

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT:

NATIONAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN ALBANIA



Albanian Media Institute
Instituti Shqiptar i Medias

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Background Document: National Media and Information
Literacy Policies and Strategies in Albania

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Albanian Media Institute
Instituti Shqiptar i Medias

Rr. Gjin Bue Shpata, No.8, Tiranë, Albania

Tel./fax: ++ 355 4 2229800

E-mail: info@institutemedia.org

www.institutemedia.org



This project is funded
by the European Union



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

This study was conducted in the framework of the project
“Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey,
Phase II”, funded by EU and UNESCO. Its content is the sole
responsibility of Albanian Media Institute and do not necessarily
reflect the views of the European Union and UNESCO.

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Executive Summary

This background study was conducted in the framework of the project *“Building trust in the media in Southeast Europe and Turkey, phase II”* supported by UNESCO and the European Union and implemented by the Albanian Media Institute. The project, at this stage of implementation, ***aims to increase the skills of young people for media and information literacy (MIL) through the integration of the MIL curriculum in the formal education system in Albania.*** The implementation of the project started in June 2020 and will last until 2022.

One of the project activities is ***updating the current situation of EMI Albania and identifying key actors, as well as contributions made to improve the level of media and information literacy in the period 2016-2020.*** To enable this process, the Albanian Media Institute has collected primary data (through interviews and national consultations) and secondary data (desk-research, review of existing strategies and documents). The collected data were processed and included in this study organized according to the following thematic areas: ***existing policies and strategies for MIL, overview of MIL (policies and initiatives in formal education, non-formal and formal education), as well as policy objectives and strategic recommendations for improving the level of MIL.***

In our country ***there is not yet a strategy that guides national policies on media and information literacy to respond to the needs in this field.*** Various national strategies (National Strategy for Development and Integration; Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education, Digital Agenda, National Strategy for Culture, etc.) mention one or more elements of MIL, such as the digitalization of services and increasing the computer skills, ***but it is lacking the holistic approach towards developing MIL competences*** (critical thinking, evaluation of information and information sources, ability to access and localize information resources, content creation, promotion of active citizenship, understanding of media and information systems, etc.).

The lack of a strategy is reflected in the three levels of education, formal, non-formal and informal. Although in the pre-university system priority is given to the use of ICT during the teaching and learning process, ***this priority is limited only in terms of technological education and use of equipment, not focusing on other MIL competencies.*** The integration of the MIL curriculum into the pre-university education curriculum, which is the goal of this project, would increase the knowledge and skills of students and teachers in the field of media and information literacy.

At the university level, certain concepts of MIL are taught by different academic training programs on Bachelor and Master cycle, in the faculties of public universities (University of Tirana, Aleksandër Moisiu, Aleksandër Xhuvani, etc.) and private universities (Beder University, etc.). Depending on the study program, these concepts include media literacy, audience, digital competence, multimedia content production, etc., ***but what remains to be emphasized is the lack of general***

training for MIL. It is imperative that EMI interventions be made at university level as well in three dimensions: 1) operational, 2) analytical and 3) creative.

Based on the identified needs and gaps that are existent, this document, drafted according to a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, ***suggests objectives for MIL policies and strategy, which should be extended to formal education (university and pre-university level); in non-formal and informal education thus affecting all members of society*** with the aim of increasing the level of education on media and information in Albania.



INTRODUCTION/THE AIM OF BACKGROUND STUDY

The media and information play a crucial role in a democratic society as they enable citizens to make well-informed decisions, influence positively the strengthening of the position and encourage their contribution to society. The potential of new information technologies is enormous, so citizens and the media need to be able to use these new tools wisely and avoid the risks they carry. In this regard, knowledge and education on media and information literacy (MIL) is of paramount importance in the development of critical thinking and the efficient use of media and communication technology in an age when we face a wealth of information.

The Albanian media picture is dynamic in terms of the number of media outlets. There are currently 15 daily newspapers, including sports newspapers, although we have less than three million inhabitants and the press is not distributed throughout the country. The number of audiovisual media is also quite high: five licenses have been issued for national digital platforms, there are 45 local television stations, as well as the public radio and television that broadcasts on 12 channels, through its digital platform, including two branches of television in districts. In terms

of radio broadcasts, there are two national radios, 53 local radios and four community radios. In addition to them, there is also Radio Tirana, which broadcasts on six radio channels and four branches in the districts.

On the other hand, the picture of online media is much more chaotic and in the absence of official statistics or other ways to calculate the number of online media, one can only speculate about the size of this media sector. According to the Union of Albanian Journalists, it is estimated that there are more than 800 online media in the country. The dramatic increase in the number of online media comes as a result of relatively low costs compared to other media sectors and the widespread spread of the internet across the country. According to the electronic communications regulator, the level of internet penetration at the end of 2019 was 75%. Likewise, Albanians are regular users of social networks, especially Facebook, with about 1.4 million pages, or a spread rate of 49 percent, by the end of January 2020.

With the rapid shift of the center of gravity of the Albanian media online, the media relief seems to have reversed. Albanian journalism experiences the phenomenon of portalisation and facebooking and, as in other countries, produces itself and faces false daily news. Conspiracy theories, previously found only in extremist media, are now widely dominating traditional media. Disinformation is presented as a serious problem that must be faced. This was clearly seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when conspiracy theories and misinformation spread rapidly.

Experience has shown that the Albanian public does not have the necessary immunity and the necessary skills to face fake news and misinformation, it does not have the necessary critical approach to distinguish the truth, to distinguish what is fake news, and what is real news etc. The Media Literacy

Index of 2018 puts Albania almost at the bottom of the list of European countries, leaving behind only Turkey and Northern Macedonia.¹ This ranking signals the need for immediate intervention and the planning of strategic interventions to improve the level of media education and information in Albania.

The Baseline Study aims to present the current situation regarding MIL in Albania, based on the UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Media Information Literacy.² The current Background Study is an update of the work started in 2017, where the initial baseline study was conducted, which was the starting point for opening discussions and debates during the consultative meetings on MIL that took place in Tirana. At that time, participants in these meetings were representatives of institutions such as the Ministry of Innovation and Public Administration, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, universities and various educational institutions, representatives of the National Library, audiovisual media regulatory authority - AMA, journalists' organizations, media experts, media and youth organizations, journalists and civil society organizations. The consultations highlighted the main trends and identified the key actors that are involved, or can be engaged, with MIL, and the specific roles that everyone should play to design a holistic and complex strategy in formal, non-formal and informal education.

¹ Lessenski, M. (2018). Common sense wanted. Resilience to post-truth and its predictors in the new media literacy index 2018*. Open Society Institute, Bulgaria.

² Accessible at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publicationsandcommunication-materials/publications/full-list/media-and-information-literacy-policy-and-strategy-guidelines/>

In the same line is organized the collection of information in this second phase, where with stakeholders and key actors that play an important role in relation to MIL in Albania were conducted interviews to obtain detailed information about the role and contribution in this area. Thus, during October and November, 27 interviews were conducted with representatives of public institutions, educational institutions, media outlets media institutions and civil society organizations. More specifically, interviews were conducted with high-level representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, ASCAP, Ministry of Culture, Prime Minister's Office, National Historical Museum, General Directorate of Archives, National Library, TUMO Center, Albanian Public Radio and Television, Audiovisual Media Authority, Albanian Council Media, University of Tirana, "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University, Bedër University, UNICEF, Center for Quality Journalism, Faktaje.al, Center for Children's Rights, National Association for Life Education, etc. (A full list of interviewed actors can be found in the appendices at the end of this document).

The data included in this study are primary (collected from interviews) and secondary (desk-research). The study, immediately after consulting the draft document, will be made available to the government and other parties involved in the process to recommend specific steps to be taken to integrate media and information education in formal, non-formal and informal education in Albania. This work is carried out in the framework of the project "Building trust in the media in Southeast Europe and Turkey, Phase II", supported by UNESCO and the EU, which beyond the planned intervention aims to create sustainability in terms of media education and information, as well as to incite the drafting of the National Strategy for Media Education and Information, which currently does not exist.

A MULTILATERAL APPROACH: WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL?

A complex and comprehensive intervention like MIL requires a multilateral, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional commitment. Thus, EMI policies and strategies need to be developed on the concept of media education and information that harmonizes and summarizes a variety of other basic skills in the digital age, such as news, television, film, computer, internet, social media, archives, libraries, museums, resource centers, etc. Efforts to identify needs and design policies and strategies to solve the EMI problem will not be complete without the involvement of all stakeholders who can contribute in the future to the development of MIL in Albania, such as government actors, civil society, educational institutions, the media and business sector.

These actors can be from different fields of formal, non-formal and informal education and can help in the process of education for media and information through various tools and techniques. Currently official institutions dealing with education issues are involved, such as the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP). Also, primary and secondary schools will be part of the pilot of this project. Universities will be another level of intervention together with organizations or institutions that offer continued education opportunities so that media and information education becomes a culture at every level and structure of education.

Other important actors to be involved are the media, regulatory and self-regulatory institutions, state and school libraries, teachers 'and parents' associations, library associations, various information conductors, social media

users, training institutes, institutions various storage of knowledge and memory, mediators in the information process, etc.

Substantial changes in the media and information landscape show that schools are no longer the only sources of knowledge and learning. This also means the role that informal and intermediate teaching institutions should play, such as libraries, archives, museums and other cultural institutions.

In Albania, preparations and efforts for media and information education are still in the first steps and the project in question is one of the most consolidated interventions as it aims to make EMI part of the official curriculum in pre-university education. However, it is important to involve as many stakeholders as possible, in order to ensure the achievement of positive results in this area, as well as to create a synergy between all the contributions that are being made in this regard, be they sporadic and short-lived, or long-term and enduring.



MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY AS A COMPOSITE CONCEPT

“Media education” and “information education” have traditionally been considered and treated as two separate fields, but the transition to the digital age and advances in technology have brought about the transformation and merging of the two terms thus creating a more inclusive concept that encompasses both: “media and information literacy”. In this context, this Baseline Study uses the UNESCO definition of Media Education and Information as a starting point to present a broader concept that includes MIL as a set of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for life and work. Media and Information Literacy includes all types of media and information providers, such as libraries, libraries, archives, museums, but also information obtained via the Internet regardless of the device being accessed or the platform where the information is received. MIL equips citizens with the skills and competencies to be active and critical citizens, who can participate in social life and shape democracy. The competencies that MIL aims to develop are the ability to access and localize information sources; the ability to use and understand media and information to apply it in everyday life; the ability to assess the reliability, accuracy and objectivity of resources; the ability to create and produce media and information; the ability to participate knowing how and when to interact with media and information creators and editors; the ability to understand how media

and information systems work, how they are organized, and how information is produced; the ability to recognize, search for and protect quality media and information sources.

Essentially, a broader understanding of the MIL concept aims to harmonize the approach to media and information literacy and apply this concept in the educational context in Albania. To this end, this study will consider media education, computer education, internet education and digital education.³ This is achieved by taking into account legislation, regulations, documents and strategies dealing with these issues, as well as initiatives taken by civil society and the general public. This also takes into account the situation and needs on the ground, as well as the fact that in Albania there is still no national strategy for MIL and that basic knowledge about it is not provided in either secondary or higher education. In schools, attention is paid mainly to the training of students in the use of computers; programs include: providing general knowledge about computers, software, internet, e-mail. While universities organize courses only for Information and Communication Technology, or media, there is no proper orientation on MIL as conceived by UNESCO and in this document. Currently, information education is included only in the national library education, where it is one of the most important, but still this education does not include the media and still remains partial. In this regard, this study will provide recommendations for drafting policies and strategies in the field of Media and Information Literacy in Albania.

³ EMI as a broader concept includes: library education, news education, digital education, computer education, internet education, education on freedom of expression and the right to information, education on television, advertising education, cinema education, and games education (UNESCO, MIL Policy and Strategy Guidelines - UNESCO, EMI Strategy Policies and Guidelines)



THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR MIL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN ALBANIA

Policies and strategies on media and information literacy (MIL) in Albania should be seen and judged in the social, political and cultural context of our country. One of the driving forces for reform and encouragement towards new policies and rules in the country has been the process of integration into the European Union, where Albania is a candidate country. Although progress in this process is slow, it has had a significant impact in the area of legislation, paying attention to the fact that new policies and legislation adopted are in line with EU standards and legislation and for that the assistance of EU has been required in drafting the legislation. The legislation that addresses the field of MIL is no exception, based on the case of drafting legislation on audiovisual media, legislation on electronic commerce (e-commerce), transition to digital television broadcasting, electronic communications, etc.

An essential precondition for improving public access to media and information is the improvement of information and technology infrastructure, as well as the significant improvement in the level of internet use in recent years. The Albanian government, for years, has declared as a priority the digitalization and creation of

a society oriented towards knowledge and information, both in consolidating a more open and developed society, as well as in improving the economic level. Efforts have been consistent in adopting policies to create and promote government services electronically, seeking to facilitate the provision of information and services provided to their citizens. The government portal e-albania is a product of these efforts. Being a multifunctional portal e-albania.al is administered and developed by the National Agency of Information Society and serves as a gateway through which any interested person can receive via the Internet, electronic services provided by public institutions in Albania. The government portal e-Albania is connected to the Government Interaction Platform, which is the basic architecture on which interaction with the electronic systems of public institutions is enabled. In October 2020 alone, the total number of uses of electronic services was 1,341,627⁴ and the number of new registrations for this month was 37,330 persons, data that show the increasing number of government online services use.

Another government policy has been to improve and strengthen the technological base in schools, in order to widely engage students in learning information and communication technology (ICT). On the other hand, the Ministry of Education has shown its readiness to support efforts to reform the curriculum and create sufficient opportunities for teachers to educate the younger generations on media and information. Although the full digitalization of archives and information across various institutions has not progressed at a rapid pace, there have been achievements in several other areas such as libraries, museums, the central archive and some databases.

⁴ Accessible at: <https://e-albania.al/Pages/Statistics/statistika.pdf>

EMI at the heart of the strategies and policies of Central government and public institutions

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) is working on updating the new National Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education (NSDPE). So far the priorities have been and will be the use of ICT in school by teachers and students to have the most effective experience in teaching-learning. The use of ICT in the learning process contributes to the development of digital competences in students, which is one of the aspects of EMI. The commitment to digitalization of education is expressed in NSDPE where the promotion of digital skills of students, as well as the integration of ICT in teaching and learning is a priority and has been reaffirmed in the Government Program for the period 2017-2021. In the period March-June 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning took place, MEYS took on the obligation to create online resources in the form of video recordings, while ASCAP issued guidelines for organizing distance learning in global emergency conditions. During the distance learning that was organized in the period March-June 2020, the teachers demonstrated that they can quickly adapt to the circumstances, using communication platforms and software that serve the best integration of ICT in the learning process, so it is necessary to move steps forward by providing clear training, advice and guidance on work in this area.

The Development Programs and Cooperation Unit at the Prime Minister's Office is developing a program for "Start-ups and Innovation" as well as "Smart Cities", both of which aim to increase the level of digitalization at

the national level and the engagement of young people in establishing start-ups in the field of technology and creative industries. In cooperation with the Minister of State for Entrepreneurship Protection, this unit has drafted the law and is in the process of approving the law on start-ups and innovation.

The Ministry of Culture, in the National Cultural Strategy 2019-2025⁵ has emphasized the special attention for education through culture, as well as has made efforts to create audio-guides, use of electronic tickets⁶, reduce prices for students and vulnerable categories to increase access in cultural sites and the opening of virtual tours, as well as the allocation of funds for digitalization. In this context, in cooperation with AADF, the establishment of digital centers for intangible cultural heritage is in progress. Also, the Ministry of Culture, to promote education through culture has launched calls for cultural project proposals, which in particular focus on the creation and use of digital cultural services.

The National Historical Museum in its program has components of education for information and also within the program of education through culture there are initiatives such as “Little Archaeologist”⁷, “My Museum”, “A day with the curator”, as well as “An afternoon in the museum”. In addition to these initiatives to promote education through culture, the NHM prepares the cultural almanac, organizes informative news on television, conducts presentations

⁵ <https://kultura.gov.al/programi-i-kultures-2019-2025/>

⁶ <http://cultureticketsalbania.al/>

⁷ <http://ww.mhk.gov.al/>

as well as publishes manuals and books. At the level of university open lectures are organized. In an effort to digitize services, NHM is working on creating audio-visual guides, as well as organizing various quizzes and competitions.

National Library of Albania has various functions and sectors, but the role of the Sector of Informatics and New Technologies is particularly important in terms of informing and bringing the public closer to the media and information, as it enables, orients and organizes the integration of information technology in the daily work of the National Library of Albania. Currently, the NLA database contains 447,336 library materials (books, articles, maps, manuscripts, etc.) that can be searched online and over 265,000 pages of books, magazines, manuscripts, antiques, maps that have already been digitized. and accessible online. Also, NLA is one of the institutions that currently has a consolidated annual strategy in terms of education and training of its staff, as well as the staff of the libraries of the national system in Information Training. Furthermore, this institution also offers opportunities for Information and Technology Training for children and young people, through a series of programs that it implements, which will be explained in more detail below. In 2014, NLA was involved in the European initiative to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the use of the term “Information Training” by organizing in the country the first scientific conference “Training in Information through New Communication Technologies”, as well as then paid attention not only to the publication of the conference proceedings, but also to the translation into Albanian of the basic international documents (manifestos/ declarations) on Information Training.

The Commission for Education and the Media (CEM) which is responsible for, among other things, education, culture, print and visual media, has recognized for years the need for media and information education. The current media situation in Albania, the spread of false news and conspiracies requires intervention and addressing. In these circumstances CEM is interested in initiatives that aim at improving the level of media and information education.

The Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) as the regulatory authority for audiovisual media and support services, has included in the Strategic Action Plan 2021-2023⁸ the objective 3 to emphasize a proactive approach to responsible audiovisual broadcasting, the planning and implementation of a number of activities that promote media education. This is in order to promote the ability of audiences to evaluate and understand audiovisual content, in an evolving media environment.

Although government and line ministries, other research and training institutions, as well as local ones play a key role in drafting MIL policies and legislation, the civil society sector has sought to influence and assist in some aspects of media and information literacy, such as training young people and citizens in the production of media materials, efforts to introduce media education and information as a separate subject in schools, and other efforts to develop critical thinking skills, especially among young people. Civil society is also engaged in projects aimed at creating opportunities for all citizens and communities in need to acquire the ability to produce media materials and to provide access to communication channels, as in the case of

⁸ AMA_STRATEGJIA_20212023.pdf

ethnic and linguistic minorities, LGBT community, Roma and Egyptian community, young people with less opportunities, etc.

However, there is still no official, formal strategy and policy that addresses MIL as a complex concept. Government and civil society are dealing with different issues and aspects, sometimes in cooperation with each other, but the different components and different approaches within MIL are still underdeveloped in terms of policies, strategies and implementation.

IV

OVERVIEW OF MIL IN ALBANIA

This study focuses on current MIL policies in Albania, in three aspects: formal education, non-formal and informal education.

4.1. MIL POLICIES IN FORMAL EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

The legal framework on pre-university education in Albania is mainly summarized in law 69, adopted in 2012 “On pre-university education in the Republic of Albania.” The main objective of this law is to define the basic principles on the structure, activities, and administration of the pre-university school system in Albania, trying to guarantee the constitutional right of all citizens to education.⁹ This law is mainly related to general education, while vocational education is covered by another specific law.

