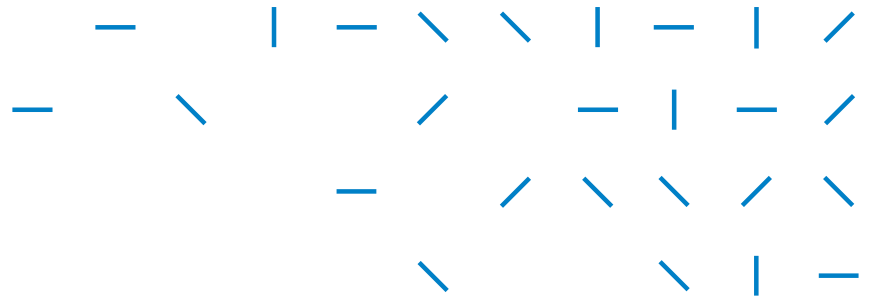




Baltic Centre for  
Media Excellence



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

# Latvia Country Report

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2021



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## 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”.<sup>1</sup>

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. 17 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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<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?do=groupDetail.groupDetail&groupID=2541>

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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.

### *Acknowledgements*

The team of researchers is grateful to the experts and representatives of institutions and organisations who dedicated their time and shared knowledge and expertise.

## **1. General Context**

### **1.1. Policy Regulations**

Over the last decade, media literacy has been increasingly addressed in the political agenda and in policy papers. In Latvia, media literacy related policy has improved and changed significantly within the last eight years. Several factors have changed the trajectory of policy related activities and international cooperation, the main ones being the Maidan events in Ukraine (2013); the illegal annexation of Crimea (2014); the aggressive informational activities of the Kremlin (including interference in elections, leading to increasing polarisation and fragmentation of societies); and the current Covid-19 pandemic and its related malign information.

A shift can be observed within the policy papers, from information literacy, mainly linked to digitalisation (Brikše, Freibergs, Spurava, 2014) to the more focussed concepts linked to the additional and redefined challenges posed by the hybrid threats (Aday, et al., 2019; Rožukalne, Skulte, Stakle, 2020; Kalniete, Pildegovičs, 2021; Heap, Hanses, Gill, 2021). Academia and research related institutions have focused on the manipulation of the media environment and the role it has played in the media landscape over the last decade, but the Ukraine related events of 2014 changed the framing to securitization. Securitization (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde 1998, 24) means that the issue is presented as a threat, with emergency measures and actions taken, which was the approach after the 2014 events. (Bērziņa, 2018; Schulze, 2018).

### *International and Regional Developments*

Different stakeholders from Latvia have become significant international actors in this area, taking leading positions in setting the scope, and not only following others. Some prime examples are: at the regional Baltic level, Re:Baltica and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (Garcia, 2018); at the EU level, the activities of the Latvian Members of European Parliament and the representation in the EU StratCom East Task Force; and within NATO - the NATO Centre for Strategic Communication, which is based in Latvia. In addition, Ambassador Baiba Braže became the Assistant Secretary General of NATO for Public Diplomacy. Latvia has also hosted several related UNESCO events and recently became one of the initiators and co-sponsors of the first ever resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on Global Media and Information Literacy Week.

Recently, in documents produced by the European institutions, media literacy has become more focused on fact-checking initiatives, quality media outputs, and the online ecosystem. An example includes, the “*Action Plan against Disinformation*” (European Commission, 2018), which highlighted that raising awareness and societal resilience (referring also to media literacy) means the ability to identify and “fend off” disinformation. In this context, it is important to emphasise the importance of building trust. The Audio-visual Media Services

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Directive also requires that media literacy is dealt with through cross-border cooperation. The definition of media literacy (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2010) was changed in the Audio-visual Media Services Directive (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2018): *“Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies but should aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgment, analyse complex realities and recognise the difference between opinion and fact.”*

### *National Developments*

This next chapter looks at the national level from a more detailed perspective. The development of media literacy related legislation, according to some experts, is externally motivated. By 2013, media literacy was mainly connected to digitisation and education. Later it evolved to securitization of the information space. While media literacy is mentioned in a number of Latvian legislation related documents, what is lacking, for the most part, is a joint strategy, and one responsible organisation to take the leading role and/or coordination, as well as the financial support required to increase sustainability. There still is room for both improvement and adaptability for the involved institutions, as well as for detailed plans and activities.

As stated by several experts in education, there is a need for additional efforts to introduce more media literacy related competences into education. Media literacy implementations should be future-oriented. The roots for the development of media education in Latvia are linked to external factors and membership of Latvia in international organisations, like Open Society Institute and Soros Foundation, the UN, UNESCO, the EU and OECD (Zelče, Ardava, 2017; Rubene, Svece, 2019). The changes needed in defining the main focus within the institutions should also be considered, and it could be aligned to the changing focus illustrated in the Audio-visual Media Services Directive from 2010 to 2018. At the same time, however, a digital focus and digital literacy-based competencies continue to influence the implementations made and planned for formal education within the reform known as Skola 2030 - School 2030<sup>2</sup> (Ivāne, 2015; Andersone, Helmane, 2019).

Moreover, based on the document analysis and expert interviews, there is a widening gap between the understanding of media education and the role it plays in developing the societal resilience needed to protect democracy. Professor Zanda Rubene and Assistant Professor Artis Svece (2019, p.411) indicate the need for research on critical thinking and the need for it to be promoted in education, *“Unfortunately, the situation in the field of developing critical thinking in the education of Latvia can also be described as unsystematic, untargeted and fragmentary”*.

### *Securitization of Media Literacy*

The National Plan for Development approved on July 2 2020 by the Saeima (Parliament of the Republic of Latvia (2020)) says - *“Citizens feel responsible for the security of their country. They know how to protect themselves, their family and their country during a crisis, and relevant authorities are accountable and ready to respond. Media literacy and critical thinking are Latvia’s best defence against hybrid threats.”*

Almost a year earlier, in September 2019, the Saeima approved the National Security Concept. The document includes a section dedicated to media literacy combined with the professional growth of the media sector. In the document, media literacy is connected to all ages, formal and informal education, public and commercial media, as well as psychological resilience (where it is mentioned with reference to young people). The Concept underlines the importance of society's preparedness to distinguish manipulative types of information from objective information (Saeima, 2019). The Concept provides a holistic view on the threat related problems and the necessary solutions.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details see <https://www.skola2030.lv/lv>

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Pandemic related misinformation and disinformation (or the so-called infodemic) not only showed the significant importance of the external threat posed by Russia, but also emphasised the distrust of public institutions. Hybrid threats are one of the leading narratives. The infodemic is mainly associated with health-related issues, which have evolved from the trust/distrust of state institutions. The recognition of the importance of the media landscape, media consumption and the need for increasing media literacy actions are not connected to a visible involvement of the defence and security sectors. According to interviews with representatives of the government and NGOs, there is room for increasing the participation of defence and security representatives in media related debate, policy planning, and co-financing.

