introduced a course on disinformation and propaganda research at the University of Georgia.

Ilia State University introduced two specific courses, namely "Propaganda Theories and Methods" for the Political Science master's degree programme in 2017 and "Media and Information Literacy in Schools" for Teachers One-Year Preparation Programme in 2019. The latter was developed and taught by MDF. The University of Georgia offers fact-checking and verification techniques as a separate subject, while several universities have integrated fact-checking and verification techniques into their journalism programmes (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs - GIPA). Ilia State University also offers UniLab, allowing students to work in the field of digital literacy.

In addition to MA and BA programmes, the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) works with young people beyond the context of higher education, implementing programmes such as social media platforms for media literacy ambassadors and media literacy programmes for minorities.

NGOs and Professional Organisations

Based on their activities, non-governmental and professional organisations can be divided into several categories:

1. Organisations specialising in media and digital literacy: MDF, IREX, The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab), BBSA - Georgia, IDFI, CYSEC, GRASS, The Critical Mass, Democracy Lab; Disruption Network Lab;

2. Organisations specialising in fact-checking and verification - Myth Detector, FactCheck.ge;

3. Organisations specialising in exposing electoral discreditation campaigns: International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED);

4. Membership-based professional organisations for journalists - The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics;

5. Media Ethics and Critics: Mediachecker, No to phobia!

The following report does not include the wide range of organisations that work on disinformation and propaganda research in Georgia, conduct informational meetings, and plan awareness campaigns on propaganda and disinformation in various thematic areas. Instead, the research prioritises actors specialising in media and digital literacy and providing mechanisms and platforms for critical media content analysis.

Media

Media literacy projects carried out by the media are predominantly funded by donor organisations. Nonetheless, in separate instances, media outlets create editorial materials to foster the development of critical thinking and information verification in media consumers with internal resources.

The creation of media content around media literacy and other educational projects on the same issue is

mainly pursued by the following organisations: On.ge, Radio Liberty, Netgazeti, Batumelebi, Public Broadcaster, Chai Khana. Furthermore, various media products related to the activities of individual non-governmental and donor organisations can be found periodically on TV and specific online platforms.

Local and International Support

Several local and international organisations are working in Georgia to develop capacity and support media literacy initiatives, some of which are involved in project implementation, as well as in funding and support.

American governmental and non-governmental organisations have been actively working in the field of media and digital literacy, namely: International Research and Exchanges Board - IREX, Internews, The Critical Mass, PH International, US Embassy, Programmes supported by the United States Agency for International Development – USAID, such as East-West Management Institute, United Nations Association's Promotion of Integration, Tolerance and Awareness programme - PITA and British Zinc Network in Georgia's the Information Integrity Programme.

For years, media literacy programmes in Georgia have been supported by the Deutsche Welle Akademie and the German government, as well as the embassies of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and separate European countries. Various international organisations have also supported programmes such as the EU, the Council of Europe, and separate UN programmes, including UNICEF. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting - IWPR and the Czech organisation - People in Need Georgia - also work on media literacy issues.

1.3. Target Groups

As indicated by the research, the selection of the target audience is not always based on research-based approaches. Research on media consumption, which allows challenges in different age groups or regional prisms to be identified, has not been conducted in Georgia in recent years. Most of the time, issues related to media consumption and disinformation are integrated into the research conducted by international organisations, namely, NDI and IRI - that study public attitudes about politics and current events but do not draw an in-depth and comprehensive picture of these topics.

Two approaches have been identified that have been utilised by the surveyed organisations:

1. **Youth-oriented approach.** Given the openness of the youth towards new technologies and their ability to amplify knowledge, many organisations focus their work towards them;

2. **Donor-oriented approach**. In this case, the target audience is determined by donor priorities. According to one of the participants, the coordination problem across donors leads to an overlap between the target groups and regions. Hence, it would be essential for locally-represented international organisations to collaborate on setting priorities to optimise resources.

Youth. For most respondents, the primary target group of media literacy activities were young people, mainly high-school graduating and university students. The age group of the surveyed young people is defined differently by the organisations, ranging from 15 to 28 years.

