

UP2YOUTH insights: from media literacy to responsible citizenship



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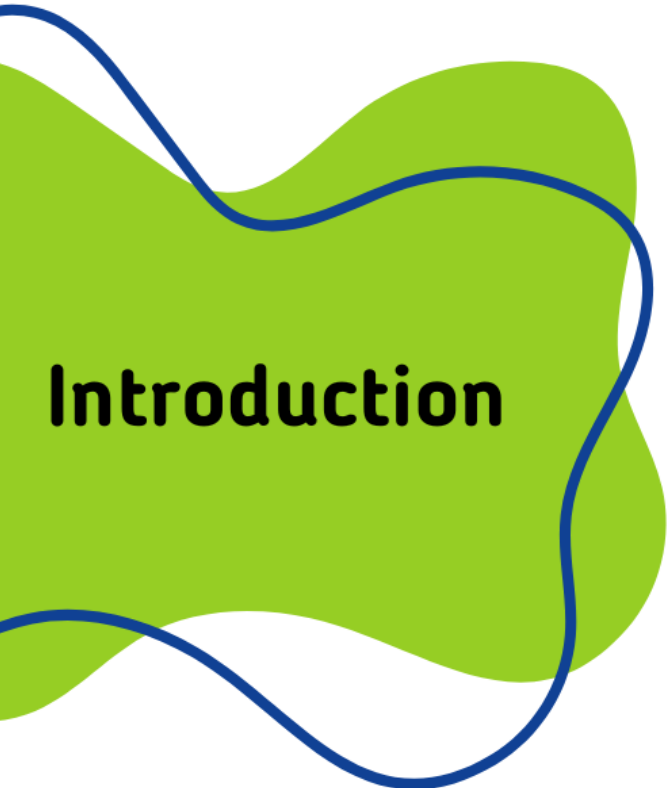


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Introduction

The bulletin “**UP2YOUTH Insights: from media literacy to responsible citizenship**” has been developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ (Youth Action) project **UP2YOUTH – democratic future in youth responsible hands**. Its purpose is to present knowledge, experiences, and good practices related to youth civic education and media literacy across Europe. The publication is the result of cooperation among project partners from Poland, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, who are jointly exploring innovative and effective approaches to fostering active, informed, and responsible citizenship among young people.

The UP2YOUTH project focuses on strengthening civic education practices for young people by integrating media literacy and addressing the **challenges of the contemporary digital age**. The project partners believe that effective civic education can no longer be limited to providing knowledge about democracy, citizens’ rights, or the functioning of public institutions. Young people increasingly participate in social and public life through digital media, social networking platforms, and online communication tools. As a result, civic competences and media literacy have become inseparably linked.

Modern democratic societies require citizens who are not only willing to engage in public life but are also able to critically analyse information, assess the credibility of sources, recognize manipulation, and use media and digital

technologies responsibly. Media literacy supports the development of these skills by helping young people make informed decisions, participate in public debate, and contribute to a culture of dialogue based on facts, mutual respect, and responsibility. For this reason, civic education and media literacy should be viewed as complementary areas of learning that prepare young people for active participation in a digital society.

The importance of media literacy

becomes particularly evident in the face of the challenges associated with the digital era. Young people are exposed every day to an overwhelming amount of information from diverse sources, many of which are difficult to assess in terms of reliability and credibility. Online environments are increasingly affected by phenomena such as fake news, disinformation, hate speech, online trolling, information manipulation, and growing social polarization. Social media algorithms may reinforce so-called information bubbles, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and making constructive dialogue more difficult. At the same time, many European countries are witnessing low levels of civic and democratic participation among young people.

In response to these challenges, the UP2YOUTH project promotes an innovative approach to civic education that combines the development of democratic competences with critical thinking, responsible media use, and active participation in social and community life.

In this bulletin, readers will find an overview of the key challenges facing youth civic and media education in Europe, examples of good practices implemented by project partners, ready-to-use educational session plans, and recommendations for individuals and institutions working with young people. The publication presents both the experiences of partner organizations and inspiring solutions that can be adapted to different educational contexts.

The bulletin has been developed primarily for **youth workers, teachers, trainers, and facilitators involved in both formal and non-formal education**. It may also serve as a valuable resource for youth leaders, non-governmental organizations, libraries, cultural centres, youth centres, schools, universities, and public institutions responsible for youth and education policies. We hope that the experiences, tools, and recommendations presented in this publication will inspire the development of innovative educational initiatives that foster informed, critical, and active citizenship among young Europeans.



Challenges in Youth Citizen and Media Education in Europe

**By Dr. Rumena Filipova, Founder,
Institute for Global Analytics**

The wave of protests spearheaded by Generation Z (commonly referred to as Gen Z) that has swept across the world in 2025 – from Serbia, to Peru, Madagascar and Nepal, has starkly demonstrated outstanding youth attitudes and grievances that have been brewing for years. Gen Z's fundamental opposition to entrenched power structures in social and political life, considered by youth as unjust and thwarting their life prospects, poses systemic challenges, including to the educational sector. Indeed, the extent to which contemporary educational philosophies and institutions can address young people's needs, appeal to their interests and equip them with the necessary skills to succeed in a fast-changing world becomes a key conundrum that has to be urgently tackled.

To illuminate the problem areas and potential of youth citizen and media education in Europe, the current report advances the argument that the main dispositional tendencies of youth and the factors that shape them have to be comprehensively understood in order to devise relevant (educational) solutions. This argument is detailed in four main parts. The first one starts with an examination of the key attributes of young people in distinction to previous generations. An analysis is subsequently presented of the main attitudinal

patterns of youth vis-à-vis politics, economics and society, followed by a discussion of the explanations for youth's world views with a focus on the deficiencies and promises of educational systems. The report ends with the identification of recommendations and lessons learnt about improving the state of young people's understandings of citizenship and media literacy skills.

Who are youth?

The current analysis illuminates the views and dispositions of Gen Z, encompassing individuals typically categorized as being born between 1997 and 2012. Although the preceding generation of Millennials (born along the timeline of 1981 and 1996) also warrant consideration as belonging to the younger cohorts in society (with whom Gen Z shares some overall similarities), the report nevertheless prioritizes an examination of the stances of Gen Z. The latter age group is now making an entry in public and work life and is characterized by distinctive attributes that can leave a dramatic imprint on social, political, economic and academic life.

Emerging studies¹ of youth values based on interviews, focus groups and representative surveys have begun to single out a number of traits foundational to Gen Z's mindset, including:

- **Skepticism of traditional institutions** and a preference for **collaborative and inclusive leadership**:
 - ✓ Dissatisfaction with traditional political parties and hierarchies;
 - ✓ Support for far-right or far-left causes as two sides of the same coin reflecting anti-incumbent sentiments.
- Placing a **premium on work-life balance** and **job security**. Pragmatic attitudes to work also inform **changing patterns of loyalty** to the workplace:
 - ✓ Declining expectations of a fixed career path;
 - ✓ Rise of contract work, which presupposes multiple organizational affiliations;

- ✓ Flexibility and readiness for entrepreneurial activities.
- At the same time, a **motivation to make an impact** and create ethical (work) environments is observable too.
- Intensive use of **social media for personal branding, consumption and learning:**
 - ✓ **Negative side effects** – mental health disturbances; self-harming behavior; negative body image; withdrawal; attention deficits; substance use.²
 - ✓ **Positive side effects** – development of digital skills; connectedness and peer support; expression of creativity.

The general character of Gen Z representatives that takes shape on the basis of the above features however needs to be supplemented by three main caveats. First, **some contradictions in the attitudes of representatives of Gen Z can be discerned**. This generation is defined by the digital world, yet it craves personal

connection; the expectation of job flexibility (such as working from home) coexists with a yearning for an office and a physical space for work interactions.³ Indeed, the surge in nostalgic attitudes about the 1990s suggests that the desire for safety and personal contact – as modes of being typical in an era before online communication was firmly established, is a reaction to their predominantly digital environment.⁴

Second, an additional caveat should be noted that despite the distinctive orientations that Gen Z representatives have developed in contrast to their elders, a **continuity of outlooks among generations also exists**. It is shaped by the socialization effects of family, society and the educational system, which can in turn erode progress in overcoming outdated and harmful attitudinal stances (such as lingering anti-democratic and pro-Russian positions in Central and East European countries).

Last but not least, irrespective of the predominant US focus of the pioneering research conducted by Katz and Welch, the features they identify as typical of American youth can, on the whole, be generalizable to European youth as well.

That is, on the one hand, similar comprehensive values surveys of young people in Europe have indeed been less prominent and readily available. But, on the other, as detailed in subsequent sections, national and cross-European opinion polling, measuring youth views on *specific* political, social and economic issue areas (i.e., rather than on overall values) suggest congruent worldviews. Hence, **Gen Z as a cohort can be taken to be characterized by a set of overlapping motivations, even if some concrete attitudinal manifestations and variations will depend on contextual national factors.**

Old assumptions vs. the new realities of youth

Understanding youth attitudes takes on an especially critical importance nowadays because of the peculiar worldviews and trends that inform the lives of young people, which can turn them into outliers compared to previous generations. Established assumptions about successive new generations have long held that young people are almost necessarily more politically progressive; that they will attain a higher standard of

living than their parents and that they enjoy greater levels of well-being.

However, the actual state of affairs characterizing today's youth defy such precepts. First, **young people's growing support for far-right parties across Europe** has reflected a disenchantment with the (predominantly "liberal") political and economic status quo that leads them to choose anti-systemic political options.⁵

Second, **youth face a decline in their economic prospects in contrast to previous generations** as a result of a combination of factors. The latter encompass the lingering aftermath of the 2008 Financial Crisis for work opportunities; the increasing burden of welfare contributions due to the need to support an expanding aging population⁶; as well as the role of AI in eliminating entry-level jobs. For example, a trend reversal in the US has taken place, whereby unemployment for recent graduates has climbed above that of the whole population (thus flipping the generally better prospects that youth have had in the labor market vis-à-vis other age groups).⁷

Third, recent studies have uncovered **unexpected patterns of wealth**

distribution among and within the younger generations. Data available for Millennials in the US (who have fully entered the workforce) shows that the average representative of that generation holds 30% less wealth at age 35 than the baby boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964). However, the top 10% of Millennials own 20% more wealth at age 35 than baby boomers, which points to soaring intra-general wealth inequality among the younger age cohorts.⁸

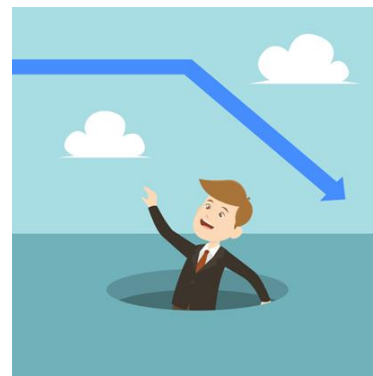
Last but not least, **negative changes in youth's mental health are leading to a radical rethinking of the well-established and persistent patterns in social science**, which have so far defined well-being throughout an individual's life span as a U-shape – whereby peaks in well-being take place in youth and after middle age. Recent research relevant to the US, UK and 44 other countries (including European ones) has instead demonstrated that a deterioration in mental health starts already in one's 20s and continues to plummet over time, thus representing a monotonously decreasing arrow shape (as rendered below).⁹

Previously:



Well-being peaked in youth and older age

New pattern:



Monotonous decrease since youth

Source of images: Shutterstock

What do youth think?