The notion of media literacy as a powerful tool to protect Latvian society against hybrid threats became one of the leading narratives. Experts assess this narrative both as a positive and negative development. On the one side, scholars refer to the idea of avoiding additional politicisation of the media literacy related question within society, referring to, for example, the different attitudes towards the evaluation of the activities of Russia (Clay, 2018). On the other hand, involvement of defence and security related stakeholders would be beneficial for designing and financing ad-hoc campaigns to attract attention to and to raise awareness of the ongoing activities/techniques/tactics of those who generate misinformation by providing the needed informational and financial support.

Several experts also underlined that another relevant input of the Ministry of Defence and related institutions could be increased engagement in society awareness and preparedness related research. Publicly available research, as mentioned by experts, goes beyond the common practice of measuring media literacy with self-evaluation of media literacy associated skills. According to the interviews with state policy related experts, media literacy and critical thinking are frequently mentioned in various areas, such as: formal and informal discussions about societal and informational resilience; in the transformation of the Latvian media landscape within the framing of securitization; and also, within the topics of hybrid threats (such as those that influence values, attitudes, behaviour, etc.).

### *Setting The Goal and Measuring Impact*

To measure impact, some documents mention an indicator that needs to be reached. For example, in the National Plan for Development, the indicator is related to research done by the Riga Stradins University on media literacy and refers to respondents, who check content before sharing on social media or check the reliability of information sources. The indicator when categorised as “Respondents who are “absolutely convinced” means they can identify any news or information that distorts or falsifies reality”. This example of self-evaluation illustrates the limitation of media literacy in the recently updated document. At the same time, the same document states that media literacy and critical thinking are Latvia's best defence against hybrid threats.

Another institution, related to media literacy, at the level of policy planning, as well as having an active agenda, is the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEPLP), which is the national electronic mass media regulatory authority. Media literacy is still mentioned among the duties of the Council. According to the Public Electronic mass media regulating law, adopted in November 2020 by the Saeima (2020b) and in-force from 1 January 2021, where it states that NEPLP should promote media literacy. Media literacy is defined as “the ability of individuals to navigate the changing information space, the diversity of the media, and to identify the risks, threats and opportunities associated with it.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Unofficial translation

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Media literacy is also mentioned among the responsibilities of the Public Electronic Media Ombudsman - to promote media literacy and to personally engage with the society. Media literacy is one of the priorities of the National Strategy for developing the Electronic Mass Media Industry, which was adopted for the period of 2018-2022. In this document, media literacy is connected to the trust in the media.

In summing up, while there is overall awareness of the relevance of media literacy for the development of society and protecting democracy, the lack of a general strategy was identified as a significant problem. Although many previously detected problems within the media landscape (Denisa-Liepniece, 2016) have been successfully solved, the current study detects previously unsolved and newly identified problems in the constantly changing environment: 1) media literacy goes beyond media, culture and education and a holistic approach is needed that engages with more than just governmental institutions and grassroot initiatives; 2) critical thinking and the future-oriented media literacy in formal education needs to be encouraged by the Ministry of Education and Science working in cooperation with other stakeholders in developing a future-oriented approach; 3) securitization of media literacy in connection with societal resilience, needs to involve the role of the Ministry of Defence and other security related institutions in developing formal and informal cooperation and support to implementers of media literacy projects; 4) there is a need to (re)define goals and indicators to be measured and reached, in order to plan measurements and research, with data being made available to stakeholders to design future activities; 5) there needs to be provision for the possibility of a rapid reaction and adaptivity (co-financing of projects; monitoring and case-based campaigns; targeted specific activities) to meet new challenges.

## 1.2. Actors

Based on the desk-research, in-depth interviews and survey, media literacy actors can be divided into the following general sectors: 1) Governmental, 2) Education and Academia, 3) NGO and professional associations and societies, 4) Public and Commercial media; 5) Supporters / Donors (external international/other non-Latvian nationals).

### *Governmental*

There are many voices at different levels, who call for media literacy, including at the government level. Political documents adopted, such as the National development plan or the Declaration for cooperation (or the so called “coalition agreement” of the current government) mentions the main state related stakeholders responsible for implementation of media literacy activities (Ministru Kabinets, 2019). The list includes: State Chancellery; Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice; National Electronic Mass Media Council (*Nacionālā elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome*, NEPLP or media regulator). The Public Broadcast Media and some NGOs are also mentioned in these documents.

The Ministry of Culture, in accordance with the documents regulating the sphere of its responsibilities, is responsible for organising the use of donations (grants) from the state budget intended for the implementation of media literacy. The annual budget for these activities, according to the interview with the Ministry of Culture representative is 20 000 euro. According to experts, this funding is assessed as absolutely inadequate. Significantly more funding is dedicated to media projects through the Society Integration Foundation (*Sabiedrības integrācijas fonds*) and the Media Support Foundation (*Mediju atbalsta fonds*).

Some experts interviewed evaluated the creation of a Media Policy Division under the Ministry of Culture as a positive initiative. However, they emphasised that the activities of the Ministry had stopped when the core personnel responsible for the issue (Roberts Putnis and Dr. Klinta Ločmele) left the office.



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According to the Media Policy Guidelines 2016 - 2020, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers (2015), media literacy means: *“The skills of the audience to use mass media, to search for and analyse information, to critically evaluate the messages of mass media to promote open integration of the society. Such skills promote the creative activity of an individual, as well as reduce the uni-directional influence of mass media communication and allows them to identify and prevent the distribution of biased information. A well-informed audience is able to distinguish mass media that supports and represents the principles of quality and credible journalism.”*

The plan for the implementation of the Media Policy Guidelines includes the following main areas of action: 1) research on the media literacy in society; 2) to improve the knowledge of media literacy of the public; 3) to include content in the media to improve media literacy; 4) to include content to improve media literacy in education; 4) to educate teachers in teaching institutions; 5) to prepare would-be teachers; and 6) to create resources for teachers.

The guidelines have not been updated yet, as referred to by several sources, due to limited human resources, but the work on the document for the next period has started. The same reason - limited capacity of the Ministry of Culture is mentioned as the main problem for the lack of cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science. The previously mentioned Head of Division for media policy left the Ministry of Culture after alleged political pressure from particular political parties and obstacles linked to this issue (Delfi, 2018).

The National Electronic Mass Media Council has plans to enlarge activities in the sphere of media literacy and to play a more proactive role. Among the planned activities are networking, support of media content creation and increasing local expertise.

### *Education and Academia*

In the survey responses, almost half of the organisations mentioned that their activities are connected to “academia and education”. The interviews with education-related organisations shows that universities participate actively in the creation of resources for schools, training teachers, providing workshops and organising seminars. The National Centre for Education (*Valsts izglītības satura centrs* - VISC) and the previously mentioned Skola 2030 are among the most significant stakeholders for school related level of education.

The current research does not foresee any detailed analysis of practices followed in formal education at the school level. At the same time, the overview could not ignore the Skola 2030 project and the implementation of media literacy within it. On the one hand, the experts interviewed identified fruitful but difficult communications with the team working on in the Skola 2030 programme<sup>4</sup> to include media literacy in the programme, but they also realised that it was not the only issue to be included in the list of competences. Several of the experts interviewed mentioned that it was digital literacy that was leading the agenda instead. At the same time, regretfully, the majority of experts interviewed, who are familiar with Skola 2030, mentioned that it is a mistake not to include media literacy as one of main competences.