The main reason for choosing young people as the primary target group is their high level of acceptance, knowledge dissemination ability, and higher technological aptitude. Hence, organisations prefer to invest limited resources in this selected target group.

School children and parents. GNCC and several other organisations have also been working with school children, including primary school students and their parents.

55+. Out of all the respondents, only one organisation, People in Need, had a relatively small project that targeted the age category of 55+. This age group was included in the category of 'lacking attention.' The elderly are considered vulnerable due to their inefficient digital literacy skills, often depending on Russian-language media products, unreliable media, and sometimes are subjected to religious indoctrination. A representative of one of the NGOs stressed that even an attempt to encourage the senior age group to agree to participate in similar projects is a challenge in itself, as the 55+ age group is reluctant to change and labels similar activities as "imposed by the West." Notably, however, in 2021, the European Union announced a tender for a media literacy programme specifically for the 55+ age group.

Profession-based target groups. Two profession-based target groups have been identified that the respondents worked with: 1) Teachers and students of the teachers' programme; 2) Journalists trained primarily around information verification tools.

During the interviews, respondents underscored the need for a more systematic approach to teacher-centred activities, which can only be achieved through diversifying the audience based on resources and finding the right approaches.

Vulnerable groups - Linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities, conflict victims, the population living in the occupied territories. Notably, media literacy projects have expanded into the regions of Georgia; nonetheless, some of the regions that are densely populated by linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities remain out of focus. According to several respondents, training is rarely held in the aforementioned minority regions due to the language barrier, which can be further explained by the non-existence of a communication language[2] and the need to include an additional translator.

The youth affected by the conflict, as well as the population living in the occupied territories, represent particularly vulnerable groups. However, they were named as the target group by only one organisation.

Need for coordination among donors. In-depth interviews with respondents, including media experts, donors, government officials and NGOs, revealed that implemented projects often overlap and organisations that work with the same audience, especially young people, leave other vulnerable audiences overlooked.

Respondents also underscored the necessity for coordination among donors to diversify the audience and avoid overlap between projects so that the project priorities could be better tailored to the needs of target audiences.

1.4. Mapping Activities

The data acquired from the questionnaires show that deterring political propaganda and detecting (mis)disinformation skills has been a critical aspect in media literacy projects implemented within the last three years, with a considerable focus on information verification skills based on open sources. The following two most commonly named components were critical thinking and creativity/media content creation (multimedia photography, audio-visual, etc.). Relatively less attention is paid to digital inclusion and intercultural dialogue/communication.

Most actors assess their competencies as 'strong' or 'somewhat strong' in the following areas: finding professionals to be involved in project implementation, communicating with stakeholders, communicating with the target audience, and developing grant/project concepts.

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[2] In several Armenian and Azerbaijani language settlements, Russian no longer remains the communication language.

General Communication with the Audience

Actors predominantly utilise social networks to communicate with target groups. Almost all respondents named Facebook their primary communication platform, followed by websites, email and physical events. Some respondents also use Instagram and Twitter.

Among its communication channels, one of the universities named an electronic system designated for informing university students.

Forms of Activities

According to the questionnaire: data, campaigns, creation of resources (books, games, podcasts, etc.), and research compose the main activities for the media literacy actors. During the interview, some respondents noted that the resources created by their organisation are also available in ethnic minority languages.

Training of Trainers (ToT) was mentioned by about a third of respondents. Among the list of the least implemented activities are the creation of networking platforms and policy advocacy. In addition, one should point out that for educational institutions that work on media literacy issues, lectures on media literacy issues are a common form of activity.

When it comes to individual activities, one should mention the Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) approach, which focuses on gathering information from publicly accessible tools or resources. In Georgia, this is widely utilised by the "DFRLab" of the Atlantic Council, "Myth Detector," "FactCheck.ge," and others.

One of the highlights among the activities was the Cascade Training, which IREX successfully implemented in Ukraine and was later adopted in Georgia. The programme involved training of trainers (ToT) and the subsequent cascade training conducted by 18-35-year-olds. Within the programme, master trainers have provided expertise to more than 600 young people, who later trained more than 8,700 participants.