The above-presented negative trends that have begun to shape young people's lives are also leaving an imprint on the worldviews that have been forming among Gen Z about politics, economics and society. To illustrate those stances, the analysis first zooms in on the case of Bulgaria and then expands the lens to the wider European context, identifying broad similarities among Gen Z across the continent despite national specificities.

Youth in Bulgaria: Lured by authoritarian states

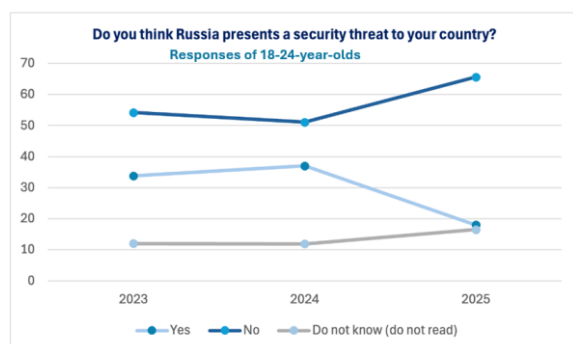
The analyses of the Institute for Global Analytics focused on public opinion in Bulgaria have uncovered a number of attitudinal patterns, which indicate youth's authoritarian and often aggrieved proclivities.¹⁰ In three consecutive years (2023, 2024 and 2025), an overwhelming majority of 71% of 18-34-year-olds thought that the EU “dictates to Bulgaria without the latter having the power to influence decisions in Brussels”. Over half of respondents in the 18-24 age group expressed a preference for a strong leader that does not have to comply with parliament and elections (the highest preference among all other age groups) and a similar proportion held that LGBTI is an immoral and decadent ideology.

Furthermore, young people are, as expected, avid social media users, but TV still remains a significant source of information. While Bulgarian youth acknowledge the importance of media literacy, when probed deeper, they reveal that they have not taken specific actions to improve their media literacy skills and tend to consider the latter as important for journalists, rather than

themselves. Focus-group discussions additionally expose a lack of critical concern about Russia's war against Ukraine.¹¹

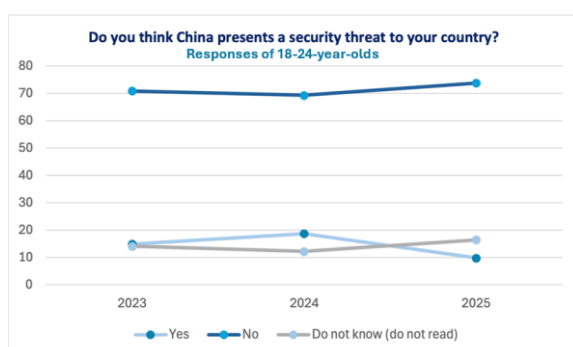
These attitudes are additionally projected onto geopolitics, informing **uncritical and permissive views of authoritarian states such as Russia and China**. Consistent majorities of the Bulgarian respondents aged 18-24 years did not deem Russia as a threat to Sofia in the last three years (see figure 1). Such Russia-friendly opinions have persisted despite the Kremlin's war against Ukraine and aggressive meddling activities throughout Europe, including disinformation, societal and political subversion and attacks against critical infrastructure. Bulgarian youth views of China have been even more positive as over 70% of the polled in 2025 do not think of Beijing as a danger to Bulgaria (see figure 2). Again, such favorable and non-alarmist orientations have taken place against an international background in which China has extended its influence operations on the European continent through “corrosive capital practices”, growing propaganda and political-elite capture.¹²

Figure 1. Perceptions of threat from Russia among Bulgarian youth.



Source: IGA analysis of Globsec polling results in Central and Eastern Europe in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Figure 2. Perceptions of threat from China among Bulgarian youth.



Source: IGA analysis of Globsec polling results in Central and Eastern Europe in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

European youth: The declining relevance of democracy

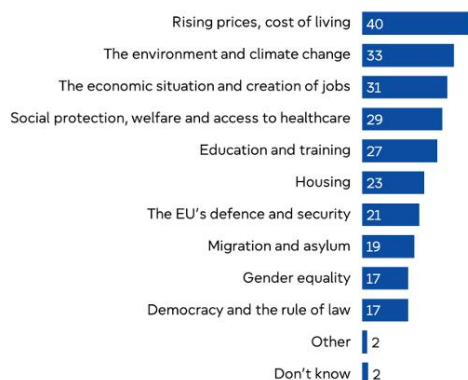
Bulgarian youth's attitudinal dispositions broadly resonate and overlap with the views held by their European counterparts. Young people

on the continent have displayed a declining satisfaction with democracy, reflected in diminishing rates of participation in elections. As a consequence, Gen Z have been preoccupied with social, rather than political, issues and when political re-engagement takes place, it is usually in the direction of greater support for far-right, anti-systemic parties. As regards media literacy, Gen Z may be digitally savvy but often lack the skills to judge the reliability of information.¹³

In line with those trends, Eurobarometer results reveal that only 39% of European youth (age 16-30) eligible to vote have actually done so.¹⁴ When asked to identify priorities for the EU, **Europe's young people place a premium on economic issues, education and social security** as, on the whole, more pressing than questions of migration, gender and democracy (see figure 3). As in Bulgaria, **social media predominates as the main source for receiving news**, identified by 42% of the respondents, while TV still retains a significant position as the choice of 39% of the polled youth as a source of news information.¹⁵

Figure 3. Youth priorities for EU policy.

Q2 In your opinion, which three of the following topics should be a priority for the EU in the next 5 years? [Multiple answers]



Source: Eurobarometer Youth Survey, 2024

Explaining youth views

The peculiar orientations of Gen Z can be accounted for by a combination of factors. While perceptions of political exclusion, diminishing economic prospects and opportunities for social mobility as well as global upheavals (such as the 2008 Financial Crisis and the Covid pandemic) are leaving an indelible mark, the current analysis zooms in on the ramifications of educational systems. The latter are crucial to personality development in the formative early years of life and persist over the course of subsequent social, political and economic fluctuations.

The rest of this section will draw upon examples from the case of Bulgaria in order to demonstrate how deficiencies

in the content and structure of curricula as well as receptivity to flawed foreign authoritarian-state models can perpetuate and deepen problematic societal outlooks among young generations. At the same time, the potential of some educational practices (e.g., from Slovakia) to re-engage youth and equip them with skills to respond to the contemporary challenge of disinformation will also be discussed.

Educational ideologization prevents attitude change

The lack of critical re-assessment of educational content in the humanities, particularly following periods of authoritarian governance, as during communism, can represent a prime factor for the continued molding of young people's views within outdated ideological frames.

In Bulgaria, **the persistent dissemination of historically unfounded pro-Russian sentiments and positions within textbooks** entrenches an uncritically pro-Kremlin mindset among youth (as displayed in public opinion trends discussed above). IGA's report *History Undone. Russia's Historical Disinformation, Bulgaria's Memory Politics and Lessons for Dealing*

with the Past from Central and Eastern Europe undertook a thorough review of all versions of history textbooks used in the 4th, 7th, 10th and 12th grade (when Bulgarian history is taught) to analyze the predominant interpretation of Russia's role in Bulgarian social, political and economic life.

A number of key trends were identified common to all textbooks. First, the content of textbooks maintains relative silence on Russia, muffling the adverse consequences of Russian interference in Bulgarian history and refraining from critical discussions. Second, positive depictions of Russia abound, typically through stylistic means such as evaluative epithets, whereby that country is called a “liberator and savior”. Third, the insufficient analytical treatment of the topic of Russia's interference in Bulgarian history is compensated for with an outsourcing of interpretive responsibility to the students themselves. That is, they are asked as part of lesson exercises to state their opinion but without having the requisite historical material in textbooks on which to draw. In addition to school education, an examination of tertiary educational curricula further

revealed an absence of a well-developed academic field in Bulgarian-Russian historical relations. Its existence would have otherwise served to promote objective knowledge about bilateral relations.

Figure 4. Patterns in the presentation of Russia in history textbooks in Bulgaria.

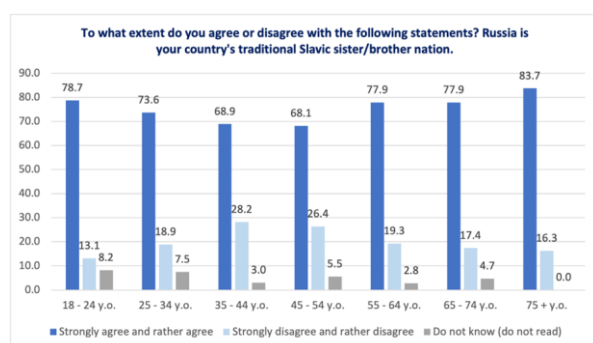
4th grade • Silence/insufficient discussion of the adverse effects of the Russian role in Bulgarian history • Positive portrayal of the EU • Generally critical assessment of the communist period	7th grade • Silence/insufficient discussion of the adverse effects of the Russian role in Bulgarian history • Positive/uncritical representations of Russia • Deflect interpretive responsibility to students • Lack of unified assessment of communist period across textbooks
10th grade • Silence/insufficient discussion of the adverse effects of the Russian role in Bulgarian history • Privileging breadth over depth of material • Deflect interpretive responsibility to students • Generally critical assessment of the communist period	12th grade • Provide most advanced and detailed content • Silence/Insufficient discussion of the adverse effects of the Russian role in Bulgarian history • Critical assessment of the communist period and Soviet Union

Source: “History Undone”, 2023.

The inability of the educational system to promote reasoned debate about Russia therefore sustains long-established stereotypes. They hinge on broad – but not necessarily deep and historically substantiated, views of the cultural closeness between Bulgaria and Russia, representing the latter as a “Slavic brother” that ostensibly has Sofia's best interests in mind. Accordingly, public opinion remains aligned with these stereotypes. Significant majorities in all age groups consider Russia to be Bulgaria's traditional “sister/brother nation”, with

18-24-year-olds demonstrating the second highest agreement with this statement, only trailing 75+ year-olds.

Figure 5. Measuring Bulgarian cultural assumptions about Russia.



Source: IGA analysis of Globsec polling results in Central and Eastern Europe in 2025.