As mentioned, consultations with developers of Skola 2030 were not very successful. The same was said about the possibility of sharing materials with the teachers through Skola 2030 platforms, as they faced problems with downloading and reaching the proposed platform. According to interviews, areas to be improved are the 1) programme and competences; 2) cooperation of the main actors with implementers; and 3) continuing the creation of the database.

Several experts mentioned that Finnish media education was an example to be followed. The developments

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<sup>4</sup> According to the information provided by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Skola 2030 programme is the first time, the review of the curriculum includes the competency-based approach to develop value-based knowledge, skills and attitudes.



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of media literacy related competences should be supported by an effective system to evaluate the assessment of competences. Training activities are needed for teachers and students (for more, see “Activities” and “Target Audiences” and “evaluation”).

At the level of higher education various programmes are offered: the Master’s study programme in media and information literacy at the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA, 2021) and the Riga Stradins University programme, which offers a process of accreditation. Two Latvian universities - The University of Latvia and Riga Stradins University participated in the implementation of the IREX programme for higher education. The two-year programme is meant to train future journalists, however, as mentioned by the experts interviewed familiar with the programme, students did not always join the media sector, but frequently entered the public relations, marketing or advertising sectors. There is a risk that the universities will not be able to find the resources to sustain the project after external support is over. In general, IREX (Ruklis, 2020) works with six Baltic universities on developing the course “Journalism in the Era of Disinformation”. In addition to training future journalists, significant efforts were invested in the research on media by the pedagogical faculty (Rubene & Svece, 2019). Working with future teachers is one of the needs underlined by a number of experts in the interviews.

With regards to the University of Latvia, the previous UNESCO media and information literacy Chair left the post to study abroad. It currently does not have official representation. The procedure of obtaining the status of UNESCO media and information literacy Chair has been launched by the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences.

Universities demonstrate connectivity and international cooperation, including in the field of media literacy. One example was the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership project that the Riga Stradins University participated in, called “Media and Information Literacy & Innovative Teaching Methods Laboratory”. Other state programmes also partly include the media literacy aspects. The Riga Stradins University was also referred to in the interviews with experts from other sectors. They mainly mentioned that personnel were working on media literacy related activities and providing expertise in the field of implementation. This included criteria to analyse media literacy in the society, as well as actively working in media criticism and analysis. The Riga Stradins University is also moving towards offering a media literacy related programme.

Riga Stockholm School of Economics has a Media Centre (The Anne-Marie and Gustaf Ander Centre for Media Studies), which also provides a set of activities connected to media literacy and improving skills of the journalistic community. It also teaches a course on media literacy to students not related to journalism. In addition, Rezekne’s Academy of Technologies (Rēzeknes tehnoloģiju akadēmija) was mentioned as being among the active participants.

In the “*OECD (2020): Skills Strategy Implementation Guidance for Latvia*”, a lifelong learning culture is mentioned as one of priorities for development. One significant actor is the Latvian National Library who engages in different types of activities, where media literacy is at the core or one of elements<sup>5</sup>. It has been positively mentioned by donors and support related experts, as well as government related sectors. The work is supported by the network of libraries which are already a hub for activities at the regional level but there is the potential to increase those activities.

#### *NGO, Industries Professional Associations and Societies*

The NGO and professional associations dealing with media literacy activities are mostly related to 1) informal education and libraries; 2) media and journalism; or 3) youth focused. No NGO has media literacy activities as the main and only focus.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, a project “Zenit stāsti (The Stories of Zenit)” focused on storytelling and visual storytelling, as well as interviews.

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One of the most frequently recalled NGOs was the Latvian Safer Internet Centre (*Drošinternets*), which has significantly increased activities focused on the media literacy components, and not just digital literacy. They have a systematic approach, which, according to analysis of their activities, and expert interviews in the field, makes them sustainable, able to go deeper into topics, and to plan activities. They have a sustainable budget and participate in activities organised by other stakeholders, as well being willing to share their experience, knowledge and, teaching resources.

The following NGOs were mentioned more than once during interviews: the Education Development Centre (*Izglītības attīstības centrs*), The Sceptics Association (*Skeptiskā biedrība/ SkeptiCafe*), Riga Tech Girls, Latvian debate association (*QUO Tu domā?*), the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, Avantis (Young media Sharks), Lampa (mainly referred to as a platform for media literacy related events at their annual conversational festival, performances and discussions, but an initiator as well) and the Media Ethics Council (*Latvijas mediju ētikas padome*).

When asked, the experts interviewed found it rather difficult to describe other actors, as there were no updates on current activities and events also it was quite difficult to mention recent projects. At the same time, the donors / supporters shared more detailed profiles of organisations they have joint projects with and also with organisations they do not actively cooperate with.

For all the above-mentioned NGOs, media literacy related activities are only one part of their duties and for the majority their media literacy related projects that they do have are focused on younger audiences. However, their general audience goes beyond this age. For example, an organisation like Skeptiskā Biedrība/ SkeptiCafe reaches a wider audience through collaborations with media platforms. Another tendency is that professionals in the field are engaged in the work of multiple initiatives.

Summing up the main trends identified in interviews, the NGOs would benefit from cross-sectoral cooperation within the NGO network. The organisations, like Apeiron, a non-government organisation that supports people with disabilities, could help other NGOs working with media literacy activities to reach their target audience with focused projects. Some researched NGOs do not go public with their projects but have targeted audiences that they address in a specific way. They would be ready to inform the stakeholders about these activities, but do not see it as a media story for the general audience.

#### *Supporters/Donors External International/Other Nationals*

Based on the desk-research and expert interviews, a number of supporters of media literacy initiatives were identified. These are not connected to the Latvian government but are active actors in the field of media literacy. For example, the British government is mainly associated with projects supported by the British Council in Latvia and partly through Baltic Independent Media project. According to the interviewees, the work with the Council is recalled as being network and innovation based, with the approach on targeting audiences and focussing on the inclusion of minorities. According to interviews with the field experts, the US government, represented by the Embassy, has changed the focus of support slightly with the arrival of IREX, At the same time, the US government supports enhancing the individual qualification of experts and provides fellowships to engage with the US media literacy community. Another Baltic initiative on media literacy, was implemented by the Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a think-tank based in Washington. This project was aimed at training civil society and developing local curriculum.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is another significant supporter in the field of expertise. The Council facilitates knowledge exchange, for example in translating and implementing successful projects. It has also funded creation of media content. While supporting a wide range of NGO projects, it increases cross-regional and cross-sectoral engagements. Finnish and/or Nordic approach(es) to media literacy were positively mentioned

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in interviews by experts from different sectors, including government. It was mentioned as a direction for further developments. Norden (The Nordic Council of Ministers) provides policy and content making expertise, initiates networking (also for media from linguistic minorities), as well as supports some targeted initiatives.

The Embassy of Germany in Riga, based on the desk-research and interviews, has a programme to provide support to media literacy activities, which are implemented in accordance with the Joint statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both countries. Besides the general networking and capacity building activities, the statement includes society strengthening elements connected to media literacy and critical thinking. Another German-related supporter, mentioned by more than one expert, is Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

The European Parliament and European Commission also have been mentioned as actors. First of all, European House (*Eiropas māja*), which has held a number of events integrating media literacy issues, for example on Digital Transformation. Additionally, the experts interviewed pointed out the activities of Members of the European Parliament. For example, the Vice-Chair of the Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education MEP Dace Melbārde (European Conservatives and Reformists Group) was mentioned by more than one expert, referring to her support of projects for seniors and journalists. Individuals, as said by one of the experts, play a crucial role in getting deeper into the topics and having a mission to inform others.