The Learning by Doing approach is used by MDF, leading to the establishment of the Myth Detector Laboratory for young people aged 18-28 and based on its fact-checking platform. The lab allows students to attend weekly seminars and engage in a practice-oriented internship, thus exercising their knowledge obtained in practice by publishing fact-checking articles.

Another widely used method in media literacy is the use of online games. Part of the games are intellectual, aiming at teaching the players how to identify disinformation and hate speech and develop cyber security skills (Dr. Fake; Davita; Duck Hunter; Measure the Truth and your own Nose; Hate or Tolerate?). It is important to mention that Media Development Foundation's online games are also available in minority languages, as well as in English for international audiences.

USAID's new Information Integrity Programme, Zinc Network, ForSet, Iliauni and MDF have been promoting the use of technology to combat disinformation and generate new ideas through hackathons. Such hackathons have been used to develop several games and disinformation verification tools.

The issue of stimulating young people through competitions has been prioritised by GNCC (Real or Fictional) and the MDF. In addition to choosing the most media-literate young person every year, MDF also chooses the most media-literate school each year, consequently promoting media literacy.

Follow-up Projects and Updates

Digital literacy, access to new technologies, critical thinking, media content analysis and evaluation were identified as the most promising areas for future projects. Knowledge of media ethical issues, including those related to the new social media platforms, were least prioritised by the respondents.

It is noteworthy that the Communications Commission denoted the need to update the political document of the agency, which would provide a more nuanced description of measures and indicators necessary for the development of media literacy in Georgia.

Some organisations and donors have already started researching project impact assessments to improve their other projects. Some of the respondents labelled similar activities as priorities in their future activities. MDF listed focus groups as their future activity, enabling them to explore media consumption habits.

Several experts underscore the need for local actors to focus on active cooperation with schools and educational institutions, developing curricula for teachers, or updating existing ones.

Who Sets the Agenda?

During the in-depth interviews, media experts pointed out that the main actors in the country in the field of media literacy are the non-governmental sector and international organisations.

Some experts believe that the Ministry of Education, which implements specific projects with the Communications Commission, should also play an important role in developing and implementing media literacy initiatives. However, it does not have an agenda-setting role in this area.

1.5. Funding

Donors of media literacy projects and organisations working in this field are mainly local and international organisations, Western embassies and Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Namely, US Embassy to Georgia, USAID, UNICEF, Zinc Network, Embassy of the Netherlands, British Embassy, NED, German Marshall Fund, the EU Delegation to Georgia, Deutsche Welle Akademie, UNAG, East-West Management Institute, Internews, CoE, PH International, Open Society Foundation, the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, Adenauer Foundation, United Kingdom Office for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development, N-ost and others.

According to the questionnaire, within the last three years, almost all media literacy projects carried out by local organisations were funded by a single donor. Two or more donors were present in about 25% of the projects. Additionally, the respondents stated that for the general duration of funding for the implemented projects, the funding is mainly allocated for medium-term (1-year) projects, with relatively few short-term or multi-year projects.

The organisations surveyed working in the field of media literacy are entirely or predominantly dependent on foreign donors. EU and UN grants were most apparent in the context of donor-dependency. As for the national government, only three organisations have fully or partially relied on its backing.

In selected cases, the actors refuse to fill in the grant applications due to various criteria, such as the need for their own resources/mandatory contribution, minimum years of experience, and project duration.

As a broadcasting and electronic communications regulatory body, the Communications Commission represents a publicly funded agency subject to financial accountability under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI). For the purposes of this study, the MDF requested information from GNCC on the funding of individual media literacy projects and the "Media Academy." In response, GNCC provided only the unified budget of the Media Academy, amounting to GEL 5,018,794 since the establishment of the organisation (August 10, 2018) until today (September 21, 2021). The commission did not provide information on the funding of individual projects of the Media Academy, including Media Critic, which would allow us to assess the priority areas of the commission. Notably, the IDFI has been requesting information from the "Media Academy" since January 2020. Even though the court granted the request of the NGO, the data regarding the budget of the Media Academy is yet to be provided to the IDFI.