Foreign influence deepens authoritarian orientations

In addition to long-held stereotypes favoring Russian positions, the more recent influx of Chinese influences and practices in the Bulgarian academic sector have promoted China-friendly views and exchanges. The advancement of bilateral academic ties has however proceeded in a manner that is frequently oblivious to **security risks such as the potential for IP theft, (self)censoring of content and enmeshment in Beijing's geopolitical objectives.**

Bulgarian academic institutions' cooperation with their Chinese counterparts has thus become a generic phenomenon.¹⁶ The overwhelming majority of universities in Bulgaria have established ties of varying depth and extent to China's academia primarily in the form of academic and student exchanges, joint research and publications.

The range of Bulgarian-Chinese academic cooperation activities coupled with laxer security screening rules and absence of specific provisions in Bulgarian academia regarding cooperation with tertiary education institutions from authoritarian states has occasionally implicated Bulgaria's universities in **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)-related projects**. For instance, the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy co-founded together with the Beijing University for Civil Engineering and Architecture the Belt and Road Architectural University International Consortium. For its part, the Institute for Population and Human Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is part of the Alliance of International Science Organizations, connected to the BRI.

Apart from involvement in BRI projects, another security challenge is contained in the fact that Bulgarian universities have concluded memoranda with **Chinese universities that pose a very high, high or medium security risk** according to the [ASPI university defence tracker](#), which assesses Chinese academic institutions' connections to state authorities, involvement in dual-use goods procurement and espionage. Confucius Institutes have additionally spearheaded Bulgarian-Chinese cultural and education ties. **Financing and issues of registration, specifically related to the operation of the Confucius Institute** at Veliko Tarnovo University, however raise concerns. Claims¹⁷ by the university that the Confucius Institute represents a third, extraneous party contradict Veliko Tarnovo University's own statement in its annual reports that the Confucius Institute is financially and administratively incorporated into the university. The lack of transparency about the activities and funding provided by the Confucius Institute thus adds another layer to the complicated financial history of Veliko Tarnovo

University, which was on the verge of bankruptcy in 2016.

Emerging best practices: An education for contemporary realities

The problematic educational practices exemplified by the Bulgarian case point to critical questions related to the politicization and ideologization of learning material as well as risk-fraught foreign influence that can stifle academic freedom, all of which are also ubiquitously present throughout Europe.¹⁸ Nevertheless, some emerging best practices can equip students with skills for contemporary challenges, being additionally responsive to the young generations' learning habits.

This approach is embodied by the **Olympiad of Critical Thinking**, which was established in 2021 and represents a media literacy initiative led by the non-governmental organization Slovak Debate Association (SDA). The program is focused on developing the media literacy skills of high-school students through the bottom-up pre-bunking of disinformation. This is further informed by pedagogical models sensitive to student needs and fast-paced changes

of the disinformation threat as well as the aim to achieve high outreach rates throughout Slovakia. In particular, instead of abstract lectures, the Olympiad uses interactive ways of immersing students into the real-world information space. Students are asked to answer questions and assess information from existing social media posts/websites, whereby the exercise prompts adapt to evolving threats, e.g. deep-fake AI images and content.

Since its founding, the Olympiad has gathered 9000 registered participants, who compete in three rounds divided by age groups. The program's innovative and effective educational impact was recognized through the reception of the first prize in the 15th edition of the Civil Society Prize, organized by the European Economic and Social Committee.¹⁹

Educating for youth's success: Recommendations and teaching scenarios

Given the uphill challenges of international and domestic political, economic and societal flux – and youth's own fundamental concerns about their life prospects, educational systems

should be reformed to keep pace with the realities of the workplace within a global environment and contribute more robustly to young people's self-actualization.

To that end, the school- and tertiary education level need to promote a set of formal skills, impart substantive knowledge and implement structural reforms. Relevant proposals for those three areas are detailed below, as are related teaching scenarios and learning-by-doing training methodologies for educators to work out experiential solutions for pressing problems in the educational sector.

Up-to-date-skills for rapidly changing environments

- **Fostering critical-creative thinking and problem-solving abilities** is a key competence that can equip youth to cope with various, unpredictable challenges, irrespective of context and across different issue-area domains. Doubling down on a more creative orientation (e.g., focused on project development) can be highly beneficial throughout a young person's subsequent

career, which will likely be increasingly defined by the dominance of AI. It can be envisioned that AI will be employed to perform technical tasks, while its curation and application will be directed by humans, who possess the critical and creative know-how about the areas of knowledge that need to be developed through the assistance of technology.

- In addition to the cognitive capacity to effectively tackle subject-matter problems, the **acquisition of social-emotional skills** is vital to the facilitation of work interactions, team work and project implementation. Although teaching non-academic competences is traditionally shunned in the educational system, a greater recognition needs to be achieved of the importance of such skills as leadership, communicative aptitude, empathy and ethical behavior to the proper functioning of work environments.

Knowledge for effective democratic citizenship

- The **reinvigoration of civics education** in schools is critical for addressing the precipitous decline in young people's trust in democracy and corresponding turn to authoritarian models across Europe. This challenge is particularly outstanding in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, which has weaker traditions of teaching politics and social-science subjects due to the holdover of previous authoritarian regimes that suppressed civic-ness. Schools can be aided in the endeavor to popularize and more consistently introduce civics classes by civil society organizations (CSOs), which tend to be well-versed in democracy-promotion activities (see text box 1).
- The **ability to discern disinformation** is integral to forging informed democratic citizenship. As a persistent and pernicious challenge to the transparency of public discourse in democracies, disinformation

should be countered through students' acquisition of media literacy skills as a key priority in the curriculum. In cases in which political and bureaucratic obstacles prevent the sustained inclusion of media literacy classes in formal curricula, CSOs have once again an important role to play in devising media literacy programs ensuring maximum student inclusion, partnerships with schools, awareness-raising and testing impact (see text box 2).

Structural guardrails against foreign malign influence

- As the Bulgarian case has demonstrated, biased historical material in textbooks can perpetuate pro-Russian stereotypes that facilitate the entry of the Kremlin's nefarious media, political and economic activities. Therefore, **historical teaching**, which is foundational to any nation's identity and self-understanding, **needs to be thoroughly reviewed to identify persistent misinterpretations**

that can benefit European countries' opponents and their attempts to sow internal divisions.

- ✓ For example, an advisory board can be created at the relevant national Ministry of Education, consisting of both local and international historians, in order to study how consequential international actors, such as Russia and China, are presented. It would be advisable to publish an open access research database, which collects and showcases all resources on the basis of which historical analyses and debates within the board are conducted. On how strategies can be developed to cope with opponents to changes in history textbook content and curricula, see text box 3.
- The breadth and depth of China's IP theft and espionage activities within academia across Europe

(and the world, more generally) necessitate the **institutionalization of robust due diligence procedures at the university level.** They can facilitate vetting and screening offers of research collaboration from Chinese universities, the transparency of talent recruitment programs proposed to local researchers as well as the backgrounds of Chinese students enrolling in local universities (i.e., whether these students are connected to China's official and intelligence agencies). Additionally, governments can develop national academic research security guidelines (in European countries still lacking such guidelines) to guide the educational sector in its dealings with Chinese academic institutions.

Text Box 1:

Making youth tick about politics through digital outreach

Type of training: Interactive ideas generation.

Topic of scenario: How to create a resonant and impactful informational campaign geared to youth:

- Politics and civics are not taught as a separate subject in the school system in country X. Hence, a CSO would like to launch a social media informational campaign aiming to disseminate knowledge in an appealing way about the key facets of democracy and citizenship.
- The prime task of the CSO team is to engage a wide youth audience. But, so far, the CSO's outputs have mainly been read by experts, which necessitates the creation of a youth outreach strategy through effective digital tools and in cooperation with schools.

Role play allocation and training procedure: Division of participants in three groups:

- Task – develop a plan for an effective social media campaign, including platforms on which the information will be disseminated and the type of posts to be created.
- Each group works on the same task; at the end, the adopted approaches will be compared and contrasted. The leader of the training will analyze similarities and differences in the groups' proposed measures with a view to identifying avenues for the cross-fertilization of ideas and constructing the most successful, integrated task actions, taking into account a variety of perspectives.

Outcome: Developing an effective and widely resonant strategy for youth outreach through digital tools.



Text Box 2:

Making media literacy appealing

Type of training: Interactive ideas generation.

Topic of scenario: How to devise a media literacy contest from the ground up:

- Country X has a few media literacy initiatives but they do not have a wide reach among youth and there is limited public knowledge about them. As a result, a CSO decides to organize a nation-wide media literacy contest.
- To do so, however, the CSO's team needs to navigate various obstacles, including lack of coordination among civic organizations; limited communication and common platforms among schools; and the challenge of raising students' interest in participating in the initiative.

Role play allocation and training procedure: Division of participants in three groups:

- Task – develop a plan for creating and implementing an effective nation-wide media literacy contest.
- Each group works on the same task; at the end, the adopted approaches will be compared and contrasted. The leader of the training will analyze similarities and differences in the groups' proposed measures with a view to identifying avenues for the cross-fertilization of ideas and constructing the most successful, integrated task actions, taking into account a variety of perspectives.

Outcome: Developing a step-by-step strategy for a successful media literacy contest.



Text Box 3:

Circumventing opposition to history textbook reform

Type of training: Role play/interactive gaming exercise.

Topic of scenario: How to reform teaching content in textbooks while navigating societal polarization and political stand-offs:

- The civic and academic sector in country X has found out – on the basis of rigorous research, that the content of history textbooks used throughout the school system contains ideological and unfounded pro-Russian interpretations of X's history as well as omissions of the actual historical record. Indeed, the textbook material has not been subject to review since 1989 and still contains communist-era interpretations. Hence, civil societal organizations and academics mount an initiative for the start of a textbook review process.
- As a result, the Ministry of Education in country X begins an expert- and society-wide debate about how to revise history textbooks.
- However, political parties and affiliated pundits spearhead a counter-campaign, claiming that an erasure of history is being perpetrated.

Role play allocation and training procedure: Division of participants in three groups, each respectively representing 1) the civic-academic sector; 2) government authorities (Ministry of Education); 3) political opposition to the initiative.

- Task – develop points of argumentation for each of the respective groups.
- After the brain-storming session, each group will present their main arguments.

Outcome: Anticipatory scenario development; tackling challenges from actors opposed to reform in the educational sector by reflecting from the position of each of the types of actors involved in the scenario.