The Law on Pre-University Education gives the right and competence to the respective bodies to design the curricula, but on the other hand emphasizes the fact that the whole pre-university education system should be based on teaching

⁹ Law nr. 69/2012, “On Preuniversity Education,” Article 1.

and developing knowledge (competencies), identifying and defining the knowledge that every student should gain from pre-university education. Some competencies are related to EMI, and consequently it is thought that some knowledge or skills of media education and information are gained in this process.¹⁰

The competencies mentioned in the law are broad and do not provide details or clarifications on any particular element, but are presented as a list of basic knowledge and skills that every student must acquire from school before entering university education. The only knowledge, or skill specifically mentioned, is digital competence, which is directly related to media education and information. The use of new technologies and the acquisition of digital competencies by students is also emphasized in the Strategy for the Development of the Pre-University Education System 2014-2020.

The chapter outlining the visions, principles and priorities of government policies on pre-university education states that “the progressive implementation of this vision will create conditions and opportunities for students ... to use new technologies,” among others¹¹. Some of the elements and methods needed to achieve this goal are related to the improvement of technological infrastructure in schools,

¹⁰ More specifically, the core competencies mentioned in the legislation include: communication and expression; thoughts and thinking; understanding; competencies for life, private enterprise and environment; personal skills; civic skills; and digital competencies. Also, the additions to the law in 2015 include among the goals of the pre-university education system the teaching of students with the use of new technologies.

¹¹ This is a point where emphasis has been placed on the previous strategy on education, for the years 2009-2013. One of the priorities of the previous strategy is to include ICT extensively in curricula, in the use of ICT by students and to improve their chances in the labor market.

the use of multimedia materials for teaching curricula, the establishment of mobile laboratories for schools, as well as the inclusion of ICT in various educational programs.

In addition to the law and strategy on pre-university education, more specific guidelines and orientations are also provided by the core curriculum, which is the main document for the orientation and design of curricula and subjects. The core curriculum itself is based on the Curriculum Framework. The Curriculum Framework defines digital competence as “the critical and effective use of ICT at work, in leisure time and in communication. It relies on the basic skills of using a computer to find, produce, create, present and exchange information, as well as to collaborate on online information networks.”¹²

The Curriculum Framework considers technology and ICT as one of the main areas of learning and in order to advance rapidly in this area recommends its integration and extension to all areas of learning to some degree, gradually, across all cycles of the pre-university school system. Based on the curricular framework, the core curriculum is also designed to include digital knowledge or competences in the list of key skills to be acquired by students, as well as ICT and new technologies¹³, as one of the seven key areas of learning.

In addition to ICT, which is a separate subject, there are elements of other lessons related to finding, evaluating and interpreting text in the media, combined with developing the ability to think critically. In particular, this concerns the subject of Albanian language and communication, as well as the subjects of civic education, which are part of the core

¹² Ibid

¹³ Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020

curriculum, which make it a compulsory subject. Thus, the curriculum for the subject of Albanian language and communication for grades 1-6, mentions as one of the main objectives “searching, finding, evaluating and critical use of information from the media and the Internet.” Likewise, the civic education subject curriculum lists among the knowledge and skills that should be acquired by students’ elements related to MIL.¹⁴

Although media and information literacy is not mentioned as a competency and is not ranked among the key knowledge and skills to be acquired by students in the pre-university school system, specific elements of some subjects relate to some components of education and media familiarity. such as the evaluation of information, access to information, as well as the creation of media content and the distribution of materials through communication channels.

Within this project, the draft MIL curriculum for pre-university teachers has been drafted in cooperation with the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP). The curriculum is based on the competencies of UNESCO and will become part of the official curriculum in the cycle of pre-university education, which will be piloted initially in 20 schools, primary and secondary, in Tirana, Durrës, Lezha and Elbasan, in rural and urban areas. This will be the first integrated curriculum for MIL in formal education in Albania.

¹⁴ The current strategy of the pre-university school system acknowledges that “despite the investments made, the use of ICT in educational institutions is limited. Publicly funded equipment is, for the most part, not being used properly or is obsolete. Of the public basic education schools, 15,731 personal computers are reported, of which only 11,331 are functional. Schools report 1,631 laptops, of which 432 are out of order.

The curriculum framework explains a framework for developing a study program about media and information literacy and through different levels of involvement in the field of media and information channels. Competencies determine the knowledge, skills and attitudes that this curriculum is expected to develop. Based on the recommendations of the UNESCO expert group on media and information literacy, and the modules developed to accompany the curriculum framework, three main interrelated thematic areas were outlined, such as broad curricular areas in which include the curriculum for media education and information for teachers. They are: 1) Knowledge and understanding of the media and information on democratic dialogue and social participation; 2) Evaluation of media texts and information sources; 3) Production and use of media and information systems.

The draft curriculum was presented to 9-year-old and high school teachers, who were selected to be part of the piloting phase, to review and provide feedback which was then reflected on the curricula. During December 2020, the second round of workshops were held with the same teachers to collect their concrete comments and suggestions regarding the draft curriculum, which will be integrated according to their relevance.

ICT SUBJECT DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS

The introduction of ICT in schools and the improvement of infrastructure for this subject has been a priority of governments in recent years. However, the development of ICT in schools has encountered several problems, for various reasons and factors. First of all, the age gap between teachers and students makes the latter more favored in

terms of technological knowledge and skills. Second, the technical infrastructure needed to develop the ICT subject has somewhat improved, but much remains to be done in this regard. Third, the ICT subject is relatively new to teachers and consequently they face the challenges of learning a new subject for their students, who often have more advanced knowledge and skills than the teachers themselves in this field.

According to the pre-university education strategy, currently teachers have to be trained for 18 hours each year.¹⁵ However, experience has shown that so far ICT training has been insufficient.

Often this course is given by teachers who have received only a short training in this field and have graduated in other branches, such as physics or mathematics, and take this course more as a way to complete the lessons they have to complete during the week. Shortcomings in formal teacher training have not been compensated by any initiative of the non-governmental sector, both in the field of ICT and media education and information.

In this regard, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education has issued curricular instructions¹⁶ for teachers on teaching ICT, presenting models or formats to integrate ICT knowledge in other subjects, such as language, science, history, etc. This material encourages teachers to use various technological tools to communicate with their students and to develop the subject, such as websites, blogs, chats, forums, etc., promoting more interactive methods. The guidelines also refer to the UNESCO ICT standards on the level of knowledge that a teacher should possess

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ <https://ascap.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/TIK-3.pdf>

within the professional competencies and knowledge on technology for as long as they teach this subject.

In addition to the above challenges facing the education system in Albania, the year 2020 further aggravated the situation, where due to the conditions dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching in pre-university schools and universities was interrupted and switched online. To respond to the new conditions, which found the schools unprepared for online learning, the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Albanian Public Radio and Television created the RTSH-School television space, which enabled students to watch learn through, a service that still continues to be active. In addition to RTSH school, another initiative that was supported by the Ministry of Education was the platform akademi.al, a newly created platform that offers recorded lessons, similar to those broadcasted on RTSH. On the other hand, an advanced and quite consolidated platform in the provision of online educational services is schoolme.education, which offers the 9th grade curriculum presented audio-visually, through animations. This private platform has been piloted in 35 schools in Albania, but is also in use in several libraries (Shkodër, Tirana, Korçë) and also provides training for teachers to use the platform in the most effective way possible during the teaching process. Universities, on the other hand, used the Zoom, Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams platforms to continue the program with students. The pandemic highlighted and stressed once again the need for educational institutions to develop capacities related to the use of technology for a better learning and teaching experience.

MIL IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION LEVEL

In the framework of academic programs at the university level there is no subject that offers special training related to the complex concept of MIL, but in different departments of the faculties of education, journalism and social sciences students receive a general training in communication, journalism, etc.

Here we mention for example, the Department of Journalism and Communication at the Faculty of History-Philology / UT which forms students in art and culture journalism, political journalism, economic journalism and general journalism. According to the head of the department, these curricula are flexible and with a primary focus on journalism.

The Master of Science in Communication for Social and Behavior Change program, offered by the Department of Social Work and Social Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences / UT has a curriculum that includes media education, audience research and mass media use for social activism and positive change in society, thus combining elements of information, media, communication and active citizenship.

Aleksandër Moisiu University, Durrës offers the program “Multimedia and Digital Television” at the Bachelor level. The program aims to educate students about multimedia productions, providing competencies to work on production and post-production tasks in the field of digital multimedia and television that are needed to meet the needs of the public and private sector needed for dynamic development of technologies in the field of multimedia. This program offers specialization on multimedia technologies and digital television combining contemporary knowledge with theoretical and practical studies based on many years of experience in this field.

Aleksandër Xhuvani University regarding media education emphasizes the promotion of critical thinking, as well as the improvement of skills to produce audiovisual content that conveys messages.

Bedër University has focused on MIL curriculum reform, theoretical approach and practical orientation focusing on investigative journalism. But it also offers programs for multimedia training and graphic design of students, as well as programs in marketing communication, some of those courses are closely related to the concepts of MIL (creativity strategy, multimedia applications, digital marketing, etc.).

Although university curricula have a well-defined focus that leans from journalism to communication, in the long run it is necessary for MIL policies to include media education and information in universities. This should be done through interventions that treat MIL as a complex and interdisciplinary concept so as not to leave behind those students who are already in the auditorium, some of whom after graduation will be pre-university education teachers. ***MIL interventions at the university level should be planned at three levels: 1) operational (including promotion, awareness 2) analytical (critical thinking, analytical skills, verification of sources, response to fake news and propaganda, etc.) and 3) creative (developing the ability to create content as well as publish it).***

GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES ON ICT AND MIL

The main document that discloses government policies on the information society is the Digital Agenda Strategy (2015-2020), which follows the Inter-Sectorial Strategy of the Information Society (2008-2013.) This strategy adopted

in 2008 identified the need to introduce ICT as a subject in schools, but also the need to inform the general public about ways to find and use information as efficiently as possible, at a time when the population's access to the Internet was increasing significantly¹⁷.