### *Public and Commercial Media*

Re:Baltica (and especially their fact-checking initiative Re:Check) and Delfi are the main media (and often the only ones) mentioned by the respondents. For several years, Delfi participated in activities for young people, including hosting a journalism school. Delfi also has a scholarship. Other actors mentioned more than once are: TV3, RE:tv and Latvijas avīze - LA. The Public Broadcast media was also mentioned, however, this mainly relates to the period prior to the last three years, i.e., a project called *Tīri fakti* (Pure facts), although there is one new project as well. Checks made on the public broadcast portal LSM.lv related to media literacy, reveals that the last article on the topic is dated May 2021. Even if selected programmes of popular shows, including *Aizliegtais paņēmiens* (The Forbidden Method) or a project for young people *Interneta akadēmija* (The Internet Academy), or *Atvērtie faili* (Open files) were dedicated to information and source checking and other related issues, there is no clear labelling on the portal. Clear labelling should be taken into account for further development, as it makes it easier for other actors to find the content, for example teachers, where it would provide material for school lessons.

At the same time, as underlined by several experts, media and journalists as individuals are willingly participating in media literacy initiatives and activities, by sharing their knowledge, engaging in evaluation and creation of media projects with students, etc.

Summing up this section, there is a room for improvement in terms of better coordination among the engaged actors, which could play a role in connecting and informing others about activities, such as: 1) by ensuring information is shared on a regular basis; 2) with appropriate formats; 3) informing actors about opportunities for cooperation; and 4) caring for professional growth. There is also a room for improvement in the case of more intensive formal and informal cooperation of those actors dealing with 1) monitoring of the information space and 2) security related actors, including with regards to providing updated information of trending issues, and providing case-based informational support.

Another prospective area for improvement is definitely in creating new partnerships and engaging more actors, who deal with science communication and security and defence. This would be appropriate not just because of COVID-19, but also due to the hybrid threat, which is constantly present and stated as such by the security services.

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### 1.3. Target Groups

There are many factors, which influence the selection of the audience within media literacy activities. The experts interviewed demonstrated different approaches of thinking about the selected target audiences: 1) main focus driven approach (organisation works with youth, the projects are focused on the youth); 2) funding driven approach (there was opportunity to get a project funded, preferences of the donor / supporter); 3) audience research (needs) driven approach (the audience is selected is based on data collected). The first and the second approaches are dominant. The third approach, as identified in the interviews, is mainly related to academia connected projects, cross-cooperation projects, as well as state institutions.

Among the main criteria used in selecting the mentioned audiences are: 1) age group; 2) residence (capital / regions – outside of the capital, Riga); 3) profession - sphere of activities (and future profession in the case of universities); 4) language spoken in the family; 5) level of education; 6) gender; 7) disabilities; 8) individuals (training for one). Some experts interviewed expressed the need to revise the selection criteria of audiences based on the needed research on competencies and skills within the larger society.

#### *Age*

Within the last three years, high school students and teachers are the most common audience addressed within the media literacy activities, according to the respondents of the survey. Fewer organisations have worked with the children of primary school and pre-school age (approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the respondents). These two general audiences (school students and teachers) were mentioned as the main overlapping audiences in projects across the organisations.

While some of the experts interviewed expressed the need to revise and redirect activities to other potentially vulnerable audiences, those working with teachers and pupils emphasised the importance of consistent work with these groups. According to the experts, the teachers expressed their willingness to obtain updated resources for teaching during workshops and seminars. They want to be informed about the trends in information and technologies.

#### *Regions and Minorities*

From the survey it was found that half of all organisations work in the regions, but only a quarter mentioned linguistic minorities as an audience they have worked with within the last three years. Socially marginalized, sexual minorities, people with disabilities are almost completely ignored. Government-related experts emphasised the role of schools to enable reaching young inhabitants, and expects competences associated with media literacy to be developed.

There is also an awareness of the lack of support for projects/implementation of projects for linguistic minorities. As several experts (both governmental and non-governmental) explained this was due to a lack of political will, and that the audiences were being addressed by NGOs through attracting donor's funding. Consequently, the main driving force and funding for media in the Russian language - comes from donors related to other countries. For example, the project A-Z for the Public Broadcaster in Russian was supported by the Embassy of Germany in Riga.

#### *Professional Communities*

Among the targeted audiences are professional communities (journalists, trainers, civic activists). In several projects, librarians were addressed. They are mentioned as a significant group to share the knowledge with

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their clients. Librarians are mentioned as the local hubs for local communities, because they have access to different demographic groups, including seniors, children and their parents.

The second most mentioned professional group were journalists. The experts interviewed pointed out the need to inform and educate the journalists on the basics and trends connected to media literacy, and to get into a deeper coverage of communication related processes. While analysing journalists as the target audience, the media related experts mentioned that it is challenging to provide training for journalists, as their level of preparedness differs. The interested journalists could be located in the regions and therefore, in addition to media literacy activities, they also have to cover other topics.

### *Vulnerable Audiences to Focus On*

How do the experts interviewed define the vulnerable audiences? There is no single answer. While some argue that the most vulnerable are young people, others put seniors on the priority list. The group of experts prioritised linguistic minorities as some of the most vulnerable audiences, as well as people with low income, socially marginalised and those living in the regions. Among some experts, there is a tendency to avoid the issue of an ethnic divide, and to only provide official language-based media literacy.

The problems with the level of education and perception of the role of science (not just a lack of it, but the attitude to science related sources etc.) are seen in widely demonstrated conspiratorial thinking (Lewandowsky, 2019). Here it is worth referring to one of the experts, who also pointed out the role of media in popularising non-science-based approaches and publishing clickbait stories, to get visibility (for example, using the algorithms on social media and such) and to attract the attention of the audience.

In addition to the previously mentioned audiences, there is also a lack of focus on people with disabilities, and gender-based, and sexual minorities, however, some actors mentioned that they tried to make audio versions available of visual presentations for those with visual impairment. The main reasons mentioned for not often addressing the needs of vulnerable audiences in the projects undertaken by the actors are, a lack of resources and a lack of understanding of how to reach and attract the audience, especially those not interested in getting this kind of information (for example issues such as: fatigue from news; not interested in the media and experiencing distrust to public institutions, including the media).

In summing up, what should motivate actors to reach specific audiences, to enlarge or focus the profiles of audiences they work with? In the current situation, it could be 1) exact requests from stakeholders, including donors; 2) research on the specific target audiences (understanding the needs and gaps); 3) sharing of good practice (also international experience); 4) cooperation with the local organisations mainly working with the specific audience (already established connections, advice in adapting existing programmes and creating new ones).