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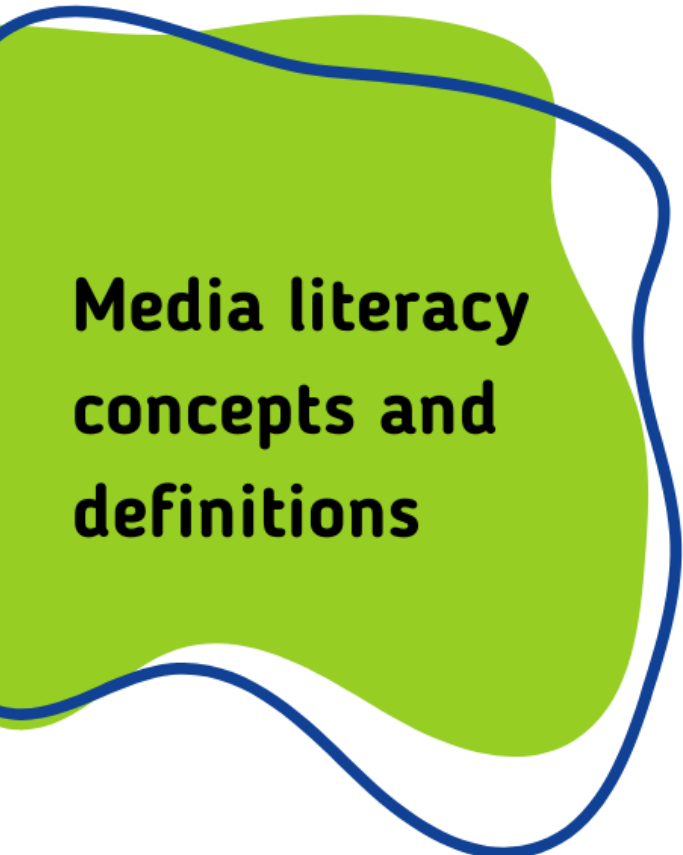
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Media literacy concepts and definitions

To effectively support young people in developing civic and media competences, it is important to begin with a shared understanding of the key concepts related to today's media and information environment. In the digital age, where information is created, shared, and disseminated faster than ever before, the ability to use media critically and responsibly has become an essential component of active citizenship.

The following collection of concepts and definitions covers the most important topics in media literacy, including disinformation, fact-checking, source credibility, media bias, information bubbles, algorithmic influence, and digital citizenship. Understanding these concepts helps individuals analyse media messages more effectively, recognize manipulation, evaluate the quality of information, and make informed decisions as participants in social and public life.

We encourage readers to explore the glossary of key terms presented below. It can serve as a useful reference point for both educators and young people seeking to strengthen their media and civic literacy skills. These definitions provide a common foundation for further reflection on the role of media in contemporary democracy and on the challenges of responsible participation in a digital society.

Media Literacy

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, and share information using different forms of media. It enables individuals to understand how media messages are produced, what purposes they serve, and how they may influence opinions, attitudes, and behaviours. In democratic societies, media literacy is an essential civic competence. It helps young people become informed citizens who can critically assess information, participate in public debates, and make responsible decisions in both online and offline environments.

Misinformation

Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is shared **without the intention** to deceive. It often results from mistakes, misunderstandings, or a lack of verification.

In the digital age, misinformation can spread rapidly through social media, messaging platforms, and online communities. Teaching young people how to verify information before sharing it is an important aspect of media literacy education.

Disinformation

Disinformation refers to false information that is intentionally created and disseminated to mislead, manipulate, or influence public opinion.

Disinformation campaigns may target political processes, social issues, or public trust in institutions. Understanding how disinformation works helps young people recognize manipulation techniques and become more resilient to harmful narratives.

Bias

Bias is the tendency to present information from a particular perspective, often favouring certain viewpoints, interests, or groups while overlooking others.

Bias can be found in news reporting, social media content, advertising, and even educational materials. Developing awareness of bias encourages learners to seek multiple perspectives and evaluate information more critically.

Source Credibility

Source credibility refers to the trustworthiness and reliability of a source of information. It is usually assessed by considering factors such as expertise, transparency, evidence, and objectivity.

Evaluating source credibility is one of the most important skills in media literacy. Young people should learn to distinguish between trustworthy sources and content that lacks evidence or accountability.

Fact-Checking

Fact-checking is the process of verifying whether information is accurate, reliable, and supported by evidence.

Fact-checking involves comparing claims with trusted sources, consulting experts, and examining available data. It is an essential tool for combating misinformation and promoting informed civic participation.

Propaganda

Propaganda is communication designed primarily to persuade or influence audiences, often by appealing to emotions, stereotypes, or fears rather than factual evidence.

While propaganda has traditionally been associated with political communication, it can also be found in commercial advertising, social movements, and online campaigns. Media literacy helps learners identify persuasive techniques and assess messages critically.

Echo Chamber

An **echo chamber** is an information environment in which people are primarily exposed to opinions and information that reinforce their existing beliefs.

Social media algorithms and online communities can contribute to the creation of echo chambers. As a result, individuals may become less exposed to alternative viewpoints and more vulnerable to polarization.

Filter Bubble

A **filter bubble** is a personalized information environment created by algorithms that select content based on a user's previous behaviour, interests, and preferences.

Although personalization can improve user experience, it may also limit exposure to diverse sources of information. Understanding filter bubbles helps learners become more conscious consumers of digital content.

Clickbait

Clickbait refers to sensationalized or misleading headlines designed to attract attention and generate clicks.

Clickbait often exaggerates information, creates false expectations, or relies on emotional reactions. Recognizing clickbait helps young people develop more critical reading habits and avoid manipulation.

Media Bias

Media bias occurs when media outlets systematically favour particular viewpoints, political positions, or interests in their reporting.

Media bias does not necessarily mean that information is false. Rather, it may influence which stories are covered, how issues are framed, and whose voices are represented. Comparing different sources can help identify potential biases.

Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship refers to the responsible, ethical, and safe use of digital technologies and online platforms.

It includes respectful communication, protection of personal data, responsible participation in online communities, and awareness of the rights and responsibilities associated with digital environments. Digital citizenship connects media literacy with active and responsible civic engagement.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to seek, interpret, and remember information that confirms one's existing beliefs while ignoring contradictory evidence.

This cognitive tendency affects everyone and can make individuals more susceptible to misinformation and polarization. Media literacy education encourages learners to question their assumptions and consider alternative perspectives.

Framing

Framing refers to the way information is presented in order to shape how audiences understand and interpret an issue.

The choice of words, images, examples, or context can significantly influence public perception. Understanding framing helps learners recognize how media can shape narratives without necessarily changing facts.

Agenda- Setting

Agenda-setting describes the ability of media organizations to influence which issues people consider important by giving some topics more attention than others.

Media may not tell audiences what to think, but they often influence what people think about. This concept is important for understanding the relationship between media, public opinion, and democracy.

Algorithmic Bias

Algorithmic bias occurs when algorithms produce results that unfairly favour certain groups, perspectives, or types of content.

Because algorithms increasingly shape the information people encounter online, understanding their influence is becoming a key component of media literacy and digital citizenship.

Privacy Literacy

Privacy literacy is the ability to understand how personal data is collected, used, shared, and protected in digital environments.

As digital technologies become increasingly integrated into everyday life, privacy literacy helps young people make informed choices about their online activities and protect their personal information.

Information Overload

Information overload refers to the difficulty of processing and evaluating large amounts of information.

The abundance of digital content can make it challenging to identify reliable sources and make informed decisions. Developing skills in information management and critical evaluation is therefore essential.



Strategies and good practices in youth civic and media education

How can we develop young people's civic and media competences?

Contemporary youth education faces new challenges. Young people are growing up in a world where the boundaries between social, civic, and digital life are becoming increasingly blurred. Public debates take place on social media, community initiatives are organised online, and civic decisions are often shaped by information coming from multiple – and not always reliable – sources.

In this context, civic education and media literacy should not be viewed as separate fields of learning. Active citizens need not only the ability to participate in democratic processes, collaborate with others, and engage in community life, but also the skills to critically analyse information, identify manipulation, evaluate sources, and communicate responsibly in digital environments.

The good practices represent proven educational approaches that help develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for participation in contemporary democratic societies. Each practice addresses specific challenges related to civic engagement, information literacy, or online communication. Together, they form a framework for preparing young people to become informed, responsible, and active citizens.

From learning about democracy to learning democracy through action

“From learning about democracy to learning democracy through action” is a modern approach to civic education based on the assumption that young people develop civic competences most effectively through active participation in social and democratic processes. Unlike traditional civic education, which primarily focuses on teaching about public institutions, political systems, and citizens’ rights, this approach places young people in the role of active participants in community life.

The fundamental principle behind this practice is that citizenship cannot be learned solely through lectures or textbooks. Civic competences are developed through experience, collaboration, dialogue, decision-making, and engagement in addressing real social challenges. Young people learn democracy by practising democracy.

This approach creates learning environments in which participants identify issues affecting their communities, analyse their causes, design solutions, collaborate with stakeholders, and take action to bring about positive change. The educational process thus becomes a space for developing civic agency, responsibility, and active engagement.

Key characteristics of the practice

- **Active participation of young people-** young people are not passive recipients of information but active contributors to the learning process. They participate in planning activities, making decisions, analysing challenges, and developing solutions.
- **Learning through experience-** direct experience is at the heart of the approach. Participants learn through action, reflection, experimentation, and evaluation of the outcomes of their activities.
- **Connection with real-life issues-** educational activities are based on authentic challenges and needs within local communities. This enables young people to see the practical relevance of civic engagement and understand how democratic processes affect their everyday lives.
- **Development of civic agency-** the practice strengthens young people's belief that they can influence their environment and contribute to social change. Building a sense of agency is one of the most important factors encouraging long-term civic participation.
- **Collaboration and Dialogue-** participants develop skills in teamwork, communication, negotiation, argumentation, and consensus-building. Social competences are developed alongside civic competences.

- **Integration of civic and media education-** contemporary civic engagement increasingly takes place in digital environments. Therefore, this approach combines civic education with media literacy by helping young people critically evaluate information, verify sources, recognize disinformation, and engage responsibly in online communication.
- **Innovative elements of the practice-** modern civic education increasingly relies on participatory and interactive methods that foster engagement and allow young people to influence the learning process. These methods include:
 - ✓ community-based projects;
 - ✓ project-based learning;
 - ✓ design thinking;
 - ✓ civic debates and deliberative discussions;
 - ✓ simulations of democratic processes;
 - ✓ youth consultations and participatory decision-making;
 - ✓ scenario-based and decision-making games;
 - ✓ participatory budgeting activities;
 - ✓ service-learning projects linking education with community action.

Digital technologies play an increasingly important role in supporting these activities. Young people use social media to promote civic initiatives, create educational and advocacy content,

conduct online consultations, collect community feedback through surveys, and collaborate using digital platforms. As a result, civic education reflects the realities of participation in contemporary digital societies.

Tips for educators:

- providing young people with genuine opportunities to influence decisions and activities;
- creating a safe and inclusive environment for participation and self-expression;
- focusing on authentic social and community challenges;
- using participatory and learner-centred methodologies;
- building partnerships with local authorities, civil society organisations, and community stakeholders;
- encouraging reflection on experiences and learning outcomes;
- integrating civic engagement with media literacy and digital competences.