“Measures taken to introduce ICT education in the education system must be accompanied by education plans for the general population that in one way or another will become users of information or electronic services.”¹⁸ The Digital Agenda strategy acknowledges the fact that despite developments and some improvement in the situation, there is still much to be done about the field of ICT in the education system.

The government program of 2013 mentioned the media as one of the priority areas, referring to freedom of the press, the operation of public radio and television, independent regulatory authorities and the right to information, but did not mention media education and information. Other policies and strategies on gender, protection against discrimination, or strategies on youth do not envisage MIL as a means of empowering citizens and especially at-risk groups. The only reference in this regard is to the use of the media for public awareness campaigns against domestic violence, gender equality issues, discrimination, etc.

4.2 MIL IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The education system and core curricula do not specifically focus on media education and information.

¹⁷ Cross-cutting Strategy for the Information Society (2008-2013).

¹⁸ *ibid*

ICT is part of the curriculum, but the emphasis is more on the advantages of using new technology and not on the knowledge and skills to analyze and evaluate the information obtained through these technologies. Given this fact, some civil society organizations have tried to take initiatives to fill this gap.

The Albanian Media Institute (AMI) launched in 2010 a project to gather and exchange regional experiences regarding media education initiatives and possible ways to incorporate these elements into educational programs. Two textbooks have been drafted that can be used by teachers for this purpose, but media awareness was not formally included in the core curriculum. There were no further steps towards non-formal education, such as extra-curricular training, teacher training, etc. However, the Institute has continued to publish books and manuals on media education and information, the most recent of which was “Journalism, False News and Disinformation”¹⁹ (2020).

Since 2018, AMI has implemented a project that focuses on the development of various components of MIL, such as: building a coalition of governmental, non-governmental and media actors to develop policies for MIL, capacity building of non-governmental organization in the field of MIL, public awareness of the role of the media and elements of MIL through campaigns with journalists on social media and in primary and secondary schools, etc. AMI has also supported eight civil society organizations to develop their projects and capacities in the field of MIL, through a small grant scheme. Also, several manuals related to MIL have been published

¹⁹ <http://www.institutemedia.org/2020/10/30/new-publication-journalism-fake-news-disinformation-handbook-for-journalism-education-and-training/>

as supporting materials for teachers and journalists, but also publications related to the types of misinformation and how to distinguish fake news or misinformation. AMI also conducts training courses for journalism students and young journalists, to improve their digital technology skills, especially related to online information verification.

A similar commitment has been made by the **Active Media Center**, which has been involved in training young people to create media content, teaching them professional norms and technical skills. The Soros Foundation has also organized the project “Rrathë (Circles)”, inviting young people to produce documentaries on social issues.

From 2016 until today, several other organizations have contributed in the field of media and information education, although these contributions have been within specific projects and do not have a continuity in the long run.

More specifically, one of these organizations is **the Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture (IDMC)**, which part of its mission is to support young people in relation to media education. In this regard, IDMC has drafted several manuals, such as “Oral History Manual”, “Manual for Media Literacy at School”, “COVID-19: Propaganda Manual”, but has also developed trainings and competitions that strive to develop the skills of young people in creating media content.

Other organizations, mainly those focused on child protection and care, are committed to protecting children online, creating an alliance and a national platform for child safety online, with the cooperation of Albanian government institutions - on the safe browsing (www.isigurt.al). The main purpose of this initiative is to protect children from

abuse, but it is necessary to explain to them further how to use the media and information safely but effectively.

The Center for the Rights of the Child (CRCA) in two recently implemented projects has also had components of education and media production, where they themselves have been producers of written and/or audiovisual content. **The Observatory for Youth and Children's Rights**, in relation to MIL, has conducted a study on "The ethics of music videos and their impact on adolescents."²⁰

The National Association for Life Education (NALE) with the support of UNICEF is offering digital education courses, with a focus on increasing the ability of children from marginalized communities to use technology and the Internet, while being safe online. The product of this initiative will be the design of a special curriculum for digital education of children.

ABC Tirana Club Center - a student initiative that aims to revive life and youth activism through media education and information of this target group. In this regard, the center has implemented an EU-funded project "Critical understanding and evaluation of media content by students", in order to encourage critical thinking on what they read, watch, listen, etc., to understand and select that content which are unfounded.

HANA Center (Hand in Hand Against Nation Apathy), a youth organization that operates in the city of Lezha is

²⁰ <https://observator.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Raporti-final-anglisht-5.12.2019.pdf>

developing the course “Storytelling and multimedia”, where young people are given the opportunity to be trained on MIL issues and then develop their critical thinking skills, but also to be “citizen-journalists” contributing actively by creating content to express personal and community thoughts and needs.

The media organization “**Faktoje.al**” deals with civic education mainly on the law on the right to information, verification of facts, education on the distinction and avoidance of propaganda, as well as awareness campaigns for disinformation, false news and propaganda. It specifically trains journalism students, but also focuses on young people and the general public. The ways in which Faktoje.al promotes media creativity and critical thinking is through blogging, studies and the provision of a reporting space by citizens.

With a focus on journalism, the **Albanian Center for Quality Journalism** provides education and training for journalists and journalism students on fake news, freedom of expression, access to media by marginalized groups, multimedia and mobile journalism. One of their projects is MOJO Albania: Mobile Journalism as a method for innovation that aims to increase the capacity of journalists and journalism students in the field of mobile journalism and news production through these contemporary methods.

On the other hand, special attention continues to be given to digital education and training, mainly with a special focus on information and communication technology. Thus, training is provided for children and young people in the field of coding, programming, robotics and artificial

intelligence. Programs in this regard are “Coding for Albania” and “Coding Hour” implemented by Alpha Plan for students from grades 6-9; Smart-Gigs (for children 7-13 years old); Bibliotech- the initiative of the Municipality of Tirana and UNICEF to transform the libraries of 4 schools in Tirana into incubators for the development of children’s digital skills (digital literacy) and programs offered by the American Embassy, through the American Corner Centers - which offer daily educational, and cultural programs for different age groups, as well as technology and innovation classes, clubs (Reading Club, Children’s Club, Drama Club, Book Club); movie screening / Movie Hour, etc .; TUMO Center, the center for creative education recently inaugurated in Tirana offers programs for children 12-18 years old in 8 main areas: coding, programming, graphic design, filmmaking, music, games, robotics, 3D modeling. The focus of these programs is to foster critical thinking, enhance research and problem-solving skills.

In addition to MIL projects at the local or national level, efforts are also being made at the regional level, by international actors. It is worth mentioning here the Balkan Voices Project, a two-year project (2020-2022), which is implemented by Canal France International (CFI), the French media development agency of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. Through this project implemented in six Balkan countries, the aim is to encourage critical thinking among high school youth, as well as the ability to produce digital, audiovisual content, resource checking competencies, identifying influencers and developing branches of the arts, etc.

Unlike Balkan Voices, which targets young people, the regional project **“Media for Citizens - Citizens for Media”**

funded by the European Union and implemented in Albania by the Albanian Media Institute will continue until 2021 and has at its core the development of skills and the capacity of civil society organizations to improve Media and Information Education in the Western Balkans. In this regard, the project has supported several short-term initiatives that contribute to this goal.

UNICEF on the other hand, in cooperation with ICT Labs are implementing in Albania the PONDER youth social program, which aims to promote the ability of young people aged 14-21 to think critically, especially in relation to information received from all types of media. Ponder is realized through a curriculum which contains: lectures, games and interactive exercises. Promotes the ability to think critically about information received in the media. Improves critical media literacy skills through continuous mentoring. Enables understanding and challenging subjective information. Part of the Ponder curriculum is: critical use of MIL; diversity of media, positions and experiences, image reading as well as growth through critical media thinking and information.

Four years after the launch of this basic study, it is noticed that the need for media education and information has been recognized and has begun to attract the attention of various actors. The fact that there are initiatives, although sporadic and short-term, is a positive indicator in this regard. Although initiatives are present, the lack of strong community-level organizations and associations in the fields of education, media, and information has hindered the further development of non-formal education in the field of MIL. The initiatives and contribution given to MIL in non-formal education is short-term, sporadic and

uncoordinated between the main actors. These initiatives are mainly focused on journalism, multimedia creativity, digital education for children and young people, but there is still no holistic approach to MIL as defined by UNESCO.

THE CODE OF ETHICS AND THE COUNCIL OF COMPLAINTS

The first Code of Ethics was first drafted in 1996 by the Albanian Media Institute in collaboration with the two largest journalism associations at the time, but there was no official approval or adoption of this Code. In another effort in 2006, the Code of Ethics was improved and updated with the joint efforts of the Albanian Media Institute and a group of media experts. Also, the possibility of creating a self-regulatory instrument or institution was analyzed, based on the models used by other countries. At that time, the opinion of the owners of the main media in the country, editors, media experts and journalists was taken. Although the majority agreed in principle, the main media actors in the country were reluctant to support the establishment of self-regulatory mechanisms that should oversee the implementation of the Code's rules and make decisions that would be respected by all media outlets.

The code was reviewed again in 2018 by a group of experts under the leadership of the Albanian Media Institute, and some guidelines were drafted regarding ethical behavior in online media. The new Code of Ethics defines the rights and obligations of journalists in their daily work and presents the view on the role that the press and free journalism should play in society. This code has a similar approach to the ethical regulations of other countries in terms of issues it considers, such as accuracy in reporting, separation of

fact from opinions, respect for minors, victims and people in need, protection of editorial independence, service to the public interest, respect for the principle of innocence without being found guilty, the right of reply and refutation, clear separation of editorial content from advertising, respect for privacy, respect for copyright, etc.

In 2017, the Albanian Media Institute brought together a group of experts to review the Code and draft Ethical Guidelines for Online Journalism. Both of these documents went through a consultation process with the media community. In addition to the Code of Ethics, regulations or guidelines have been drafted for specific sectors of journalism, such as investigative journalism, reporting on victims of trafficking, reporting on minors, reporting on groups in need, reporting on elections, etc. Even in these cases, the implementation of ethical rules is on the hands of journalists and their conscience and no penalties are imposed for violations.