1.6. Georgia in Indexes

	2019	**2020**	**2021**
World Press Freedom Index	60/180	60/180	60/180
Global Innovation Index	48/129	63/131	63/132
Global Peace Index	86/163	84/163	89/163

As of 2021, according to the World Press Freedom Index, Georgia ranks 60th out of 180 countries (28.64). It ranks 63rd out of 132 countries in the Global Innovation Index and 89th out of 163 countries in the Global Peace Index. While Georgia's score for the World Press Freedom Index has remained the same for the last three years, the Global Innovation and Peace Index scores have deteriorated.

2. Country Findings and Recommendations

2.1. Cross-sectoral Cooperation and Networking

Cross-sectoral cooperation and networking represent essential components for organisations working on media literacy activities. According to experts, cooperation helps organisations to ensure the sustainability of the projects and allows them to reach wider audiences.

Cooperation mainly takes place between local NGOs and their donors on the one hand and among organisations working in the non-governmental sector on the other. A survey of activities found that Tbilisi-based non-profits often collaborate with regional organisations to mobilise participants in the regions or conduct media literacy projects for locals with the financial support of a partner organisation.

Respondents underscored the cross-sectoral cooperation at both international and national levels. Regarding international cooperation, the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Finding Network (IFCN) has been named as the most prevalent among respondents, signed by Myth Detector and Factcheck.ge. The two organisations are also partners with Facebook's third-party fact-checking programme. MDF and GRASS also collaborate with the Open Information Partnership (OIP), which brings together organisations that combat disinformation across Europe. In addition, MDF is represented in the Deutsche Welle Akademie Media and Information Literacy Expert Network (MILEN) and shares the organisation's experience with other countries.

Additionally, when it comes to international cooperation, several organisations have named the EU StratCom EUvsDisinfo and the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (StratCom CoE). Among media outlets, one should mention the cooperation between On.ge and the Atlantic Council DFRLab, which entails translating DFRLab publications into Georgian and distributing them through On.ge.

As for the internal cooperation, one should mention the joint work of IREX and MDF on creating a Georgian version of the adapted media literacy textbook. For its part, IREX mobilised participants in cascading training in cooperation with the Georgian Library Association.

When it comes to coalitions, one should point out the Coalition for Information Integrity, funded by USAID and supported by Zinc Network, bringing together the following organisations based in Georgia: MDF, iFact, IDFI, The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), ISFED, Georgia's Reforms Associates (GRASS), The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI).

In addition, the Communications Commission has set up a Media Literacy Hub consisting mainly of government agencies and their LEPLs, as well as several universities and two local NGOs.

The aspects of collaboration with universities and media outlets were also mentioned by the respondents. For instance, MDF actively collaborates with the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) and Ilia State University. Notably, organisations that do not have a separate media literacy programme but have integrated this component into other projects (PH International, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Rondell Foundation, etc.) regularly invite experienced trainers from MDF, the Atlantic Council, and others.

Since media and information literacy is linked to digital literacy, collaboration with organisations working in this field is also apparent.

Apart from formal cooperation, informal cooperation was also emphasised between organisations that work mainly in different areas. For example, the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics accentuates an informal cooperation format with MDF and GRASS.

In contrast to the high degree of cooperation between organisations in the non-governmental sector, coordination and joint work between government agencies and non-governmental organisations is relatively rare. The actors indicate the need to cooperate with the Ministry of Education to ensure the full integration of media literacy in academia.

"There is practically no, or very weak, coordination between NGOs and governmental bodies, as the latter do not consider the former as their partners in this matter; instead, for some reason, they label NGOs as their critical enemies. On the other hand, NGOs do not trust government bodies because they do not see their willingness to cooperate." - says one of the media experts.

Strengths

- Cooperation among NGOs and inviting experts from related fields;

- Cooperation in international networks ensures quality, as well as enables sharing local experience with other countries;

- The partnership of fact-checking organisations with Facebook reduces the spread of disinformation on social media and informs the audience about it;

- Media involvement in media literacy campaigns.