How can young people recognise manipulation before encountering it? – prebunking and inoculation education

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Rather than only reacting to misinformation, educators and NGOs now emphasize *prebunking* – teaching people about common manipulation techniques *before* they encounter them. This practice, backed by research, involves exposing individuals to weakened examples of misinformation tactics to build “cognitive antibodies”. For instance, games like *Harmony Square* or *Bad News* are used to inoculate users by having them step into the shoes of misinformation spreaders, thus revealing the tactics from the inside. International bodies such as NATO’s StratCom and universities (Cambridge, etc.) have promoted such gamified inoculation as a cutting-edge literacy tool, and the Debunking Handbook 2020 explicitly recommends prebunking where possible to prevent falsehoods from sticking. This proactive approach is becoming a best practice, often delivered through workshops or online campaigns (e.g. Google’s Jigsaw launched prebunking video campaigns to preempt election misinformation).

Examples of educational tools and initiatives:

- Harmony Square – political misinformation simulation game
<https://www.harmonysquare.game/>
- Bad News – fake news inoculation game
<https://www.getbadnews.com/en>

- Go Viral! – misinformation awareness game developed by Cambridge University and Google Jigsaw
- <https://inoculation.science/the-debunking-handbook/>
- Debunking Handbook 2020 – evidence-based guide to countering misinformation
<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/go-viral>

Tips for Educators

- Use interactive games such as **Harmony Square**, **Bad News**, or **Go Viral!** to introduce participants to common manipulation techniques in a safe learning environment.
- Organise workshops in which learners analyse real examples of misinformation and identify tactics such as emotional manipulation, conspiracy narratives, scapegoating, or false dilemmas.
- Encourage participants to reflect on why certain types of content attract attention and spread quickly on social media.
- Compare authentic news stories with misleading or manipulated content and ask learners to identify the warning signs.
- Encourage learners to develop their own “misinformation checklist” that can help them recognise manipulation techniques before accepting or sharing information.

How can we verify information?– lateral reading and source evaluation (SIFT Method)

An endorsed practice in digital literacy curricula (including by UNESCO and the Stanford History Education Group) is teaching students to evaluate information by verifying sources via **lateral reading** – opening new tabs to see what other sources say about a site or claim. The **SIFT method** which encourages learners to:

- Stop before sharing information;
- Investigate the source;
- Find better coverage;
- Trace claims back to their original context.

SIFT method has been widely adopted by educators as a quick heuristic for fact-checking in everyday life. It encourages readers to pause (“Stop”) when encountering a suspicious claim, check the *source’s* credibility (who is behind the information), look for *better coverage* (see if reputable outlets report the same claim), and *trace* quotes or media back to original context.

This method helps young people navigate away from the original potentially false content and see the broader context. Many NGOs and library associations have integrated lateral reading exercises into their training, as research showed even college students benefit from this approach. It’s considered a good practice because it mirrors how professional fact-checkers work and is effective in teaching critical evaluation of online sources.

Tips for Educators

- Introduce the **SIFT method** using real examples of viral social media posts, news articles, or online claims.
- Encourage learners to **open multiple tabs** and compare information from different sources instead of relying on a single website or post.
- Organise **source investigation exercises**, where participants identify who created a piece of content, what their purpose may be, and whether the source is trustworthy.
- Ask students to compare how different media outlets report the same event and discuss similarities, differences, and possible biases.

How can we distinguish reliable information from information noise?– Fact-checking tools and collaborations:

Encouraging the use of established fact-checking websites and browser extensions is a common practice. For example, prominent fact-checking organizations (often verified signatories of the International Fact-Checking Network code) like Snopes, PolitiFact or FactCheck.org are recommended as first stops for verifying viral claims.

UNESCO has worked on strengthening ties between independent fact-checkers and media outlets, highlighting the importance of integrating fact-checks into news consumption. A good practice is teaching youth how to quickly query a fact-check database or even use tools like Google’s Fact Check Explorer. Additionally, many NGOs host “fact-checking hunts” or challenges where participants practice finding sources for claims, making it an interactive habit. By normalizing the use of fact-checking tools, these initiatives help reduce the spread of falsehoods.

Some educational programs also encourage creating a classroom or community fact-checking blog where students collaboratively debunk rumors – a practice endorsed by media literacy experts to engage learners actively in the fact-checking process.

Examples of useful tools

- Snopes:
<https://www.snopes.com>
- PolitiFact:
<https://www.politifact.com/>
- Fact Check:
<https://www.factcheck.org/>

- Google Fact Check Tools:
<https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer/search/list:recent;hl=pl>
- UNESCO Global Fact-Checking Sites
<https://www.unesco.org/en/world-media-trends/global-fact-checking-sites>

Tips for Educators

- To make fact-checking an engaging and practical learning experience, consider incorporating the following activities into your workshops and educational programmes:
- Use **Google Fact Check Explorer** to search for verified information and investigate claims circulating online.
- Compare fact-checking results from different platforms such as **Snopes, PolitiFact, and FactCheck.org** to understand how professional fact-checkers evaluate information.
- Organise “**fact-checking hunts**”, where participants work individually or in teams to find evidence that confirms or disproves specific claims.
- Encourage learners to create a **school or community fact-checking blog**, where they can collaboratively investigate rumours, misinformation, and viral stories.
- Analyse the methods and workflows used by professional fact-checking organisations to better understand how information is verified and how evidence-based conclusions are reached.

How can we practise good information hygiene?

International bodies like the EU and UNESCO stress teaching what quality information looks like as a counter to “fake news”. One best practice is using frameworks such as the **CRAAP test**:

- Currency
- Relevance
- Authority
- Accuracy
- Purpose

or specific media rating criteria, like NewsGuard’s transparency and reliability indicators, to evaluate news sites.

For instance, UNESCO’s media literacy programs encourage evaluating who owns a site, checking if news is labeled vs opinion and looking for the presence of credible sources and evidence in an article. Educators are advised to use real examples of both credible and dubious articles and have students apply quality criteria. This not only builds discernment but also directs young people to **support reliable media**.

The EU’s EDMO (European Digital Media Observatory) guidelines for media literacy initiatives suggest empowering users to understand and engage with the media ecosystem, including recognizing trustworthy journalism.

In practice, this might mean a teacher shows students how to distinguish a clickbait site from a fact-based news site by analyzing site design, “about us” pages, and citing practices. Teaching information hygiene—verifying info before sharing, not following shady sources, regularly curating one’s feed—

has become a staple recommendation in digital literacy toolkits globally.

Examples of useful tools

- News Guard:
<https://www.newsguardtech.com/>
- News Guard Rating Process and Criteria:
<https://www.newsguardtech.com/ratings/rating-process-criteria/>
- European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO):
<https://edmo.eu/>

Tips for Educators

- Introduce learners to practical evaluation frameworks such as the **CRAAP Test** and encourage them to apply the criteria of Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose when assessing online information.
- Use real examples of both reliable and questionable news articles and ask participants to compare them using quality assessment criteria.
- Teach young people how to identify who owns a website, who created the content, and whether the source is transparent about its authorship and funding.
- Encourage learners to distinguish between factual reporting, opinion pieces, sponsored content, and advertisements.
- Use tools such as **NewsGuard** to explore how professional organisations evaluate the transparency and reliability of news websites.
- Use resources developed by organisations such as **UNESCO**, **EDMO**, and **NewsGuard** to introduce participants to professional standards of journalism and media quality.

How can we respond to hate speech and online conflict?– counterspeech and civil dialogue training

To combat online hate and extremism, NGOs and international organizations promote **counterspeech** as a powerful tool. This involves responding to hateful or false content with factual, respectful messages that dilute the original negativity.

Facebook, working with partners like UNESCO, found that counterspeech by regular users can significantly reduce hate speech impact. Good practice here includes training youth in effective counterspeech techniques—such as:

- using personal stories,
- asking questions rather than directly confronting (“What makes you feel that way?” instead of “You’re wrong”),
- appealing to shared values.

For example, the “Extreme Dialogue” and “Get the Trolls Out” initiatives in Europe equip young people with communication skills to engage extremists or bigots in a de-escalating way.

Role-playing exercises (like in our lesson plans) are frequently cited as effective by educators to build confidence in counterspeech.

All these efforts hinge on a core good practice principle: promote free expression *while* challenging harmful speech through more speech – but speech that is empathetic, well-informed and respectful.

Examples of useful tools

- Extreme Dialogue:
<https://extremedialogue.org/>
- Get the Trolls Out!:
<https://getthetrollsout.org/>

Tips for Educators

- Use **role-playing exercises** to help participants practise responding to hate speech, discrimination, or misinformation in a safe and supportive environment.
- Encourage learners to use **questions, personal stories, and shared values** when responding to harmful content, rather than direct confrontation or aggressive language.
- Analyse real examples of online discussions and work together to identify effective counterspeech strategies that promote dialogue and de-escalation.
- Introduce educational resources from initiatives such as **Extreme Dialogue** and **Get the Trolls Out!** to explore practical approaches to respectful communication, empathy, and conflict resolution online.

How can we build empathy and respect in digital spaces?

Organizations worldwide highlight that fostering empathy is key to reducing online toxicity. One practice is incorporating **digital empathy** exercises into media literacy – for instance, having students read real testimonials of people who were cyber-bullied or targeted by hate, to understand the human cost and to remind people there’s a human on the other side.

Microsoft’s *Digital Civility Index* campaign and the #ChallengeHate initiative encourage youth to take pledges to uphold certain respectful behaviors online. “**Think before you post**” or “**THINK**” (True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, Kind) acronyms are promoted in schools and youth clubs as quick checklists before commenting.

These simple, memorable guidelines are endorsed by groups like **Common Sense Education** and UNESCO as they cultivate a habit of reflective, empathetic communication. Another emerging good practice is peer-led moderation: empowering respected youth leaders in online communities to set the tone and call out bad behavior in constructive ways. This peer modeling can be more influential among youth than top-down enforcement. In sum, building a culture of empathy and responsibility, through pledges,

campaigns and everyday modeling of kindness online, is recognized as a crucial practice by educators and international bodies aiming to improve digital spaces.

Examples of useful tools

- Challenge Hate: <https://challengehate.com/>
- Microsoft’s Digital Civility Index: <https://news.microsoft.com/wp-content/uploads/prod/sites/421/2020/02/Digital-Civility-2020-Global-Report.pdf>

Tips for Educators

- Use the **THINK model** (True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, Kind) before posting or commenting online. Ask participants to evaluate real social media comments using these five criteria and discuss how the messages could be improved.
- Present learners with real examples of cyberbullying or hate speech and ask them to write an **empathetic response** that could support the victim or de-escalate the situation. Discuss which responses are most constructive and why.
- Create a **Digital Civility Pledge** with your group. Together, develop 5–7 simple rules for respectful online communication and encourage participants to apply them in their everyday digital interactions.

How can we participate safely and responsibly in online communities?- community guidelines and reporting mechanisms awareness

A more structural practice is educating users about the tools at their disposal on platforms. NGOs and internet safety coalitions advise that knowing *how to report abuse or use privacy settings* is an essential digital skill.

Many educational programs now include a module on reading and understanding the community standards of major social media and learning the steps to mute, block or report harassers.