## **1.4. Mapping Activities**

In a self-evaluation of the general key elements addressed within the last three years in media literacy related activity, all respondents of the survey mentioned critical thinking (cognitive biases, decision making, etc). The next two key elements are participation / civic activity / fundamental rights and countering political propaganda and disinformation/misinformation. Slightly fewer activities are dedicated to media use (changes in and increasing complexity of media landscape) and digital inclusion (digital rights, online safety, hate speech online). While describing the selected projects in an open question, and addressing the main elements of the activities, respondents point to a clear connection between critical thinking and democracy.

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### *General Communication With The Audience*

The research has been focused on the activities of selected actors within the last three years. Due to the pandemic, many organisations were forced to redirect, reformat, or even cancel planned activities. At the same time, pandemic related changes opened up new opportunities, through online events and to addressing emerging challenges.

According to the survey, the main channels used to inform others about activities are the web pages (home-pages) and Facebook, used by almost all respondents. This is followed by off-line events, emails, Instagram, and Twitter. WhatsApp has also become one of the ways to inform others about activities (used by a third of respondents).

Another type of communication is the use of peers and influencers (integrated in the projects) or used to attract the media to the projects (to enlarge the audience).

### *Forms of Activities*

The most common media literacy related activities identified by the respondents are 1) creating resources (books, games, podcasts, other resources - 75%); 2) training of/for trainers / teachers (63%); 3) research (44%) and 4) organisation of media literacy campaigns (31%). Providing networking opportunities, advocacy, funding media content, etc. are less popular activities. The desk research and analysis of publicly available documents shows a tendency to move away from workshops and seminars as the main activities to campaigns with a set of different formats included in the project.

### *Small Projects Vs. Long-Term Projects*

In the part of the survey dedicated to specific projects, some of the respondents highlighted only one project. The longest project (4.5 years) is connected to one donor. The majority of projects mentioned have been completed.

The main characteristics of the activities, according to desk research, interviews and surveys, are that they are short-term orientated, project-based and frequently (depending on the nature of organisation) grant based. As commented on by the experts, grant-based, small projects do not allow actors to go deeper into the topic. For example, the small projects frequently have limited resources (including a lack of resources for examining the lessons-learned, which could serve as the basis for developing future activities). Another risk associated with project-based short-term activities is the increased risk of oversimplification and generalisation. At the same time, some experts mentioned successful, quality short-term projects. These projects, according to experts, could be improved and repeated, but due to the lack of funding they were abandoned. One of the solutions, as recommended by a number of experts, is to include a request for follow-up activities in the calls for applications.

The Latvian Safer Internet Centre (*Drošsinternets*) is mentioned as one of the organisations, which has implemented a successful longitudinal project. Within the preceding years, the organisation had added media literacy focus into their mainly digital safety focused agenda. A sustainable, internal strategy allows them to go deeper, to grow the network of partners and to forge collaborations. It also influences the creation of materials, work with personnel involved, etc. In addition, they are ready to provide materials for an expanded usage of their materials, create campaigns targeted for different audiences and, what is most important, have a set of planned activities for the future.



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### *Follow-Up Projects and Updates*

The experts interviewed emphasised that due to changes in the media landscape and media consumption, there is a need for a constant revision of curriculums for teachers, as well as a need for updating materials. At the same time, the possible gap in knowledge amongst the teachers would be a defining factor of different levels of preparedness for training. Moreover, one expert suggested that the practice of developing grants for individual teachers (to develop curriculums, materials, activities) should be considered. The same has been said about journalists, as a group that needed to be updated with trending issues, that they should be granted individual support.

Digital literacy and access to new technologies are the themes mentioned for projects for future implementation. It is followed by “Analysis and evaluation of the content” and “awareness of ethical issues with media, including emerging new social media platforms”, content creation is mentioned last.

### *Who Sets the Agenda?*

While media policy guidelines set the agenda for media literacy activities supported by the state, some experts emphasised that, in the current circumstances, the agenda for media literacy activities has also been set by the main foreign supporters / donors. The criteria set in the calls, the number of activities undertaken as well as the reporting of the activities to the main supporter allows issues that have not been fully addressed to be returned to, for example - the need to include minorities, to follow gender balance, to include the regions, also to focus on activities in the eastern part of the country. There was also the opinion that in a specific region the state is less present compared to the support by foreign actors, which also encourages competition among the implementers of the projects to target specific audiences. For instance, schools in Daugavpils are busy with incoming calls to participate, and this applies not only to media literacy related projects.

As mentioned by the experts, there is a tendency to concentrate on linguistic minorities aimed at projects in the Latgale region, frequently ignoring Riga. According to the interviews, fewer projects were implemented in Liepāja or Ventspils (the two biggest cities in the Western part of Latvia with a significant number of ethnic minorities in the population).

According to the interviews, the US has supported grant-based projects and provided scholarships and fellowships to the actors. For example, these are the organisations identified in the research, which have been involved in media literacy related projects for the last three years - IREX (Learn to Discern), Internews (SIMBA) and CEPA. All three organisations submitted pan-Baltic projects. The US also supported the media literacy activities of the Education Development Centre (Izglītības attīstības centrs).

The British Council and the UK related initiatives, indicated in the interviews, are strategically continuing to work with the established partnerships and creatively experimenting and supporting projects related to art and different types of storytelling. They also address micro targeted communities, as well as widely working with the Russian language minorities in the regions, for example, developing several projects in Rezekne, a Latvian city near the Latvian-Russian border.

Other type of activities are boosting events and platforms. For example, LAMPA was mentioned as one of these events. The annual conversation festival also includes side events. Another activity boosting event is media, information and digital literacy-oriented weeks at European or Global levels.



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### *Future Projects*

The influence of new educational related practices is also seen with regards to changes in the formats for future projects. Representatives of several organisations in the in-depth interviews mentioned that they are going to launch virtual courses (primarily for high school students and motivated young people). These online activities allow young people to work individually and in the most convenient way (time, place, rhythm).

The following emerging activities were also mentioned: projects popular for YouTube/ Instagram/ TikTok content creators (as the audience - to educate, as content providers - by helping to create content, by financial support; and also as a channel - to reach a larger general audience, followers). Similar activities targeted at specific audiences (for example journalists or teachers) should also be considered.

To conclude, the diversity of activities depends on longitudinal funding of the project, the previous experience of the organisation, the network of cooperation developed, etc. Moreover, media literacy activities, as an informal type of education, compete with other types of activities to attract the attention of the target audience. For successful engagement with the audience, deep understanding of the audience is needed, as well as lessons learned on the implementation of activities. Exchange of experience on lessons learned on activities within a community would be beneficial. Evaluation of activities could help to design the follow-up activities and entertainment-based activities could be considered.

## **1.5. Funding**

Sustainability and funding are the most common problems mentioned by the participants in the in-depth interviews, and in the survey. The lack of co-financing is the main reason (100%) why the participants of the survey, (who decided to answer the question 8 of 16), abandoned the idea of participating in one or other call/grant application. The second common reason was the necessity to submit to the grantor the financial audits for the requested period of time.

### *The Main Financial Resources*

The risk of being unable to attract funding (donors) is mentioned as one of the most problematic issues connected to the future activities of organisations. Some participants evaluated the ability to attract funding to their organisations as partly weak, some as very high. However, the most popular answer is adequate. The data shows that the majority of respondents have project-based financial support for media literacy activities. Only one of the organisations participating in the survey mentioned that it has long-term non-project-based funding. Evidence shows that projects are mainly supported by one donor, fewer are supported by two donors or more. During interviews with the funding organisations, one of reasons to endorse just single-donor supported activities for many actors, is to use the partnering within one project to increase sustainability of projects and to strengthen further cooperation.