The establishment of the Media Council in 2015 by a group of journalists was supported by the Council of Europe. Its purpose was to improve professional standards in journalism through compliance with the rules of the Code of Ethics. So far this council has opened its office and has elected a board that reviews public complaints.

There is also a complaints council at the regulator, the Audiovisual Media Authority, which reviews complaints from public institutions, NGOs and citizens, which so far have mainly been about juvenile reporting and human dignity violations. Complaints can be found published in the Complaints Bulletin on the official website of the AMA. The fact that complaints continue and are sent by various entities regarding television programs and their content that violate ethical rules and broadcast code, is an indication

that the complaints council has been and continues to be necessary to give a voice to citizens in this regard, as well as to increase the responsibility for compliance with the rules by operators of broadcasting. Although, its impact on media self-regulation in the country is not yet reflected and it will still take time.

PRIVATE SECTOR AND MIL

The private sector has contributed in recent years to the education system in the field of media and information education. In 2016, the Ministry of Innovation, in cooperation with ALMOOC, the Albanian Coding Hour Platform, implemented a pilot project of a curriculum that included basic coding knowledge, in a Microsoft-sponsored initiative. The project created an online educational platform “that collaborates with distinguished professors from the Albanian world to offer online classes to everyone for free.”²¹ Courses taught in online classes include subjects taught in schools: English, Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry, as well as Coding and ICT as vocational subjects.

The Schoolme.education platform²², established in 2014, offers the digitization of textbooks for grades 1-9 and has been piloted in 35 schools in Albania. Through this platform, by subscribing for a symbolic fee, students, parents and teachers can log in to the website and attend subject programs, according to the respective classes. The texts on which SchoolMe supports the work are those officially approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In terms of the way how these lessons are presented, through

²¹ <http://almooc.com/rreth-nesh>

²² <https://www.schoolme.education/landing/>

animations, this platform has brought an innovation in Albanian education.

Akademi.al²³, established at the end of 2019 was supported by MEYS by introducing itself as the official partner for providing online services in response to the situation created by the pandemic. The services that this newly created platform offers are the transmission on the website of the audiovisual lessons recorded by the teachers of the respective subject in the traditional teaching model. Their materials are accessed from the platform and on Youtube and contain pre-university cycle courses (primary and secondary) that are offered free of charge after registering on the platform.

4.3. MIL IN INFORMAL EDUCATION

Informal education is learning in everyday life, in the family, in the workplace, in the community, as well as from the interests and activities of individuals²⁴. However, it is difficult to talk about the importance of informal education and the importance of educating the population about media and information without first determining whether there is a sound basis for free and abundant access to the media, as well as information conductors.

Albanian legislation has special laws that guarantee freedom of expression, such as the Press Law and the Law on Audiovisual Media.

In 2012, Albania carried out a general reform of defamation laws in the criminal and civil plan, bringing

²³ <https://www.akademi.al/>

²⁴ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002163/216360e.pdf>

them much closer to European democratic standards. Sources of information enjoy protection and journalists are not obliged by law to disclose confidential sources. A new law on access to information was approved in 2014 and it is considered one of the best in the region.

The law on e-commerce was last amended in 2013, while three years later there were proposals for changes in the legislation on online activities (e-commerce), which could affect the functioning of media outlets and interaction with users, but these amendments are still under discussion. Legislation generally guarantees freedom of expression, including freedom of the media, to a satisfactory level.

In recent years there have been several attempts to pass a law on online media given the numerous complaints regarding ethics violations.²⁵ After a long debated process, parliament passed such a law in late 2019, but it faced strong opposition from media organizations and human rights groups. The President of Albania returned for change in the parliament the law with the reasoning that it contradicts the basic constitutional principles of building a democratic state, legal security and proportionality. There were criticisms that the law gave the regulatory body almost judicial powers to impose sanctions on media outlets, implying that Albania had a sufficient legal basis to resolve cases where media outlets violated the rights of others. In this context, there are precedents for adjudicating such cases in Albanian courts²⁶. In response to these objections and criticisms of the law by international

²⁵ Albanian Media Institute (2016). "Legislation on online media and self-regulation"

²⁶ <http://www.institutemedia.org/2020/01/11/international-and-albanian-media-freedom-organizations-stronglycriticize-the-two-draft-laws-on-online-media/>

organizations, the Council of Europe decided to obtain the opinion of the Venice Commission on this law²⁷. The final opinion of the Commission, published in June 2020, stated that the changes in the legislation “cannot be adopted in their current form. The law suffers from ambiguity and will have a negative effect, restricting freedom of discussion and political speech in the Albanian media internet sector.”²⁸

PRESENCE OF MEDIA BODIES AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Albanian citizens have access to a large number of media outlets. There is still no official data on the number of printed copies, or on the number of copies circulating. Currently, there are more than 150 daily newspapers, both of a general nature and with thematic content, such as sports newspapers.

Law No. 9472 on Digital Broadcasting in the Republic of Albania, adopted in 2007, together with the Strategy²⁹, aimed to address issues related to accessibility and affordability in the context of the transition to digital broadcasting. The law specifies that operators must use universal decoders that give subscribers access to all programs free of charge³⁰. The Digital Broadcasting Strategy, the official document that guided the digital switchover, was approved only in 2012.

²⁷ <https://a2news.com/2020/01/22/paketa-antishpifje-kie-con-draftin-ne-venecia-ps-rrezon-presidentin/>

²⁸ [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2020\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2020)013-e)

²⁹ Strategjia e Kalimit nga Transmetimet Analoge në Transmetimet Numerike (2012)

³⁰ OSFA (2012) Zhvillimi i Medias Dixhitale: Shqipëria. Raporti për Shqipërinë. Faqe 77

During this time, a private digital platform was opened and closed, while two other commercial platforms continuing to operate. Given these developments and faced with pressure from existing digital platforms seeking to protect their investments, the Strategy stipulated that licenses for national digital networks would be distributed under 'beauty contest' procedures, meaning that they would compete existing platforms and those electronic media that were considered as experienced operators. The transition to digital broadcasting in Albania is underway and the Strategy has assigned to the public radio and television the task of building two national digital platforms, part of which will serve private radios and television³¹.

In general, the flow of information from both traditional sources of information and online sites, results in a rich variety of sources of information and access to these sources is unlimited, while prices are generally considered cheap and affordable. According to the electronic communications regulator, the level of internet penetration at the end of 2019 was 75 percent³². Likewise, Albanians are regular users of social networks, especially Facebook, with about 1.4 million pages, or a spread rate of 49 percent, by the end of January 2020.³³

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES ON INFORMATION EDUCATION

Libraries can play an important role in the field of media and information literacy. However, their role and mission should be reconsidered in relation to the process

³¹ Instituti Shqiptar i Medias (2018).

³² <https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#al>

³³ *ibid*

of digitization of new information and services that can be provided in this regard, to adapt as much as possible to the new needs of citizens in the digital age.

According to the legislation, libraries are part of the national information system. The law considers them as cultural and informational institutions that provide access to information, in whatever form it is deposited³⁴. The national library network consists of all the libraries in the country. The Ministry of Culture drafts and monitors the implementation of development strategy and policies in the field of libraries.

The main institution in the field of libraries is the National Library of Albania³⁵, established in 1920, in Tirana. The library has many functions and sectors, but the role of the Informatics and New Technologies Sector is especially important in terms of informing and bringing the public closer to the media and information, as it enables, guides and organizes the integration of information technology in daily work of the National Library of Albania. The NLA database contains 447,336 library materials (books, articles, maps, manuscripts, etc.) that can be searched online and over 265,000 pages of books, magazines, manuscripts, antiques, maps, which are already digitized and accessible online. From March 2020, users request for membership in NLA and user requests for use of library materials within its

³⁴ In addition to the National Library of Albania, the legislation also regulates the functioning of public libraries, which are administratively dependent on the central or local government, and professionally from the National Library of Albania. The national library system includes 105 libraries (55 in the capital and 50 in other cities in the country). They include: National Library, public libraries, university libraries (state and private), special libraries (Parliament Library, Library of the Academy of Sciences, etc.).

³⁵ <https://www.bksh.al/>

premises are offered through the portal e-e-Albania, thus facilitating the process of membership of readers, as well as for making requests for study of materials in the hall in the distance.

In addition to collecting, storing, processing and making available to the public publications in Albanian or foreign languages, creating manual and electronic catalogs, compiling bibliographies, etc., the National Library of Albania also plays the role of the Library Training Center, training all library staff in the country.

Also, the National Library of Albania has “Information Training Programs” that target students, pupils, children and other users of different categories. For students, this training includes knowledge on the use of: online resources, OPAC (simple / advanced search, etc.), e-bibliographies, Digital Library, as well as their orientation in scientific and bibliographic research. While Training in Information for children is done through the initiatives “Friends of the Book” and “Education through culture”, where children are taught step by step how to act to register in the library, to request information to meet the requirements of school, etc. The Art Club and Young Readers are included in the Information Training module for children aged 6-10. Special attention is paid to the training of children in the use of technological devices (amazon kindle, ipad, computer, tablet), which distinguishes the technology club for girls aged 13-17 who create applications to contribute to solving social problems (FindVoice) or the Club of the Book for girls aged 16-20 years. While, the module for high school students, focuses on their ability to recognize library collections, use of electronic catalogs / manuals, orientation to find school literature on the web, reference sources, etc.

The National Library of Albania with its Information Training programs addresses all age groups; has consistency in providing these trainings, and has already consolidated the institutional strategy for Information Training by playing a key role in this regard.