Weaknesses

- Distrust and weak coordination between the non-governmental sector and government agencies;

- Collaboration between organisations is often initiated by a donor, within a specific project.

Threats

- Network competition due to limited resources may be a barrier for organisations to share their views with each other;

- Due to limited human resources, organisations are unable to engage in shared networking activities.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- Government actors should share the experience of NGOs. Civil society actors have developed significant MIL resources and accumulated knowledge based on the studies of the local media environment and best international practices over the preceding years. Therefore, the involvement of NGOs in service delivery can save resources and contribute to the development of joint quality MIL programmes to fill existing gaps;

- Establishing a format for cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations that would eliminate mistrust of the institution, ensure political neutrality, and strengthen media consumer resilience;

- Strengthening cooperation of media professional organisations and NGOs with schools and universities to incorporate MIL in various curricula, promote critical thinking and develop MIL skills at all educational levels;

- Integrating into international formats to share best practices.

2.2. Evaluation of Media Literacy Activities

The majority of respondents underscored the need for in-depth evaluation of the already implemented activities to plan future projects. According to some experts, less attention is paid to qualitative data when evaluating activities, focusing more on quantitative data. It was also emphasised that the non-existence of uniform criteria for evaluating media and information literacy activities hampered the ability of organisations to evaluate themselves according to their own resources and curriculum. At the same time, the criteria for evaluating media and digital literacy are not clearly separated, which may even overlap in some cases.

As for the evaluation mechanisms, as mentioned in the 'defining the audience' section, the lack of studies that fully address media consumption habits in the new media ecosystem and the partial integration of these aspects into various thematic studies is a considerable problem. The need for such comprehensive research has been stipulated as a prerequisite for defining a target audience, as well as an opportunity to evaluate programmes implemented by various organisations.

The evaluation of media literacy projects is mainly carried out by large donor organisations. For example, the evaluation of the projects by the US Embassy in Georgia and IREX are conducted by their contracted companies, assessing how the information is consumed and how critically it is evaluated by project beneficiaries.

The Communications Commission plans to conduct the research that would cover the entire country. GNCC stressed its lack of a designated tool for in-depth evaluation of projects but confirmed the preparation for upcoming research on the issue in the near future (from the end of 2021). The representative of the GNCC hinted at potential research in Georgia to determine the overall level of media literacy in the country and to identify vulnerable groups, etc.

Several respondents, who have limited resources to conduct representative research, named the training self-assessment method as an alternative. Participants complete pre- and post-assessment forms and assess how much their skills have improved as a result of this training.

In addition, while discussing evaluation mechanisms, IREX named a specific practice that obliges other organisations to request permission before using its training resources; thus, IREX checks the usefulness of its manual.

As one of the indicators of the success of its projects, the MDF notes that the graduates of their long-term training project have been involved in IREX cascade training, as well as employed in their fact-checking platform (www.mythdetector.ge) as analysts and serve as trainers in the organization's media literacy programmes.

The respondents stressed the insufficiency of achievements of the projects implemented in the country, as indicated, on the one hand, by the lack of coordination between donors and NGOs, and the lack of cooperation between government agencies and the non-governmental sector, and on the other hand, by paying less attention to the vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, elderly citizens, etc.

Strengths

- Media literacy is part of legislation and policy documents;

- International donor organisations actively support media literacy projects to strengthen community resilience and even evaluate project impact in the case of large-scale projects;

- Many young people were trained in the framework of the projects, most of them later employed in other media literacy and research projects and becoming amplifiers of knowledge themselves.

Weaknesses

- There are no uniform criteria for evaluating media and information literacy activities;

- Media literacy activities are evaluated more quantitatively than qualitatively;

- Individual organisations evaluate projects only with their own scarce resources, to the extent possible;

- There is no holistic study that would assess media consumption habits and media literacy levels in the new media ecosystem across the country.