This is recommended by initiatives like the **EU's Better Internet for Kids**, which notes that empowering youth to use safety tools increases their resilience online. It's a best practice to simulate using these tools (for instance, a classroom demo of reporting a fake profile) so that in real situations, young users remember they have agency besides just responding or ignoring.

Alongside this, developing **moderation guidelines in youth-led communities** (like a Discord server or a group chat) is encouraged – some youth organizations have participants draft their own code of conduct for a group as a learning activity. This not only teaches them about governance in digital communities but also personal accountability to uphold those rules, aligning with international calls for youth involvement in creating safer online environments.

Examples of useful tools

- Better internet for kids: <https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en>
- BIK for teachers and educators: <https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/resources>

Tips for Educators

- Demonstrate how to use platform safety tools by showing participants how to report, block, mute, or restrict harmful accounts and content on popular social media platforms.
- Organise an activity in which learners analyse the community guidelines of a social media platform and discuss how these rules help create safer online environments.
- Encourage participants to create their own group code of conduct for a classroom, youth group, Discord server, or online community, helping them understand both digital citizenship and shared responsibility.

How can we improve media literacy through collaboration?– collaboration and information sharing networks

Good practices are also evolving at the ecosystem level – for example, **educator and NGO networks** for media literacy (such as UNESCO’s Media and Information Literacy Alliance or EU’s EDMO Hubs) are facilitating the sharing of best practices and resources globally. A local educator can adopt a proven workshop model from another country through these networks.

Projects like **ERGA (European Regulators Group for Audiovisual)** and **EDMO** publish guidelines and host repositories of verified educational content, ensuring practitioners use approaches that are research-backed and culturally adaptable.

This collaborative approach, endorsed by the EU and others, aims to continually raise the standards of media literacy training across communities. For instance, the EDMO Guidelines call for clear goals, empowerment and relevance in media literacy initiatives, and these principles are now reflected in many new programs’ design.

By participating in such networks, facilitators and NGOs keep their practices current (important in a fast-changing digital landscape) and maintain alignment with internationally recognized norms and values (like human rights considerations in counter-speech, etc.).

Examples of useful tools

- UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Alliance
<https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy/alliance>
- EDMO Hubs
<https://edmo.eu/about-us/edmo-hubs/>
- UNESCO Media and Information Literacy e-Platform
<https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en>

Tips for Educators

- Join professional networks such as **EDMO** or **UNESCO MIL Alliance** to access up-to-date teaching materials, research findings, and examples of successful media literacy initiatives from other countries.
- Regularly explore and adapt educational resources developed by international organizations, ensuring that your activities reflect current challenges such as disinformation, online safety, and digital citizenship.
- Create opportunities for peer learning by encouraging educators, youth workers, and NGOs to exchange experiences, share lesson plans, and discuss what works best in different educational contexts.

Supplementary paper

University-based programmes in media literacy: using social simulations and escape games in higher education

Agnese Dāvidsone

Inguna Kucina

Introduction

Media literacy has become an important component of higher education, supporting students in navigating increasingly complex communication environments. Alongside the ability to access and evaluate information, media literacy includes critical thinking, responsible participation, collaboration and ethical decision-making. These competences are particularly relevant for graduates whose future professional activities involve communication with different stakeholders, public engagement and evidence-based decision-making.

To support the development of these competences, universities increasingly complement traditional teaching methods with active learning approaches that connect theoretical knowledge with authentic experience. Among these approaches, social simulations provide opportunities for students to analyse communication problems, negotiate different perspectives and reflect on the consequences of their decisions within a safe learning environment. Learning is therefore organised around authentic situations rather than predetermined answers.

The experience of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership *Simulation Games in Strategic Communication*, implemented by Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences together with the University of Tartu and Vilnius University, demonstrates that simulation-based learning can effectively support media literacy education. During the simulations, students were required to analyse information from different perspectives, communicate with multiple stakeholders and justify their decisions using available evidence. Structured reflection after each activity encouraged participants to evaluate both their decisions and their learning process, linking communication theory with practical experience. These observations provide the basis for the educational approaches discussed in this article.

KEY MESSAGE

Media literacy develops most effectively when students are required to analyse authentic communication problems, evaluate competing sources of information, collaborate with others and reflect upon their own decisions. Social simulations create a structured learning environment in which students experience authentic communication challenges, analyse different sources of information, negotiate with multiple stakeholders and reflect on the consequences of their decisions. In this way, media literacy becomes a practical competence rather than only a theoretical concept.

Social simulations as a learning method

In educational literature, the concept of simulation is used in different contexts. In communication studies, social simulations are understood as open-ended learning situations that reproduce authentic social processes and allow participants to explore different courses of action within a safe learning environment. Instead of transferring information from the educator to the learner, simulations encourage students to investigate a communication problem, assume responsibility for particular stakeholder roles and develop solutions through interaction with other participants. The facilitator creates the learning environment, provides guidance where necessary and supports the reflection process after the activity.

Types of activities	Learning methods	Specific features
Games	Role-playing game Strategy game Action game	Assuming a character Strategic-decision making Physical challenges, coordination
Hybrid	Simulation game	Goal-oriented re-enactment of real-world processes
Simulations	Training simulation Modelling simulation	Train to maximize performance in achieving a task (e.g. psychomotor) Model processes or objects

Charasteristics of different interactive learning methods (adapted from Klabbers 2009)

Source: SOCIAL SIMULATIONS IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES: Creating a Simulation Scenario of an Environmental Problem

Simulations differ from educational games because their primary objective is not competition but understanding complex social processes. Simulation scenarios are open-ended and may develop in different directions depending on participants' decisions. Students therefore experience uncertainty similar to that encountered in professional communication practice. New information may emerge throughout the activity, stakeholder priorities may change and communication strategies often need to be reconsidered. Such situations encourage participants to evaluate information continuously instead of relying on previously formed assumptions.

These characteristics make simulations particularly relevant for media literacy education. Contemporary communication environments require citizens to interpret large amounts of information originating from multiple sources with different levels of credibility. Media literacy therefore involves much more than recognising misinformation. Individuals need to understand how information is produced, communicated, interpreted and sometimes strategically manipulated by different actors. Simulation-based learning provides opportunities to experience these processes directly.

EXAMPLE: Simulation "Bees vs Pesticides"

Students represent different stakeholder groups involved in a controversial environmental issue. Each organisation receives specific objectives, background information and responsibilities. During the simulation participants analyse scientific evidence, negotiate with other stakeholders, prepare communication messages and participate in public discussions before reaching collective decisions. Learning outcomes emerge through participation, collaboration and structured reflection rather than through identifying a single correct solution.

The simulation *Bees vs Pesticides* illustrates this approach. Rather than discussing environmental communication through lectures, students assume the roles of environmental organisations, scientists, farmers, businesses, journalists and policy-makers. Each stakeholder receives different objectives, responsibilities and background information. Throughout the simulation participants analyse scientific evidence, prepare communication strategies, negotiate possible solutions and participate in public discussions. The scenario demonstrates that communication decisions are rarely based

solely on factual information; they are also influenced by stakeholder interests, institutional responsibilities and public expectations.

An equally important component of simulation-based learning is reflection. Debriefing sessions encourage students to examine not only the decisions they made but also the reasoning behind these decisions. Participants analyse how information influenced their communication strategies, how collaboration affected decision-making and which transversal competences were required throughout the activity. Reflection therefore becomes an integral part of the learning process rather than an additional evaluation exercise.

The implementation of the simulations in communication studies demonstrated that authentic scenarios create favourable conditions for developing transversal competences alongside subject-specific knowledge. Students reported improvements in collaboration, negotiation, strategic thinking and communication, while facilitators observed increased engagement and more active participation compared with traditional classroom activities. The simulation therefore functions not only as an active learning method but also as a framework that integrates knowledge acquisition, skills development and reflective learning.

Developing media literacy through authentic learning

Simulation-based learning allows students to experience communication processes that cannot be fully explored through lectures or case analysis alone. By participating in realistic scenarios, students apply theoretical concepts while responding to changing situations, interacting with different stakeholders and making decisions based on available information. This combination of theory, practice and reflection supports the development of media literacy as a practical competence.

Experience of the Erasmus+ project *Simulation Games in Strategic Communication* showed that students most frequently identified negotiation, strategic thinking, communication and collaboration as the competences that developed most noticeably during simulation activities. At the same time, structured reflection carried out before and after the simulations helped participants recognise their own strengths and identify competences requiring further development. Instead of evaluating only the final outcome, the learning process encouraged students to become aware of how decisions were made and which communication strategies proved effective under changing circumstances.

One important observation emerging from the project concerned the role of uncertainty. Many students initially expected that communication problems would have clearly identifiable solutions. Participation in the simulations demonstrated that authentic communication environments rarely function in this way. Stakeholders possess different

information, priorities frequently conflict and decisions often need to be taken before complete information becomes available. Reflection sessions revealed that students gradually shifted from searching for the "correct answer" towards evaluating alternative solutions and considering their possible consequences. This development represents an important dimension of media literacy because it strengthens critical evaluation instead of simple information consumption.

Students also reported that collaboration became essential for successful participation. Individual stakeholders could not fully understand the communication problem independently because each organisation possessed only partial information. Consequently, communication, negotiation and information sharing became necessary components of the learning process. These experiences illustrate how simulation-based learning connects media literacy with democratic participation, where informed decisions depend on dialogue, cooperation and responsible communication rather than individual interpretation alone.

Escape games and simulation-based activities

Simulation-based learning has increasingly been complemented by educational escape games and other challenge-based learning activities. Although escape games differ from social simulations in their structure and duration, both approaches share common pedagogical principles. They require active learner participation, collaboration, problem-solving and reflection while placing students in situations that resemble authentic communication challenges.

Within media literacy education, escape games offer opportunities to organise learning around carefully designed sequences of tasks that require information verification, source evaluation and collaborative decision-making. Rather than completing isolated exercises, students solve interconnected problems where each solution provides access to new information. The learning process therefore encourages systematic analysis instead of intuitive responses.

Educational escape games may incorporate different forms of media content, including news articles, social media posts, photographs, videos and official documents. Students compare sources, identify inconsistencies, verify facts and evaluate the credibility of information before progressing to the next stage of the activity. In this way, media literacy competences are developed through practical application rather than theoretical explanation.

An important feature shared by escape games and social simulations is the use of authentic contexts. Communication problems are not presented as abstract academic exercises but as situations resembling professional practice. Students therefore experience how incomplete information, limited time and conflicting perspectives

influence communication processes. These elements increase learner engagement while simultaneously strengthening critical thinking and responsible decision-making.

As with social simulations, the educational value of escape games depends on systematic reflection after completing the activity. Debriefing provides opportunities to analyse decision-making processes, discuss alternative solutions and connect practical experience with theoretical concepts introduced during the course. Reflection also enables students to recognise how they evaluated information, collaborated with peers and responded to uncertainty throughout the activity. This stage transforms an engaging learning experience into meaningful educational development.