The main sources of funding for active media literacy actors, as identified by the survey, are - the state (Latvia), foreign actors and the EU budget. Four of the respondents also mentioned individual donations. Half of the participants/respondents are partly supported by foreign actors/donors. Within the NGO sector, there is a tendency to have a set of donors, and not to be dependent on one source of financial support. At the same time, the initiatives, as such, are mainly supported by one source/donor.

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### *Will Donors Always Be There?*

Representatives of donors interviewed also mentioned that resources are redistributed to those projects connected to societal cohesion, and not so much directly associated with media literacy. This can partly be explained by the so-called fatigue with donors' support of overlapping ideas and searching for new forms of impact.

Sustainability and funding, according to the experts interviewed, including the representatives of donors, influences the quality of approaches, as well as the ability to invest in personal growth and the ability to provide a deeper analysis of lessons learned. In interviews donors mentioned the weak sustainability of local organisations.

### *Attracting Specialists*

It is noteworthy that some of the participants of the survey also mentioned that it could be hard to attract good specialists for future projects. However, neither is the community talking about the professional growth of those dealing with media literacy issues. Scholarships, grants, and visiting trips are mainly endorsed by supporters like foreign embassies.

At the same time, according to the interviews, the leading personnel are self-motivated. Many of those dealing with media literacy have already obtained doctoral degrees or are in the process of obtaining doctoral degrees in related sciences and continue to increase their knowledge by participating in conferences, training and other networking events, as well as using personal resources. The specific list of opportunities to increase professional skills for media literacy related activities would be beneficial for the community as a motivational element.

To conclude, a general recommendation is to establish a strategy, which foresees the possibility of flexible funding, linked to legislation already adopted. As media literacy goes beyond education and culture, other institutions, connected to societal resilience, should also prioritise this area (by appropriate funding).

## **1.6. Latvia in Indexes**

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
World Press Freedom Index	24/180	22/180	22/180
Global Innovation Index	34/(131)	35/131	38/132
Global Peace Index	32/163	35/163	35/163

## **2. Country Findings and Recommendations**

This second part of the research has a detailed set of recommendations on increasing the sustainability of local media literacy related actors.

### **2.1. Cross-sectoral Cooperation and Networking**

Cross-sectoral cooperation and networking, both formal and informal, has been mentioned as an essential part of increasing capacity building, as well as developing the resilience of the community working with me-

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dia literacy related activities. Formal meetings, for instance, are the ones organised by the Ministry of Culture, while the informal meetings were organised by the Ministry of Culture in parallel with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and included some of the participants active in countermeasures to disinformation, misinformation and propaganda. There were also case-based activities, like protecting the integrity of elections, which also provided a space for networking and cooperation. These types of informal activities and networking are highly appreciated by the participants and are expected by the state related stakeholders, and by those NGOs, which could take a leading role in setting the scene for actors.

Some of the participants interviewed used to be active members of groups created by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign affairs. However, according to the views shared, these platforms that have been created have not been active for some period of time. Some single-meeting based initiatives, were mentioned by the actors interviewed, that were instigated by the presidential office and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence.

International calls are another significant force that motivates the creation of cross-sectoral national and international bonds. However, only a few organisations have been a part of international media literacy related projects, even the process of working on a call, according to the interviews, has led to better cooperation in organising international events.

The significant importance of cooperation and networking are the working trips organised by the supporters/donors, including the Embassies and state related organisations. These are aimed at increasing the exchange of experience between Latvian and foreign experts in the forms of conferences, personal engagement, adaptation of materials and resources or training, etc. State related experts interviewed shared that it is an essential part of their profiles to increase cooperation between countries.

The NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence based in Riga was mentioned by some experts as being among the ones for forming beneficial partnerships and for networking. The centre serves as a hub to provide updates on relevant and triggering issues. While the national monitoring services (Ministry of Interior and NEPLP) are not reaching out to media literacy actors, according to the interviewees, the NATO StratCom CoE is providing updates on trends, which could serve as a basis for an ad-hoc and rapid response.

### *Weaknesses*

- There are no regular meetings for the community and/or a platform to share experiences and contacts, although there are plans to renew the previous practices of the Ministry of Culture;
- The community of active actors is evaluated as rather small and is competing for the limited amount of financial support (competition vs. cooperation);
- Among actors, there is a lack of vision for media literacy as a holistic approach (prioritising the sector over the cross-sectoral cooperation);
- Cooperation is frequently a project-based and donor initiated (not government initiated) endeavour, for example in the form of foreign visits.

### *Strengths*

- The cross-sectoral cooperation and networking allows more focussed projects to be created and to find unique programmes for specific targeted audiences;

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- Systematically addressing the established local networks increases awareness (for example librarians), international and regional cooperation allows best practices (mainly pan-Baltic international projects) to be found, adapted and revised;
  - Networking helps potential partnerships to be recognised not only at the institutional, but also at the individual level, for formal and informal coordination.

### *Threats*

- Sharing of views and projects could be perceived as having the potential for competitors to steal ideas or losing the recognition for generating ideas;
- While the networking is based on individual relationships, not institutional based, there is a risk of collaborative action ceasing in the event that an individual leaves the institution;
- Due to limited human resources (limited pool of professionals working with the topics), different partners hire the same professionals to implement the projects. In some cases, the organisations set limitations on post-project cooperation for individuals, which then limits the people available to work on a project.

### *Recommendations/Opportunities*

- A government funded networking platform for coordination and cooperation is needed, it should have multiple levels of coordination and have representatives from different authorities (including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science, State Chancellery the Council, etc.) as well as civil society - sectional and cross-sectional. Advance leadership within the sectional levels. Substantially increase the visibility of actors;
- Regular meetings and communication should be held, with a clear set of participants, the participation of supporters (foreign actors) should be considered (but not necessarily in the same meeting, possibly to create pre/post meetings). Newsletters and other means of sharing lessons learned could be beneficial for the community of actors;
- There is a need for state funded capacity building of the community, which should include recognition of active participants. A variety of forms of professional development should be evaluated and supported;
- State related stakeholders should find an appropriate way to inform and support the local activists to take part in international level calls – such as grants, to encourage participation and including the skills and administrative support needed - and lobbying for the presence of Latvia related initiatives on the, for example, European level;
- Cooperation (formal and informal) with security and defence related representatives should be seen as a possibility to develop a deeper and targeted understanding of strategies and techniques implemented by manipulators, increasing the awareness among the actors. Increasing formal and informal networking with monitoring related institutions for ad-hoc responses should be considered.

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## 2.2. Evaluation of Media Literacy Activities

The majority of respondents mentioned that the evaluation of general media literacy within the society and the impact of media literacy activities is one of the most important and simultaneously challenging issues that needs to be addressed in the projects. The difficulties with impact assessments were the second challenge that respondents were afraid of, when thinking of the future of media literacy projects (after “Not being able to attract donor - funding”).