Threats

- Self-evaluation forms do not fully measure the impact of the project and may create a misconception about the success of the project;

- Not all donors, especially in small-scale projects, fund evaluation;

- Due to the undifferentiated approach of donors to target groups, many target groups, including vulnerable groups, remain out of focus.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- Project evaluation should serve capacity building and be based on study needs;

- It is necessary to conduct comprehensive research that would assess both media consumption habits and the level of media literacy in the country;

- It is important to come up with common assessment indicators based on curricula and media and digital literacy definitions;

- Donors should allocate more resources to conduct evaluations and facilitate the implementation of best practices on the ground in this regard;

- Coordination between key actors will make it possible to both identify the target audience as well as plan activities based on needs and results achieved;

- It is important to evaluate not only the knowledge and skills that beneficiaries gain as a result of media literacy projects, but also the methodology that organisations use with different audiences so that organisations can develop and refine existing methodologies tailored to different audiences;

- Involvement of external experts in the internal evaluation will help the organisations in the neutral evaluation of their activities.

2.3. Sustainability and Funding

The sustainability of projects is impacted by the fact that, other than the Communications Commission and government agencies, organisations mostly rely on project funding from foreign donors that lasts on average 1 year, which is often not enough for a project to reach a large audience and impact the media environment in the long run. Notably, a five-year USAID-funded "Information Integrity programme" has been launched to strengthen the capacity of local organisations to combat disinformation. In addition, in selected cases, the donor (US Embassy) has extended funding for their successful media literacy projects, allowing programme organisers to achieve results in the long run.

The interviewed actors stress the lack of funding and attracting donors as their primary challenge. Respondents noted that donor funding in the field of media literacy was limited, and one of the organisations also asserted that donors do not encourage newly created organisations and rarely promote their development.

According to some experts, sustainability requires long-term cooperation with educational organisations, universities, schools, and government agencies to systematise existing approaches and curricula and make media literacy part of the compulsory curriculum. While discussing the sustainability of media literacy activities, one donor organisation assumed that media literacy principles could be taught through the 'gamification of learning' in primary classes. Given that expertise in media literacy is accumulated mainly within the non-state actors, the willingness of such long-term cooperation from government agencies is believed to be of importance in this process. An example was used when the Teacher Development Centre terminated a memorandum of cooperation with an NGO after a staff reshuffle, making the NGO implement the teacher

training component in a modified format. The NGO linked the event to the political decision of the new head of the centre.

The fact that coordination and cooperation can be hampered by frequent personnel changes, including changes in management, as well as organisational changes, was also mentioned in an interview by a GNCC representative.

Strengths

- Donor organisations put particular emphasis on the role of media literacy in enhancing national resilience;

- Despite the scarcity of shared resources, some donors support long-term programmes in this area;

- In the context of limited resources, identifying young people who are themselves amplifiers of knowledge as the primary target audience helps to optimise resources;

- The already created resources represent a solid basis for other initiatives.

Weaknesses

- The target group is identified by the donor, which may not always correspond to the actual needs;

- Lack of coordination and competition is apparent in the case of non-governmental organisations and donors where different donors try to carry out identical activities, which sometimes leads to overlap;

- Project-based funding impacts and organisational development;

- Short-term or 1-year projects do not succeed in the long run, as the organisation is unable to continue the project with its own resources.

Threats

- Frequent organisational, personnel, or managerial changes may affect the project;

- Arbitrary decisions made by individual public officials may interfere with the non-governmental organisations in the implementation of projects, leading to modifications of the original project.

Recommendations/Opportunities

- In order to diversify audiences and optimise resources, coordination with both donors and government actors is essential;

- To achieve project sustainability and long-term results, it is crucial to use the expertise of non-state actors with a variety of resources. Furthermore, it is vital to integrate these experiences into the formal academic process;

- The state to invest more financial and technical resources in media literacy initiatives;

- The government institutions lacking experience and sufficient resources in the media literacy field could also benefit by outsourcing services.

2.4. The Role of Media in Increasing Media Literacy

During the interviews, the experts stipulated the immense role of the media in the promotion of media literacy. This emphasised the need for the media to be more involved in media literacy activities and initiatives, including, if possible, allocating financial resources in this area. While discussing the funding of media literacy initiatives, one of the donor organisations stated that encouraging the media is essential in terms of introducing basic skills and encouraging the adoption of media literacy by them and this could be done through the resources of both media and international donors.