Educational experience from simulation-based learning suggests that escape games should not replace other teaching methods but complement them. They are particularly effective when integrated into broader learning sequences that combine theoretical preparation, authentic learning activities and structured reflection. Such combinations allow higher education institutions to strengthen media literacy while simultaneously developing communication, collaboration, negotiation and critical thinking competences that are increasingly required in contemporary professional practice.

TIP FOR EDUCATORS

Begin by defining the intended learning outcomes rather than the activity itself. Whether designing a social simulation or an educational escape game, the scenario, supporting materials, assessment strategy and reflection activities should all contribute to the development of clearly identified transversal competences.

Practical examples from Latvian higher education

At Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences, social simulations have been integrated into communication studies through international Erasmus+ cooperation projects aimed at strengthening active learning methods. Working together with partners from Estonia and Lithuania, educators designed simulation scenarios addressing authentic communication challenges and tested them in different higher education contexts.

The simulations are built around real societal issues involving multiple stakeholder groups. Rather than analysing communication retrospectively, students become active participants in the communication process. They prepare stakeholder positions, evaluate available information, negotiate with other organisations and respond to new developments introduced during the activity. This approach enables students to experience how communication evolves in situations where information is incomplete and different interests need to be balanced.

Experience gained during the testing of the simulations demonstrated that students initially focused primarily on defending the interests of their own organisations. As the

activity progressed, however, successful participation increasingly depended on cooperation with other stakeholder groups. Reflection sessions revealed that many participants realised the importance of listening to alternative perspectives before making communication decisions. Several students also acknowledged that their initial assumptions changed after discussions with other stakeholders and after receiving additional information during the simulation. Similar observations were reported in the qualitative study exploring students' perceptions of simulation-based learning, where participants described negotiation, collaboration and strategic thinking as some of the competences most strongly developed during the activity.

Another important outcome concerned students' awareness of their own learning process. Before participating in the simulations, students completed self-assessment activities focusing on transversal competences. The same assessment was repeated after the simulation and discussed collectively during the debriefing session. This approach encouraged participants to compare their initial expectations with the competences they actually applied during the activity. Reflection therefore became an integral part of the educational process rather than a separate evaluation exercise. According to the project experience, this combination of participation and structured reflection helped students better recognise both their existing competences and areas requiring further development.

The project also demonstrated the importance of structured reflection. Following each simulation, students discussed their decision-making process, collaboration within stakeholder groups and the communication strategies they had chosen. These discussions encouraged participants to connect practical experience with theoretical concepts and to evaluate their own competence development. Research carried out within the project indicates that students particularly valued opportunities to develop negotiation, teamwork and strategic communication skills while working with authentic communication challenges.

The transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated that simulation-based learning can be successfully adapted to digital environments. Although facilitation methods and communication channels changed, the essential pedagogical principles remained the same. Students continued to work collaboratively, negotiate solutions and participate in structured reflection, confirming that meaningful learning depends primarily on pedagogical design rather than the learning environment itself.

Tips for educators

Simulation-based learning requires careful pedagogical planning. The effectiveness of the activity depends not only on the quality of the scenario but also on the alignment between learning outcomes, facilitation and reflection. Experience gained during the implementation of simulations in communication studies suggests several

considerations that may support educators who intend to integrate simulations and escape games into media literacy courses.

- **Define learning outcomes first.** Design the simulation around the competences students are expected to develop rather than around the scenario itself.
- **Use authentic communication challenges.** Real societal issues encourage students to evaluate information from different perspectives and recognise the relevance of theoretical concepts.
- **Prepare students for their roles.** Clear instructions, stakeholder descriptions and supporting materials create a common understanding before the activity begins.
- **Facilitate the process.** During the simulation, guide discussion without directing decisions, allowing students to take responsibility for their own communication strategies.
- **Include structured reflection.** Debriefing helps students connect experience with theory and identify opportunities for further competence development.
- **Combine different active learning methods.** Social simulations and escape games complement one another and together support the development of media literacy, collaboration and critical thinking.

KEY MESSAGE

Effective simulations do not require increasingly complex scenarios. They require clearly defined learning outcomes, authentic communication challenges and carefully facilitated reflection. The educational value emerges through the combination of participation and critical analysis rather than through the activity itself.

Conclusion

Media literacy has become an essential component of higher education, extending beyond the ability to access and evaluate information towards responsible participation in contemporary communication environments. Universities are increasingly expected to prepare graduates who can analyse complex information, communicate with different stakeholder groups, make evidence-based decisions and contribute to democratic processes. These expectations require learning environments that allow students to apply theoretical knowledge in authentic situations.

The experience of Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and its international partners demonstrates that social simulations provide such an environment. By recreating realistic communication challenges, simulations encourage students to analyse information critically, negotiate different perspectives, justify their decisions and reflect

on the consequences of their actions. Learning therefore develops through active participation, collaboration and structured reflection rather than through passive knowledge acquisition alone.

Educational escape games further expand these opportunities by introducing challenge-based activities that strengthen information verification, collaborative problem-solving and critical evaluation of media content. When integrated with simulation-based learning, escape games contribute to a broader educational approach in which media literacy is understood as a combination of knowledge, skills and responsible attitudes.

The implementation of these methods within international Erasmus+ projects also illustrates the value of collaboration between higher education institutions. Joint development of learning materials, testing of educational scenarios and exchange of pedagogical experience have supported the creation of learning environments that respond to contemporary communication challenges while remaining adaptable to different educational contexts. The successful transition of simulations to online environments further demonstrates that active learning can be sustained across different modes of delivery when pedagogical objectives remain at the centre of course design.

Future development of university-based media literacy programmes should continue to strengthen the integration of authentic learning methods into higher education curricula. Social simulations and educational escape games represent complementary approaches that support not only the acquisition of communication knowledge but also the development of critical thinking, collaboration, ethical reasoning and responsible citizenship. These competences remain essential for graduates who will work and participate in increasingly complex digital and democratic societies.

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Conclusions

The UP2YOUTH project demonstrates that civic education and media literacy can no longer be treated as separate areas of learning. In contemporary digital societies, active citizenship requires not only knowledge of democratic institutions and civic participation mechanisms, but also the ability to critically assess information, recognize manipulation, communicate responsibly, and engage constructively in online environments.

The analysis presented in this bulletin highlights that young people face a complex set of challenges. They are growing up in an information environment characterized by information overload, disinformation, polarization, algorithmic influence, hate speech, and declining trust in traditional institutions. At the same time, digital technologies create new opportunities for civic participation, social engagement, and community building. Supporting young people in navigating these opportunities and challenges requires educational approaches that combine civic competences with media literacy skills.

The concepts and definitions presented in this publication provide a common framework for understanding key phenomena shaping today's information ecosystem. Developing awareness of concepts such as disinformation, fact-checking, source credibility, algorithmic bias, filter bubbles, and digital citizenship is an important foundation

for informed participation in democratic life.

The good practices included in this bulletin demonstrate that effective civic and media education should be participatory, practical, and learner-centred. Approaches such as learning democracy through action, prebunking, fact-checking, information hygiene, counterspeech, digital empathy, community moderation, and international collaboration help young people develop critical thinking, resilience, civic agency, and responsible communication skills.

The lesson plans developed within the UP2YOUTH project translate these principles into practical educational activities. They provide educators, youth workers, teachers, and trainers with concrete tools for fostering active citizenship, media literacy, fact-checking skills, responsible online communication, and community engagement.

Useful links and resources

Media Literacy and Information Literacy

- UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL): <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy>
- UNESCO MIL Alliance: <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy/alliance>
- UNESCO MIL for Teachers: <https://www.unesco.org/mil4teachers/en>

Fact-Checking and Verification

- Google Fact Check Explorer: <https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer>
- Snopes: <https://www.snopes.com>
- PolitiFact: <https://www.politifact.com>
- FactCheck.org: <https://www.factcheck.org>
- International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN): <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn>

Media Literacy and Anti-Disinformation Initiatives

- European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO): <https://edmo.eu>
- EDMO Media Literacy Resources: <https://edmo.eu/areas-of-activities/media-literacy>
- Better Internet for Kids (BIK): <https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en>
- BIK Resources for Educators: <https://better-internet-for-kids.europa.eu/en/resources>

Prebunking and Inoculation Education

- Harmony Square: <https://www.harmonysquare.game>
- Bad News: <https://www.getbadnews.com/en>
- Go Viral!: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/goviral>
- Debunking Handbook 2020: <https://inoculation.science/the-debunking-handbook>

Digital Citizenship and Online Safety

- Common Sense Education: <https://www.commonsense.org/education>

- Be Internet Awesome (Google):
<https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com>
- Microsoft Digital Civility Initiative:
<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/digital-skills/digital-civility>

Countering Hate Speech and Promoting Dialogue

- Extreme Dialogue:
<https://extremedialogue.org>
- Get the Trolls Out!:
<https://getthetrollsout.org>
- Council of Europe – No Hate Speech Movement:
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign>
- Bookmarks: A Manual for Combating Hate Speech Online:
<https://rm.coe.int/bookmarks-a-manual-for-combating-hate-speech-online-through-human-ri/168065dac7>

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- UNESCO. Media and Information Literacy Programme. Available at:
<https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy>
- UNESCO. Media and Information Literacy Alliance. Available at:
<https://www.unesco.org/en/media-information-literacy/alliance>

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<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/goviral>
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- Stanford History Education Group. Civic Online Reasoning and Lateral Reading Resources.
- NewsGuard. Rating Process and Criteria. Available at:
<https://www.newsguardtech.com/ratings/rating-process-criteria>
- Common Sense Education. Digital Citizenship Curriculum. Available at:
<https://www.commonsense.org/education>
- Council of Europe. Bookmarks: A Manual for Combating Hate Speech Online through Human Rights Education. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Microsoft. Digital Civility Index Reports. Available at:
<https://news.microsoft.com/digital-civility>
- European Commission & EDMO. Media Literacy Guidelines for Teachers and Practitioners.



About authors



Magdalena Szczudło is a specialist at the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FRDL) in the fields of social innovation, civic education, and civil society development. With more than 20 years of experience in the non-governmental sector, she has been actively supporting the development of active citizenship, civic participation, and the institutional capacity of NGOs and organizations working with young people.

She specializes in designing and implementing social innovations, civic education initiatives, and cross-sector partnerships at the local, national, and international levels. At the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy, she is responsible for the development and implementation of international projects, including those funded through the Erasmus+ and Interreg Europe programmes. She is the Project Coordinator of UP2YOUTH – Democratic Future in Youth Responsible Hands, a project focused on strengthening youth civic education through the development of media and digital competences essential for informed and responsible participation in democratic life. Within the project, she

also serves as a youth educator and co-author of educational materials and publications dedicated to civic education, media literacy, and digital citizenship. She is the author and co-author of publications, handbooks, and training materials on public participation, civic education, project management, and social innovation.