Changes in media development - including digitalisation, the advancement of manipulative techniques, and the ongoing research on media consumption and effectiveness are the most likely issues to trigger the design and implementation of media literacy related projects, as mentioned by the experts. Moreover, there is a constant need for updated and focused audience analysis, as well as precise post-evaluation of activities to provide the basis for situation-based policymaking aimed at new targeted activities.

Besides mentioning the needs for qualitative design of activities and the lack of knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research tools and skills, the experts interviewed mentioned problems with attracting funding for these activities and the limited capacities of growing in-house expertise on research and evaluation. At the same time, there is awareness among participants that the evaluation is an essential part of advancing longitudinal projects, as well as helping with the redesigning and experimentation needed to develop and deliver media literacy projects.

The overall tendency, observed within the mentioned projects, is to include pre and post measurements, as this was the easiest way to ensure “pre and post self-evaluation”. The evaluation-based elements of the projects, according to the majority of interviews with actors, should be revised and improved. Some respondents mentioned that the involvement of academia related partners would be beneficial to develop and improve criteria and measurements designed for specific projects.

### *Weaknesses*

- It would be difficult to find general or unified criteria suitable for the majority of initiatives and activities;
- Given the complexity of evaluation criteria and the different types of skills addressed in projects, some participants decided not to include evaluation (when possible) or to limit reports to the number of participants, events held, materials printed, etc;
- The activity and responsibility of participants in media literacy activities differs (motivated to participate in the project, but not motivated to participate in evaluation). Answers by unmotivated participants could distort the perception of the impact of the project (several actors mentioned that, for example, some students do not pay attention to the evaluation and just submit unfilled/randomly marked forms);
- The supporters/donors shared doubts that sometimes the project implementers selected the easiest way (i.e., most likely to give a positive response) to prove a positive impact, that does not measure the real impact.

### *Strengths*

- The majority of supporters interviewed and financial donors are developing criteria and measurements to suggest/ or to request actions from the actors/partners, which are detected as drivers to increase the in-house capacities of actors;

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- There is a common understanding of the need to implement longitudinal measurements, experimental research techniques, specific designs not limited to self-perception or quantitative data;
  - The number of specific research projects are growing, with Covid-19 related and state funded research being made available that includes media consumption, decision-making and other media literacy related issues.

### *Threats*

- The evaluation process is underfunded. The financial costs of evaluation are frequently not included in the estimated costs. The internal capacity of actors to implement evaluation is limited;
- One of the main ways to measure evaluation is through self-assessment, which has been evaluated by some participants as “easy” but with a potential to “mislead”;
- The formulation of questions in general surveys (when used as a core to formulate actions) can be rather too broad and could be misleading (media-centric approach);
- The involvement of professional experts will increase the costs of the project. There is a demand for in-house expertise. However, the number of staff involved in media literacy projects is rather limited.

### *Opportunities/Recommendations*

- “Learn and act” in evaluation should be connected with sustainability and capacity building to avoid oversimplification and generalisation;
- Including academic partners could be a driving force to increase the quality of measurements and evaluation. The academic related organisations, who participated in the survey, guaranteed their capability to share skills and professional knowledge;
- The partners would benefit from including the academic partners as subject-matter experts into the preparation phase of surveys requested by the Ministry of Culture, the Council (NEPLP), as well as in the micro-target audience surveys. These are subject matter experts working on issues related to media consumption, critical thinking and other connected elements;
- The surveys conducted at the request of the Ministry of Culture, NEPLP and other stakeholders could be delivered to media literacy actors (as it has been done by the Ministry of Culture) as a set of raw data;
- Media literacy active actors, including the media, would benefit from targeted capacity building activities on quantitative and qualitative analysis (in cooperation with academic and research centres);
- Active actors in media literacy would benefit from networking with research and evaluation experts/expertise from other international organisations and national institutions from abroad (IREX, Internews, KAVI - a Finnish governmental bureau National Audio-visual Institute, etc.).

## **2.3. Sustainability and Funding**

The majority of problems identified are linked to underfunding. Evaluation of solutions and limitations are connected to this. The state co-finances some of international actions, but there is a need for a strategy, including increasing the sustainability of the actors involved.

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The government or government related actors should consider establishing media literacy fellowships, which would ensure 1) a deepening of the knowledge in the country or abroad; and 2) invitations to experts from other countries to participate in the activities of Latvian media literacy related organisations.

A significant factor, however, is the short-term nature of the projects, which are not followed up in the next step, thus not ensuring some continuity. Instead, a new project is started from the very beginning. This influences the planning of future projects and limits the ability of implementers to go deeper into the topics and to implement the lessons learned, which would be useful to advance the continuation of the project.

### *Weaknesses*

- One-off or project-based planning limits the abilities for expansion of activities;
- Projects are designed based on developing less fund-consuming skills (content creation, for example, was recalled in interviews as a potential topic, but mentioned less as potential due to additional costs);
- A lack of co-funding does not allow participation in international initiatives;
- Grant funding in some projects could not be used to also cover management costs;
- With project-based funding activities it is almost impossible to find resources for capacity building;
- Highly qualified officials leave the government due to being underpaid.

### *Strengths*

- Based on the evidence, longitudinal projects (at least two-three years) are effective in building capacities;
- Foreign actors/supporters demonstrate a strategy for continuing to support actions, but also to reach additional audiences;
- It was positively acknowledged that the bureaucratic elements in the calls by the state (for example, in media support projects) have decreased.

### *Threats*

- Due to the lack of state financial support, foreign actors set the agenda for media literacy actions for a wide range of public activities;
- Association with big tech companies in providing support for local initiatives, means there are image related issues/ or lobbying of interests.

### *Recommendations and opportunities*

- As media literacy is a part of the national security issues, funding of the sectors could be prioritised;
- State financed longitudinal audience analysis and in-depth research is needed for media literacy stakeholders, which should be included in terms of reference and updated with the results;



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- Developing sectoral grants and capacity building programmes should be considered both at individual and institutional levels (teachers, librarians, journalists, civic activists, other active communicators and content creators);
  - There is a need for co-financing opportunities for projects successfully accepted at European level;
  - Inclusion of Latvian institutions in European initiatives should be endorsed financially and promoted;
  - Local and regional hubs of media literacy actors and initiatives (at the local community level) should be supported and created. These should serve local communities, to become a platform for including and connecting representatives in different spheres related to media literacy as understood and in accordance with the definition used in the purpose of the study.

## 2.4. The Role of Media in Increasing Media Literacy

Professional and trusted media is a significant element in a democracy. In connection to media literacy, there are three main elements, which could be highlighted from current research: 1) media as a source for qualitative, verified (fact-checked) information; 2) media literacy delivering/endorsing/participating actors; 3) actors who need to be trained and taught accordingly, to be able to tackle information, to understand ongoing implementation, to find the appropriate format and to know and understand its audience. Besides media literacy related issues, the media sector experiences significant challenges with transforming current business models. The ongoing debate includes challenges with social media platforms, struggle for and the attention of the audience and financial sustainability. The additional question pointed out by scholars, shows the relevance of not only economic obstacles, but also political tensions connected to media consumption (Kaprāns, Juzefovičs, 2019).