The National Bibliography Sector - part of the structure of the National Library of Albania - is the only bibliographic center in the whole country. Since 1961, it publishes every month the bibliography of articles of the Albanian periodical, which describes the main articles of the press that is published within the territory of the Republic of Albania, also online. In recent years, the National Library of Albania has worked for the digitization and online publication of antiquarian books, manuscripts, maps, important periodicals starting from the beginnings of the Albanian press, works of authors of tradition, etc. The National Library of Albania also organizes the National Library School for the entire national library system, whose program also includes elements of education for media and information.³⁶

In order to stimulate interest in reading books, especially among young people, various organizations and government institutions have launched a number of projects for this purpose. Albania Reads is one of the first and main projects in this regard created by UNICEF, in cooperation with other private and state entities, in order to open new libraries, or enrich the book fund in educational institutions before -university across the country.

The Ministry of Culture has organized, in cooperation with publishing houses and public figures, activities to promote the reading of books by young people, such as

³⁶ The curriculum includes subjects such as: Information Organization, ICT, Digital Library, Library Services for the Public.

the “Meet for a Book” campaign, holding public readings and open discussions with well-known personalities; the “I read my city” campaign, enabling students to learn new things about their city through reading books; the “Read, to read” campaign, which deals with meetings between Albanian artists and high school students to talk about the book; etc. Another project is the “Library Revitalization”, through which this ministry has donated 1,200 books to six libraries in the capital. Also, the Ministry of Culture supports projects with cultural focus, but which have in essence its digitalization and use for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

In 2019, the National Book and Reading Center (NLCL) was established with the mission of following and implementing projects in the field of books, according to the governing program of the ministry responsible for books, aiming to spread the culture of reading throughout the country, promoting of creativity, strengthening the promotional and educational role of libraries and supporting projects for the promotion of Albanian letters in the European and world market.³⁷ From this center are organized activities and competitions that promote reading and literary and artistic creativity, such as “Book of Quarantine”, etc.

THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES IN INFORMATION EDUCATION

Albanian legislation recognizes and regulates the functioning of public and private museums. Public museums may be under the supervision and administration of the Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Sciences, other public

³⁷ <https://qkll.gov.al/rreth-qkll/vendimi-i-krijimit/>

institutions, and local governments. Although the law allows for the donation of funds or donations for museum sponsorship, representatives of museum administrators say that almost all public museums suffer from chronic lack of funding.³⁸

There are several public archives in the country, the largest of which is the Central State Archive, while other archives belong to special institutions, such as the Assembly, various ministries, court archives, etc. By law, the information stored in these archives is open to the public, without any discrimination, and without the need to present any reason for obtaining the information.³⁹

Although in principle the information stored in these archives is given to the public as required, in full compliance with the law, a pro-active approach to providing services digitally has recently come to life, so the Central State Archive⁴⁰ has introduced the electronic card. of users, as well as has digitized 130 thousand photos and 12 thousand books in the state archive. Services offered online for researchers currently include Catalog, Photo Library, Library, the ability to make social-legal requests online, as well as the option to request a document restoration⁴¹, as well as the Virtual

³⁸ In recent years the government has invested in renovating old museums (eg the Museum of Medieval Art in Korça) or co-financing the creation of new museums (eg the Marubi Museum of Photography in Shkodra.) As a result of general social debate and the tendency to revisit history, as well as the need to discover the truth about the communist regime, new museums about life under dictatorship have opened, and others are in the process of opening (e.g. two museums Bunkart.) By law, museums must offer low prices for specific categories of people, while admission to schools is usually free.

³⁹ <https://arkiva.gov.al/>

⁴⁰ <https://arkiva.gov.al/>

⁴¹ <https://restaurim.arkiva.gov.al/>

Museum. AQSH in cooperation with various media has prepared short reports aimed at informing the public on how they can access online and physical archive services.

Undoubtedly this is a positive step, but much remains to be done, as the digitization of archives continues to be a serious problem, especially for old films and old Public Radio and Television materials, whose archive has declined in quality over the years, sometimes endangering even the very materials it has to preserve. The State Film Archive has started to gradually digitize and improve the quality of old films and currently some of them can be found online on the Archive website. Despite the challenges that archives face in the digitalization process, they remain a key institution that should be included in the MIL strategy in Albania for the totality of information they possess and the access they should provide to the public and researchers.

The National Center of Cinematography (NCC) faces serious problems in the distribution of Albanian film as well as the lack of a cinema network. In this regard, although with limited funds, the NCC has financed the revitalization of cinemas in Vlora and Gjirokastra. In the field of production, this center supports the production of documentaries, feature films and cartoons, however another problem after their production remains access to the public. Here, the cooperation with televisions and the obligation to broadcast Albanian films is important, as a way to guarantee their access to the public. Currently in the education system there is no proper education on films. The NCC requests that the MIL strategy include specific topics on film education. The center has realized publications such as "How to read a movie" and has held competitions with schools. At the same time, it supported the projects for the realization of 13 graduation films for the students of the University of Arts.

As part of the university pact, the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation has supported the project for the establishment of the “Film and TV Directing Laboratory” of the University of Arts, which aims to fill the laboratories with the necessary infrastructure to address the teaching and creative process, finalized with film products.

From the research done and the information gathered from the interviews, it results that the informal media and information literacy is carried out by the National Library of Albania, the National Book and Reading Center, the National Historical Museum, the Central State Archive, the Complaints Council, etc. These institutions focus on access to information, provision of digital services, as well as promoting reading and increasing the number of attendees in the respective institutions, thus contributing to some elements of the holistic approach of MIL.

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES ON MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY IN ALBANIA

Albania is still lagging behind in the field of policy development, strategies and their implementation in the field of media and information literacy. Although some parties and actors have tried to deal seriously with specific aspects of media education and information, this process is still in its infancy, and has encountered serious obstacles, such as education reforms, low level of teacher training, modest initiatives by NGOs in this field, lack of strong professional associations and community organizations, etc. However, the sooner the concept of media education and information is included in official curricula, or other initiatives, the better it will be for Albanian citizens,

especially now in an era of rapid change in the world of information and technology.

Based on the Albanian context and the analysis of the situation regarding media and information literacy in Albania, and following the UNESCO conceptual strategy for media education and information, several strategies and objectives can be proposed to develop further policies and strategies related to media education and information in formal education. These proposals will be discussed in consultations at the national level and then final recommendations will be reached.

V

MIL POLICY OBJECTIVES

- Give priority to MIL in formal, non-formal and informal education in order to guarantee the sustainability and creation of a culture for media and information.
- University-level MIL programs should provide specific education and continuing education to improve media and information literacy among young students and professionals.
- MIL programs at pre-university level should provide specific education and continuing training to improve media and information literacy among teachers and students.
- MIL programs should be designed in such a way as to enable the widest possible involvement of citizens in this process (regardless of age, level of education, gender, employment status) by improving their relations with the media and information, as well as helping the crystallization of critical thinking about them.
- MIL programs to promote the improvement of media professionalism and the creation of self-regulatory bodies that will assist in the process of educating citizens about media and information.

- MIL programs will promote the values of media, archives, libraries, museums and other information conductors to improve social inclusion, anti-discrimination policies, and lack of development in areas with limited economic opportunities.

VI

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DRAFTING THE NATIONAL STRATEGY ON MIL

The following are a series of strategic recommendations that address Media Education and Information at three levels of education, formal, non-formal and informal. The recommendations were made taking into account the current needs of our country regarding EMI, but also reflect the suggestions collected from the main actors who were interviewed and participated in the national consultation meetings.

1. Strategic recommendations for MIL in formal education (at pre-university and university level)

Recommendations for MIL interventions in the formal education system include increasing the capacity of students and teachers in relation to MIL for the pre-university cycle, as well as increasing the MIL knowledge and competencies of students and teaching staff for the university cycle. The basic intervention suggested is the integration of the MIL curriculum in both educational cycles.

Goal:			
<i>Increasing the capacities of pupils / students and teachers / pedagogues in Media Education and Information through the curriculum integrated in the formal education system in the pre-university and university education</i>			
Stakeholders:			
<i>Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Culture, ASCAP, pre-university education schools and high schools; Research institutions; Public and private universities</i>			
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Formulation of an official strategy and respective policies that address MIL as a broad concept and guarantee the implementation of the strategy and policies	Training of trainers on EMI and curricula to guide the curriculum editing process.	Development of curricula and guidelines for professionals, according to the MIL model curriculum published by UNESCO and other similar institutions.
	Design of MIL pilot curriculum suitable for pre-university teachers and pedagogical staff of the university level.	Support for MIL training for research staff in higher education and research institutions.	Providing opportunities for continuing education for teachers and educators who will be responsible for the implementation of the MIL curriculum.
	Review and adapt curricula in first, second, and higher education to include MIL components.	Integration of MIL in extra-curricular activities in schools to complement the knowledge gained in the classroom in formal education. For example MIL groups; installation of a small radio station in the library; youth training programs in media and libraries.	Designing university curricula with practical orientation, and planning EMI interventions at three levels: 1) operational, 2) analytical, 3) creative
	Raising awareness of policy makers and researchers about MIL		
	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; educational institutions, NGOs / CSOs, Commission for Education and Media, AMA etc.		
	Research support, seminars and conferences to bring together stakeholders from different professions and sectors.	Enabling online training of policy makers on media and information education.	Creating a safe environment where children and students can make choices as media consumers, which will help them in the development of their MIL awareness.

2. Recommendations for MIL at informal and non-formal level

At the level of informal and non-formal education it is suggested to create a synergy between national and international initiatives and actors that are contributing to the progress of MIL in Albania. Also, a comprehensive approach is needed that targets all age groups in society (not only young people, but also adults, parents, the community as a whole) regardless of social, educational or employment status. The creation of massive courses accessible to all, in the Albanian language is a specific recommendation that contributes to the achievement of MIL capacities on a large scale.