On the other hand, given the polarised media environment in Georgia, when a specific media product is associated with a particular political party, the initiation of media literacy projects in such media may deepen scepticism in the audience.

The Georgian Public Broadcaster has established a fact-checking platform, which is mainly integrated into their website. Several other online platforms - Netgazeti, On.ge, Radio Liberty and others - integrate the fact-checking component into their materials, in addition to identifying coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB). Hence, they contribute to the preparation of materials that raise awareness of media literacy. The Media Checker of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics is also working to raise awareness, covering not only ethical issues but media literacy aspects as well.

Successful examples were also mentioned, where the topic of trolls was integrated into their popular product, or TV series (Studio "Creative", "My Wife's Girlfriends"). In this way the media raised public awareness, which according to some respondents, was an effective way to achieve the goal and was not even the focus of the programme-specific priorities of the donors.

Organisations working on media literacy issues promote media involvement in this area, which, on the one hand, is reflected in the cooperation with specific media outlets, and on the other hand, in the training of journalists selected through advertised competitions. Journalists were named as the target group by 12 out of 30 organisations, with a particular focus on regional journalists.

Strengths

- Collaboration of media outlets with organisations working in the field of media literacy;

- Some media have integrated a fact-checking component in their activities and started revealing inauthentic accounts;

- There emerged a successful example when the media effectively managed to raise awareness of media literacy with a popular TV show;

- Media literacy actors provide training to journalists about verification techniques.

Weaknesses

- Lack of resources in some media outlets to systematically implement media literacy initiatives;

- Lack of access to media content in minority languages.

Threats

- Disinformation websites that position themselves as media outlets, including the so-called Clickbait websites;

• Distrust towards the mainstream media due to the polarised media environment.

Recommendations/Opportunities

• Donors should allocate financial resources to media organisations to implement media literacy initiatives and ensure financial sustainability of successful programmes;

• Media outlets should diversify their content and introduce MIL components not only in educational but entertainment content as well;

• The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) should cooperate with non-state actors to promote media literacy initiatives and pay special attention to the most vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, while preparing programmes intended to foster resilience building of society.

Concluding remarks - general recommendations

• The role of Media Literacy in resilience building is considered to be of pivotal importance, which is further stressed in the policy documents published within the last couple of years in Georgia. However, it is essential to underscore that the failure of achieving consensus on strategic approaches between state and non-state actors remains the central obstacle towards enhancing the cooperation among the key stakeholders. Therefore, there is a need to create a cooperation format among governmental and non-governmental organisations that would ensure the elimination of mistrust, political neutrality and enhance the overall resilience level of the media consumers.

• In order to define the target audience and evaluate the programmes carried out by various organisations, one requires comprehensive research focused on media consumption habits and the impact of media literacy programmes on beneficiaries.

• Apart from evaluating the knowledge and skills that beneficiaries gain from media literacy projects, it is also essential to analyse the methodology that organisations use with different audiences to develop and refine their respective methodologies and tailor them better to diverse audiences.

• The expertise of non-state actors with various resources needs to be utilised to achieve project sustainability and long-term results. In addition, these experiences should be incorporated into the formal academic processes.

• Given the importance of media and digital literacy as transferable skills defined by the National Curriculum, there is a need to advance critical thinking from an early age, which by itself can be achieved by introducing media literacy as a compulsory subject in the school curricula.

• Coming up with joint curricula-based assessment indicators and media and digital literacy definitions remains another essential priority since there is a lack of unified definitions among stakeholders.

• Content diversification is crucial for Media outlets. This can be carried out by introducing MIL components not only in educational but entertainment content as well.

• In the framework of preparing programmes intended to build the resilience of society, the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) should cooperate with non-state actors to promote media literacy initiatives and pay special attention to the most vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities.

• There is an evident coordination problem across donors that often choose overlapping regions and tar-

get audiences, thus neglecting some of the most vulnerable audiences. Hence, the local representatives of international organisations should cooperate on setting strategic priorities to optimise resources.

• Donors should allocate more resources to conduct evaluations and facilitate the implementation of best practices on the ground.

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