Emilia Wiśniewska has recently joined FSLD, though her experience in the NGO sector spans several years and includes participation in numerous international projects across different countries. She has a background in journalism and social communication. She is also engaged in educational work focused on history and local traditions, with a particular interest in preserving and sharing lesser-known cultural heritage and material culture.



Magdalena Hanackova, representing EDUcentrum, is an experienced project manager and educator specialising in innovative educational approaches, well-being and inclusion. She has extensive experience in national and international educational projects, including Erasmus+ programmes, where she works as a coordinator, methodologist and content developer. She focuses on media literacy, democratic schooling, teacher training and psychological aspects of education. She combines strong pedagogical background with effective project management and transnational cooperation skills.



Veronika Batelkova is President of the NGO Zvol si info (Choose Your Info) and serves as the expert guarantor for media literacy initiatives. With an academic background in Media and Information Studies, she brings over seven years of hands-on experience in non-formal education – both nationally and internationally – working primarily with teachers, librarians, and youth workers. Veronika led UP2YOUTH workshop on Media Literacy, focusing on fake news, disinformation, hate speech, digital trolling and strategic communication on social media. She was an invaluable source of expert insight, inspiration and materials for this publication, as well as for our future work.



Demir Deyanov is a Senior Program Expert and Project Coordinator with over 20 years of experience in the non-governmental sector, specializing in international project management, strategic municipal planning, and public administration development. His career is focused on designing methodologies for regional development, establishing data-driven monitoring frameworks, and managing multi-stakeholder international partnerships.

Driven by a background in Macroeconomics from the University of National and World Economy, he has gained expertise in the objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy, public-private partnerships, and sustainable institutional frameworks.

Throughout his tenure at the Foundation for Local Government Reform, he has successfully spearheaded and coordinated complex initiatives funded by the European Union, Erasmus+, EEA and Norway Grants, Interreg Europe, and the Council of Europe and collaborated with regional development networks, public policy think-tanks, and international project consortiums.



Dr. Rumena Filipova is Chairperson and Founder of the Institute for Global Analytics. She received a DPhil and MPhil in International Relations from the University of Oxford and a BA in Politics, Psychology and Sociology from the University of Cambridge. Rumena has been a Denton Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis in Washington, D.C. and a recipient of the State Department's IVLP Impact Award. She has gained a wide-ranging experience in the think tank sector at the Polish Institute of International Affairs, (previously) Carnegie Moscow Center, Chatham House, Cambridge Central Asia Forum, Center for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria). Rumena's main research interests focus on the politics and international relations of Central and Eastern Europe, with a particular reference to questions of identity, Constructivist IR theory, media and disinformation, the authoritarian influence exercised by Russia and China in the region.



Inguna Kucina coordinates international cooperation projects in media literacy, civic participation and educational innovation. Her work focuses on the development and implementation of Erasmus+ initiatives, fostering collaboration between higher education institutions, public authorities and international partners. She has extensive experience in project management, stakeholder engagement and innovative learning approaches that strengthen democratic participation and youth engagement.



Agnese Dāvidsone is an Associate Professor and Leading Researcher at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences (ViA). She has been elected as the Rector of the University since 2022. Her research focuses on media literacy, strategic communication, civic participation and innovative approaches to higher education. She has led and contributed to numerous international research and Erasmus+ projects exploring simulation-based learning, digital communication and media literacy. She is the author and co-author of several publications and educational resources on social simulations, media literacy and communication studies.



About partners



Jerzy Regulski Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FSLD)



www.frdl.org.pl

The Jerzy Regulski Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FSLD) is the largest Polish non-governmental organization supporting the development of civil society and self-governance in Poland. FSLD is non-partisan, independent, and non-commercial entity. FSLD was established in 1989 and over the years FSLD has grown to incorporate a network of local units and education institutions, as well as numerous experts and collaborators. Today, FSLD with 14 Regional Centres with local branches is designed to provide training, consultancy, networking and capacity building services on local level in voivodeships outside the capital of Warsaw. Foundation has 125 permanent employees and cooperates with ca. 150 experts and trainers. FSLD's activities and programs cover the territory of the entire country.

FSLD's mission is to promote the idea of civil self-governance as the fundamental form of democracy. To fulfil its mission, the Foundation supports the activity of local authorities and non-governmental organizations, thus contributing to the development and reinforcement of the civil society in the region.

FSLD's activities are aimed at beneficiaries representing 3 sectors including all levels of public administration, CSOs, informal groups and individuals (vulnerable social groups), as well private sector (small and medium-size companies and media). 30 years of Foundation's experience resulted in natural, thematic and special-purpose partnerships established with: the Council of Europe; Ministries – structural programmes and projects; local authorities; media – media patronages, information campaigns, co-organisation of big public events;

FSLD REGIONAL CENTRES

FSLD has a network of 14 Regional Centers with local branches. Each Regional Centre is based in voivodship capital and provides services in the region. Every regional centre employs from 5 to 35 permanent staff members. Network-based model of FSLD's functioning and everyday operation on local level allows the most efficient work in regions and rural areas of the whole country, based on good identification of the local communities' needs, challenges and problems. Every year each FSLD's regional centre runs from 100 up to 450 trainings and consultancy services for local self-government units and CSOs.



Czech Republic

EDUcentrum, z.ú



<http://www.educentrum.eu/>

EDUcentrum is a non-profit organisation. Its aim is to encourage creative and innovative forms of education, support youth work, employability and entrepreneurship, promote diversity and social inclusion, foster motivation for lifelong learning, increase adaptability and promote a proactive attitude towards further education across various age, social and professional target groups.

Within its projects, EDUcentrum promotes initiatives in the field of support for the development of youth workers' skills and their competences in leadership, social inclusion, diversity, intercultural dialogue and common values of tolerance, democracy and multiculturalism. The organisation strives to support youth employability and entrepreneurship with focus on social entrepreneurship. It also provides support to gifted and talented pupils, teachers and parents and develops related strategies and trainings.

EDUcentrum has long-term experience in research and designing new learning and training tools. Within its projects a wide range of intellectual outputs focused on implementation of innovative methodologies and use of ICT in education have been developed, as well as tools for distance and blended learning. The NGO specialises on design of materials for trainers and youth learners, didactic tools to facilitate the application of new methodologies or testing and comparative tools for progress evaluation of youth learners.

Trainers and experts of EDUcentrum have been involved in a number of projects focused on the development of skills and competences of young people, their teachers and youth workers. They always try to implement different strength-based approaches in our work as this proves to bring more efficient results compared to deficit-based approaches. EDUcentrum has implemented several LLP, ERASMUS+ and Visegrad Fund projects.



Fondatsiya za Reforma v Mestnoto Samoupravljenje

 <https://www.flgr.bg/>

Foundation for Local Government Reform (FLGR) is an independent professional resource centre, supporting local democracy, established in May 1995. The Mission of the Foundation for Local Government Reform is to support local democracy and promote effective, partnership-based local development, based on democratic values, social inclusion and prosperity. For more than 25 years of existence the Foundation has successfully implemented projects and programmes contributing to the development and modernization at local, regional and national level in Bulgaria.

The objectives of FLGR are: Investment in the social capital at local and regional level, Development of the capacity of citizens and NGOs to effectively participate in the decision making process, and local governance based on the 12 principles of good governance; Support for effective, partnership-based local and regional development, based on democratic values, social inclusion and prosperity; Building of vibrant dynamic communities with strong participatory local self-government, with high standards of living, sustainable development and competitive local economy.

The main spheres of expertise of FLGR are:

- Trainings: FLGR has delivered trainings for more than 15,000 participants; incl. in cooperation with Sofia University;
- Innovative Practices: Since 1998 FLGR gathers and disseminates innovative practices from Bulgarian and European communities;
- Good Governance and Integrity: FLGR for many years works on programs and projects, promoting good governance principles;
- Participatory Local Governance: FLGR has worked on several programs and projects that consolidate and mobilize the participatory development of communities;
- Grant Management: In the period 2000 - 2008 FLGR had administered several programmes on local and regional development funded by USAID (3 mln Euro). In the period 2008 - 2011 FLGR administered the Bulgarian NGO Fund under the Financial Mechanism of EEA (2.06 mln Euro);
- Local Economic Development: For a period of 10 years (1998-2008) FLGR supported Bulgarian municipalities in the process of policy formulation and implementation; preparation of municipal long-term strategic economic planning documents, marketing materials, networking and providing international expertise to Bulgarian municipalities; Accumulation, guidance and processing of investors' requests; Professional economic capacity development, training and certification; "Municipality, Ready for Business" Certification.

FLGR through study visits and exchanges supported the development of local and regional institutions in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Georgia, Kosovo, Romania, Kaliningrad Region, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan. FLGR was part of the European network of local authorities for exchange of best practices LOGIN since its creation in 1999 until its closure at the end of 2011. FLGR was part of the Mayors Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion Network (MERI) 2013 - 2014. FLGR is a founding member of Donor Fund Bulgaria.





Vidzeme Planning Region

 <https://www.vidzeme.lv/>

The Vidzeme Planning Region* is a state institution for regional development and planning. It is one of five planning regions in Latvia. Its primary task is to plan and coordinate the balanced long-term development of the territory. This is achieved through the coordination of various municipal and state administrative activities, as well as the development and implementation of development projects within the Vidzeme Planning Region.

The Vidzeme Planning Region represents the interests of all its residents. In regional development planning and daily operations, the institution applies an integrated approach, encompassing economic, social, and environmental aspects.

The Vidzeme Planning Region also focuses on energy efficiency, blue bioeconomy, the Green Deal 2030, fostering knowledge and competencies, innovation, bioresource conservation, and other current priorities.

People, economy, and territory – the three main focus areas of the Vidzeme Planning Region's activities.

People are the most valuable resource of the region, which is why it is essential to ensure that residents feel safe and secure. This involves improving living conditions, addressing socio-economic challenges, and tackling education-related issues.

The goal of the Vidzeme Planning Region is to enhance the capabilities and quality of life for its residents.

The region's economy is directly influenced by decisions made at the national level and global trends. To strengthen the regional economy, the Vidzeme Planning Region focuses on promoting cross-border cooperation and enhancing the competitiveness of businesses, particularly by encouraging innovation and providing opportunities for lifelong learning. Improving the economic value of the Vidzeme Planning Region by fostering a better business environment and increasing economic sustainability is of paramount importance.

Key factors in territorial development include transport and communication infrastructure, the preservation of environmental resources, and strengthening the region's identity. Tourism plays a significant role in the growth of the region. The Vidzeme Planning Region actively works to enhance accessibility, connectivity, and the overall appeal of the region. Equally important is the preservation and development of the region's unique cultural landscape and the creation of a sustainable, well-functioning network of Vidzeme's towns, grounded in principles of mutual cooperation and complementarity.

UP2YOUTH

– democratic future in youth responsible hands



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