Increasing the EMI capacities of all social groups through informal and non-formal education.			
CSOs, international organizations (UNICEF, CFI, UNDP, etc.), public and school libraries, media organizations, AMA, etc.			
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	Promoting informal and non-formal activities and initiatives by NGOs and the private sector on educating all age groups for media and information.	Support for the establishment of teacher associations or similar organizations working with EMI initiatives.	
	Awareness about media education and information among media professionals and the general public		
	CSOs, international organizations (UNICEF, CFI, UNDP, etc.), public and school libraries, media organizations, AMA, etc.		
	Adapting and experimenting with new guidelines and techniques for print and electronic media to promote MIL and user-generated media materials	Improving media ethics and encouraging media and information education. Creating MOOC courses that can be accessed by the general public and that address MIL in particular in its entirety.	Promoting initiatives by regulatory bodies for educating the public about media and information, such as respecting the Broadcasting Code, communicating with the AMA Complaints Council about media content, strengthening the Listeners and Viewers Council at ART, etc.
	Promotion of awareness campaigns and professional debate about ethical guidelines for media outlets as well establish the systematic review of the quality of media reporting.	ART should play a primary role between media outlets in educating the public and communicating about MIL, through student training programs, and through the production of media material related to MIL	Organizing public, annual events, similar to the “Global MIL Week” to talk about the best EMI practices of the respective year; as well as creating synergy between initiatives and actors operating in the country.

ANNEX 1: List of institutions whose representative were interviewed

Public Institutions	Education and Cultural Institutions	Media/Media Organizations	CSOs/ International NGO
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	Department of Journalism and Communication, FHE, UT	Albanian Radio Television (RTSH)	Child Rights Center Albania (CRCA)
Ministry of Culture	Department of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Humanities, Bedër University.	Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA)	TUMO Center Tirana
ASCAP	Department of Social Work and Social Policy, FSS, UT	Albanian Media Council	Observatory for the Rights of the Child and Youth
Prime Minister's Office/ DPCU	Department of Literature and Journalism, Faculty of Humanities, Aleksandër Xhuvani University.	Albanian Center for Quality Journalism	National Association Education for life (SHKEJ)
National Library	National Center of Cinematography	Faktoje.al	Hand in Hand against Nation Apathy (HANA)
General Directorate of Archives	National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (NACA)	Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture (IDMC)	CFI Media Development
National Historical Museum	UNICEF	ABC Media Center	SchoolMe. Education

ANNEX 2:

UNESCO's broader concept of media and information education

“MIL as a broad notion and a complex concept, contains in itself knowledge, skills and attitudes that give opportunity for citizens to:

- Understand the role and function of the media and other forms of information transmission in a democratic society;
- Understand the conditions that enable the fulfillment of these functions;
- Recognize and express the need for information;
- Find and provide access to information;
- Critically evaluate the information and content of the media and other broadcasters of information, including the evaluation of Internet resources in terms of authority, reliability and freshness of information;
- Receive and organize information and content in the media;
- Elaborate or draw conclusions from abstract ideas of media material;
- Communicate ethically and responsibly the knowledge gathered by them to viewers or readers in an appropriate form and medium;
- Be able to apply ICT-related skills to process information and produce media material while being media users;
- Engage with the media and other conductors of information, including the Internet, to express oneself, freedom of expression, intercultural dialogue and democratic participation.

ANNEX NO. 3:

Curriculum documents influencing MIL policies

The core curriculum and curricular framework were adopted in 2014 and form the basis of educational content in the pre-university system in the country. The Curriculum Framework is a “key document for the organization of the education system, orienting educational actors and stakeholders on key aspects of the curriculum, as a basis for effectively providing quality education for all.” The framework document states that one of the main reasons for changing existing curricula has to do, among other things, with the need to increase the level of knowledge in society and the need to prepare students to integrate into the digital world. These priorities are set by the school to adapt to new developments and needs, such as learning new knowledge or competencies from students and improving the knowledge of digital technology by the school system, to achieve full literacy. According to the curricular framework, at the end of pre-university studies students should be able to:

- Interact and cooperate with others by using a diversity of digital media;
- use different media and formats for communicating information and ideas in an effective way for different audiences;
- develop awareness on globalization and cultural diversity by interacting with students of other cultures;
- contribute to increasing efficiency in group projects in order to bring original products or solve problems;

- preserve ethics in personal and group communications;
- find, organize, analyze, assess, and elaborate and use information from a diversity of sources and media;
- select sources of information or digital tools based on their appropriateness in doing specific tasks;
- preserve the security of virtual identity and privacy;
- select and use applications efficiently;
- solve problems of systems and applications;
- understand and use accurately the technology systems

The core curricula are mandatory for all pre-university schools in the country, including private schools. In the learning area of ICT and technology the core curricula specifies the following topics that must be addressed during the teaching process:

- In-depth data analysis (analysis and interpretation of statistical data)
 - Search engines and media tools (specific features of search engines and finding information online)
 - Programming language (application of basic formulas)
 - Technology, technological systems, and computer world (definition of technology and its systems, and analysis of their impact on society; advanced use of media to do homework and projects)
 - Graphic communication (use of graphic design to communicate)
 - Technological structures, mechanisms, and materials (construction and functioning of technological structures and mechanisms)
 - Technology and economic activity (analysis of effect of technology on economy)
 - Labour ethics and safety (protected and safe environment.)
- The ICT subject is supposed to be taught for two classes

per week in the program of third cycle, which together with the subject of technology constitute 5.4% of the teaching plan, while the ICT also is taught for two classes per week in the program of the fourth cycle, or 3.2% of its total teaching plan. Some of the main competencies the students are expected to develop include drafting online content in different multimedia forms, disseminating information and content, engaging in online citizen activity, cooperation through digital channels, searching and filtering online information, critically assessing information, etc.

ANNEX 4:

Digital Agenda Strategy and its implementation

According to the Digital Agenda Strategy there are currently 1,496 computer labs in pre-university system and broadband internet connection is available in the labs in schools³⁵. In addition, the ICT subject, which in 2006 was taught in high school, from 2014 is also spread across other, lower cycles of pre-university education. Some of the problems with ICT in education as identified in the Digital Agenda Strategy include the following:

- the ratio of number of computers for students is 1:27;
- internet connection is available only in computer labs, but not in libraries, for example;
- in more than 1/3 of schools the students' access to online information is limited;
- risk of exposing students to inappropriate content;
- lack of children awareness on phenomena related to cyberbullying or online abuse of children.

Furthermore, a priority of the Digital Agenda Strategy is also increasing human capacities, mainly by starting the use of new technologies in a systemic way and early, ranging from pre-school and reaching also public administration. Recognizing that any existing or new ICT system cannot work if human resources are used, the Strategy identifies the need to apply ICT education programs across all education system levels, and also extend it to public administration employees. Overall, the priorities identified for the years 2015-2020 from the Digital Agenda Strategy include the overall improvement of national infrastructure of ICT, increasing high speed connection, (at least 100 Mbps for 50% of households and 30 Mbps for the population),

increasing percentage of population using internet from 50% in 2013 to 90% at the end of 2020, and have broadband internet connection for all schools in the country³⁹. More specifically regarding ICT in education, the Action Plan of the Strategy states that some of the steps to be taken include digitalization of libraries in pre-university education institutions, training for teachers in ICT, developing e-learning system, and continuing work with ICT in pre-university education.

ANNEX 5:

Media legislation

For this purpose, the following sector briefly examines the legal framework for freedom of media and freedom of information for both traditional mainstream media and online content, as well as de facto availability of media and information in the country.

Legislation on freedom of expression Freedom of expression is among the personal rights and freedom enshrined in the Constitution of Albania, more specifically in Article 22:

- (1) Freedom of expression is guaranteed.
- (2) The freedom of the press, radio and television are guaranteed.
- (3) Prior censorship of a means of communication is prohibited.
- (4) The law may require the granting of authorization for the operation of radio or television stations.

The Law on the Press states: “The press is free. Freedom of the press is protected by law.”⁴² Furthermore, Article 4 of the Law on Audiovisual Media⁴³ ranks freedom of expression and freedom of audiovisual media operators among the fundamental principles of audiovisual broadcast:

- (1) Audiovisual broadcasting activity shall be pursued on the basis of the following principles: a) Audiovisual broadcasting activity shall be free;
- (2) The audiovisual service operators during the exercise of their activity shall be also guided by the following principles:
 - a) Guaranteeing of the freedom of expression.
 - b) Guaranteeing of the right to information.

ANNEX 6:

Media, Information and internet trends

The Albanian media picture is quite dynamic, in terms of the number of media outlets. There are currently 15 daily newspapers, including sports newspapers, although we have less than three million inhabitants, and the press is not distributed throughout the country. The number of audiovisual media is also quite high: five licenses have been issued for the national digital platform, there are 45 local television stations, as well as public radio and television that broadcasts on 12 channels, its digital platform, including also two branches of television in the districts. Radio for radio use, there are two national radios, 53 local radios and four community radios. In addition, there is also Radio Tirana, which broadcasts on six radio channels, and four branches.

The picture of online media is much more chaotic, and in the absence of official statistics or other ways to increase the number of online media, one can only speculate about the size of this media sectors. According to data from the Union of Journalists, it is thought that there are more than 800 online media in the country. The dramatic increase in the number of online media comes as a result of relatively low costs compared to other media sectors, and the internet spread throughout the country. According to the regulatory law of electronic communication, the level of its spread at the end of 2019 was 75 percent. Albanians are also regular users of social network, Facebook, with about 1.4 million profiles or a level of spread that reached 49% at the end of January 2020.

The financial resources for this relatively large number of media of various types do not seem to be as numerous or sufficient, and there is a marked lack of transparency on media revenues, especially for online media. According to data published by the economic magazine Monitor, it is estimated that in recent years the advertising market in the country ranges from 37-40 million euros per year, with gloomy forecasts for 2020, due to the reduction of advertising funds by companies for cover losses. Most of these funds are absorbed by television stations, with about 70 percent of the market. Most of these funds go to two national television stations, raising 11 million out of about 30 million euros spent on all television stations. The radio seems to be holding a stable position in the advertising market, with around one million euros in revenue. Funds from print media advertising have fallen sharply to around 1.5 million euros, while online media have steadily increased advertising revenue, although there has been some slowdown recently. Online media receive 2.5 million euros a year, according to the latest reports. All these data are provided thanks to a serious work, which is undertaken mainly by Monitor magazine, in cooperation with advertising agencies, analyzing and comparing data from the balance sheets of media outlets, while missing official statistics or financial reports on the real situation of the media advertising market, or the financial condition of the media in general. In this context, due to the lack of reliable and transparent data, the question of how such a large number of media can survive in this market, cannot receive a final answer yet.