In an examination of media pluralism, professor Rožukalne (2020), referring to media policy guidelines, concludes that the Latvian media system has been positively influenced by the development of media policy. In the same report, she writes that “media literacy indicators show a medium (close to high) risk situation (65%), as media literacy policy in Latvia does not cover a wide range of audiences and this policy is mainly aimed at the needs of children and young people.” It should be ensured that national regulatory authorities are promoting media literacy for a wide range of audiences.

In a number of interviews, the experts noted that creation of the Media Support Foundation, as it was foreseen in the Media Policy Guidelines, was a positive step influencing the changing media landscape. One significant limitation mentioned by some experts is the language of the content produced (with the focus on minorities, but not on the language of minorities, which was considered by the majority of experts interviewed as a vulnerable audience). The same has been mentioned in one of the first project evaluation reports (Buholcs, Silkane, Denisa-Liepniece, Veliverronena, 2018).

Although public broadcast media in Latvia are also facing changes, experts point to such positive developments as the adoption of the new law, removing the public broadcasters from the commercial market, creation of a new regulatory body Sabiedrisko elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padomes (Public Electronic Mass Media Council, SEPLP) and significant support being given to new multimedia platforms for minorities. Yet, they also underlined that the public media in Latvia has been underfunded for decades. According to interviews, there could be more space for the public broadcaster to develop media literacy related projects, although some projects were mentioned, such as *Melu detektors* (Polygraph), *Melu Laboratorija* (Laboratory Lies), *Tiri fakti* (Pure Facts), and *Interneta akadēmija* (Academy of the Internet). Media literacy related content

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could also be more integrated into existing formats and be used to experiment with the formats (as it was in the case of "Interneta akademiija").

Commercial media, as was mentioned by media experts, has a very different level of engagement with media literacy projects. There are strong and successful projects and weak projects, showing a low level of understanding of media literacy. Several experts mentioned positive capacity building and improvements in production groups, such as DEFLI, LA.lv, Red Dot Media.

### *Weaknesses*

- Focusing on and repeating the basics in similar projects (without going deeper), could devalue the notion of media literacy for the actors and for the audience;
- The journalistic community needs to be updated not only on the new threats, but also about the well-known but frequently forgotten problems, for example, the use of vox-populi as pseudo-sociology;
- Oversimplification of the problem and mainstreaming of media literacy related issues ("fake news", "infodemic");
- The projects on media literacy are used as just as another possibility to attract funding, and are directed by the journalists, who are not getting into the topic, but try to bridge ongoing stories with the funds related to media literacy;
- Not knowing the target audience, and an inability to conduct and finance proper evaluation of media literacy activities initiated by media related actors;
- Toxic fact checking could provoke amplification of misinformation.

### *Strengths*

- Longitudinal, multi-seasonal media projects shows there is an ability to go deeper into relevant topics and are an encouragement for journalists to increase knowledge and work on the topic;
- Enlarging the community of fact-checkers, actively participating in sharing the knowledge on verification tools and skills (in different formats for the audiences);
- The activities to empower quality journalism are the created and implemented projects that are meant to increase understanding of manipulative techniques, and cognitive aspects among the journalists and editorial staff.

### *Threats*

- When there is a lack of financial resources, journalists are switching to other topics and do not continue with personal improvement (capacity building);
- Fatigue from a threat - the Covid 19 pandemic connected developments showing the fragmentation of society are often associated with thinking that media literacy is a solution, or media literacy as a "silver bullet" to deal with the issues but this risks media literacy becoming devalued and not attractive.
- Journalists working on media literacy related topics could become (and are becoming) victims of online harassment and campaigns;

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- Some media do not have the capacity to fulfil administration of projects in addition to their role in creating media content, because significant time needs to be dedicated to project writing;
  - Small grants for projects are still needed, however there is a tendency among donors to limit such activities;
  - Providing media literacy grants to media where there are doubts about the quality of the journalism.

### *Recommendations/Opportunities*

- Encourage media, including public broadcast media, to promote media literacy and to make it easier to identify media literacy related content for further use in formal and informal education (labelling, tagging, etc.);
- The mutual connection between media literacy and quality journalism should be aimed at strengthening both. Promotion of quality journalism is essential;
- To consider the creation of media literacy activities within existing media programming on life-style topics (there is an indication of fatigue from the news, but indications of an audience keen on entertainment);
- Developing interdisciplinary partnerships (Media, Academia, Tech Industries, International Cooperation);
- Fellowships and scholarships for journalists, small grants to motivate journalists not only for content creation, but for capacity building;
- Exchange programmes for journalists/media professional organisations and media literacy actors from the Eastern Partnership countries;
- Well-being check-ups, prevention of online harassment and better legislation could be considered as part of the solution.

### *Concluding remarks - general recommendations*

- **A holistic approach is needed.** Media literacy goes far beyond media, education and culture. It should become an essential part of everyday life, taking appropriate forms to attract, to connect and to activate responsible decision making. The recent trending issues are digitalisation (before 2013), focus on disinformation (and mixing it up with “fake news”) after 2016, as well as (dis)trust due to the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic after 2020. Today the focus is on how the issues related to data transparency, new gadgets and wearable technology, are changing the media landscape and media consumption.
- Developing internal and external factors, related to media literacy, shows that some changes are here to stay. **Adaptability** to new agendas, tools, techniques is a must for the area. The challenges and known and emerging threats connected to media literacy emphasise the necessity for a holistic approach within a society.
- Strategic strengthening of collaboration should be considered by the stakeholders. There is discord regarding who should do what, as functions in legislation and other regulating documents are very general. **Clearly defined responsibilities** for formal networking with clear timelines, as well as ad-hoc informal networking should be considered.
- **Financial sustainability and media literacy focused institutions.** The media literacy initiatives are un-

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derfunded by the state. It is mainly international donors who are setting the agenda. For instance, newly identified needs such as projects for marginalised parts of society or those tired from the news do not get the appropriate response from the community of media literacy actors. Those actors, who occasionally deliver projects on media literacy, are mostly busy with other projects.

- **Future-oriented media literacy**. Behaviour prediction and redirection of the audience, connected to data collection and events, are topical issues for political and business purposes. The issue is connected to the emerging military technologies of influence (Kania, 2020; Tullis, 2019), means that activities related to increasing resilience and adaptability should continue. There is a need on a national level to encourage capacity building and informing media literacy stakeholders on prospective topics to be included.
- While mentioning the external factors, some experts said media education should be considered essential without the need to connect to external actors, and to be part of any informed **decision making centric** and **human centric** process, taking it out of the political scope.
- Solutions cannot be just Top-Down or Bottom-Up, as the skills and knowledge needed should be interconnected with issues relevant for the society. Motivation and engagement of the fragmented audiences, by **promoting media literacy and quality journalism** is essential for making a strong, responsible and sustainable country. There will be a growing need for very precise and different types of media literacy initiatives (in scope, format, and nature) in society.
- **Evidence based media literacy** should be appropriately funded. The networking needed for increasing research should be considered a priority for cross-sectoral cooperation.

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the Black Sea Trust, a Project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States; the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the BCME and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supporting institutions or their partners.

**B | S | T** The Black Sea Trust  
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A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND



Foreign, Commonwealth  
& Development Office



Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Latvia



Co-funded by  
the European Union