THE IMAGE OF THE MEDIA TO THE PUBLIC

In the survey undertaken by the AMI, the creation of a panorama about the image of the media to the public, was conducted focusing on such terms of the image as the level of fulfillment of the public mission by the media, the level of freedom, the degree of independence from politics and from business interests, influence in the fight against corruption, exposure of the media itself to corruption, etc.

As it results from the analysis of the results of the poll, the Albanian public in the vast majority, estimates that the media are of great importance for the democracy of a country. About 70% of respondents consider the media as very important or maximally important for the democratic level of a society. Meanwhile, about a quarter of respondents are less optimistic and say that the media are somewhat important for democracy, while only a small part of the Albanian public is skeptical about the role of the media in relation to democracy.

Although the media play a very important role in relation to democracy, the Albanian public is more reserved when asked how much the news media have generally served democracy and the public interest in Albania. About half of the respondents (48.6%) say that the media have served democracy and the public interest to some extent. Thus, for this aspect, the average rating prevails, despite the minimum or maximum rating that each occupies about one quarter of the respondents.

LEVEL OF TRUST IN THE MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

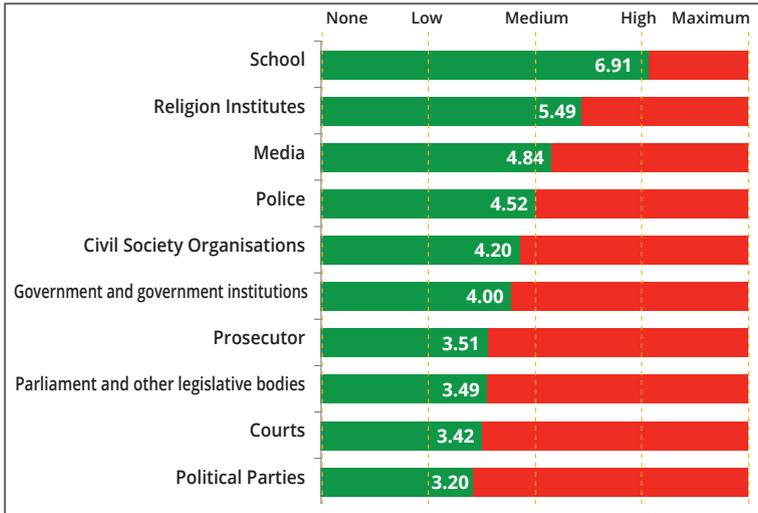
Trust is a very important factor in media-public relations. The level of public trust in the media is determined by the

level of fulfillment of the public media mission and by the quality and standards of the message and the media product. When the media fails to be, even in part, representative and protective of the public interest, and when journalistic quality and standards fall, a crisis of confidence begins to emerge.

In the context of this study, public trust in the media was initially measured within the framework of citizens' trust in public institutions to see where trust in the media stands in relation to trust in other institutions. Trust was then tested according to different categories of traditional and online media, and according to media profiles based on their geographical spread. The study also researches and analyzes public trust in different categories of media human resources, as well as in different categories of news. Media trust research and study has focused primarily on the informational dimension of the media and is based on three of the key principles of media trust, defined and applied by the American Press Institute such as: completeness, accuracy and balance in information.

Among the public institutions of democratic societies, the media enjoys a relatively high level of public trust. Even in Albania, the media is ranked among public institutions with higher credibility than a number of other public institutions. In the AMI's survey, trust in public institutions was also tested in relation to the criteria of their service to the public interest. The term "public interest" is used here in the sense of the common good. Below we present the results of the answer to the question: "How much do you believe in the following institutions when it comes to their service to the public interest?"

From 1 to 10 (where 1 = not at all and 10 = maximum), how much do you believe in the following institutions when it comes to their service to the public interest:



As can be seen, the media ranks third in terms of the level of trust in relation to service to the public interest. Only two public institutions, schools and religious institutions, have a higher degree of trust than the media. In this spectrum of trust, the media turns out to be slightly above average, while for most other public institutions, the level of trust is below average, thus confirming the existence of a trust crisis that begins with the crisis of trust in government and continues with the crisis of public trust in the prosecution, parliament, courts and political parties. The survey highlights the low credibility of political parties to the public, which are verified to have an even lower level of trust than the judiciary. Paradoxically, the five institutions that have the greatest decision-making weight for services of public interest, also have the lowest level of public trust.

In the research undertaken, public trust in the media

was also tested based on media categories. Completeness, accuracy and impartiality of information were used as evaluation criteria in this case. As can be seen in the following graph, based on these criteria, television is the media that enjoys the highest public trust compared to other categories of media. In the rating from 1 to 10, television manages to be rated at 5.22, a coefficient that is between the average and high level of trust. Radio and newspapers rank at the average level of public trust, confirming the fact that traditional media continue to remain the most trusted media for the public. As for online news and social media only, they have a below average level of credibility.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

The electronic and postal communications market has marked positive developments in terms of improving the quality of services provided to users by following the trend towards Internet-based services and the growth of postal services from e-commerce. Putting into use the frequencies of the 800 MHz band, during 2019 by the two entrepreneurs Vodafone Albania sh.a and Telekom Albania sh.a, it has been accompanied by investments in new technologies by these operators that will continue throughout 2020. The frequencies of the 800 MHz band offer higher capacities in the mobile networks and this has made possible the improvement of the services of these operators, in particular the increase of internet service speeds towards subscribers.

The volume of data transmitted via the Internet on mobile networks has marked a significant increase during 2019, a volume which has increased by about 15% compared to 2018. The total number of mobile network users who have used broadband internet access during 2019 consisted of about 2.4 million users who have used the network at

least once during 2019 and about 1.7 million active users (internet use in the last three months).

Law no.9918, dated 19.05.2008 “On electronic communications in the Republic of Albania”, during year 2019 has undergone changes reflected in Law no. 92/2019 “On some additions and changes to law no. 9918, dated 19.05.2008,” On electronic communications in the Republic of Albania “as amended”, approved by the Assembly of the Republic of Albania on 18.12.2019, and entered into force after publication in the Official Bulletin. The legal changes essentially establish the obligation of every entrepreneur providing Internet services (Internet Service Provider-ISP) to respect in any case AKEP’s request to restrict certain broadcasts with illegal or harmful content, based on Article 12 point 3 which provides that: “AKEP cooperates with AMA in accordance with the provisions of this law and other bylaws, as well as ensures the implementation of decisions of the Appeals Council and other bodies of AMA, obliging providers of internet access services to implement the relevant acts/decisions of these authorities, according to the deadlines and procedures provided in the legislation in force ”. AKEP may not adjudicate, request or decide on its own initiative, for restrictions on broadcasts with illegal or harmful content, but may address the entrepreneur, who provides the network and / or electronic communication services, for the interruption and blocking of the transmission of this content only on the basis and for the implementation of an administrative act of a body / institution responsible for the verification and evaluation of the legality of the contents of the broadcasts. AKEP’s role in this process is limited only in terms of inspecting and supervising the activity of entrepreneurs who provide electronic communications networks and services, if they have made restrictions on illegal or harmful content in accordance with the decisions forwarded by the authorities responsible.

POSITIONING PAPER ON
**NATIONAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION
LITERACY (MIL) POLICIES AND
STRATEGIES IN ALBANIA**

Table of Contents:

- I. The need to intervene in advancing Media and Information Literacy (MIL)
- II. MIL context in Albania
- III. Key principles (on policies)
- IV. Overall positioning
- V. Strategic directives on MIL
- VI. Strategic Recommendations from the national consultations for MIL
- VII. Conclusions

I. The need to intervene in advancing Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

Media and information play a crucial role in a democratic society as they enable citizens to make well-informed decisions, influence positively the strengthening of the position and encourage their contribution to society. The potential of new information technologies is enormous, so citizens and the media need to be able to use these new tools wisely and avoid the risks they carry. In this regard, knowledge and education on media and information literacy (MIL) is of paramount importance in the development of critical thinking and the efficient use of media and communication technology in an age when we face a wealth of information.

The Albanian media picture is dynamic in terms of the number of media outlets. There are currently 15 daily newspapers, including sports newspapers, although we have less than three million inhabitants and the press is not distributed throughout the country. The number of audiovisual media is also quite high: five licenses have been issued for national digital platforms, there are 45 local television stations, as well as the public radio and television that broadcasts on 12 channels, through its digital platform, including two branches of television in districts. In terms of radio broadcasts, there are two national radios, 53 local radios and four community radios. In addition to them, there

is also Radio Tirana, which broadcasts on six radio channels and four branches in the districts.

On the other hand, the picture of online media is much more chaotic and in the absence of official statistics or other ways to calculate the number of online media, one can only speculate about the size of this media sector. According to the Union of Albanian Journalists, it is estimated that there are more than 800 online media in the country. The dramatic increase in the number of online media comes as a result of relatively low costs compared to other media sectors and the widespread spread of the internet across the country. According to the electronic communications regulator, the level of internet penetration at the end of 2019 was 75%. Likewise, Albanians are regular users of social networks, especially Facebook, with about 1.4 million pages, or a spread rate of 49 percent, by the end of January 2020.

With the rapid shift of the center of gravity of the Albanian media online, the media relief seems to have reversed. Albanian journalism experiences the phenomenon of portalisation and facebooking and, as in other countries, produces itself and faces false daily news. Conspiracy theories, previously found only in extremist media, are now widely dominating traditional media. Disinformation is presented as a serious problem that must be faced. This was clearly seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, when conspiracy theories and misinformation spread rapidly.

Experience has shown that the Albanian public does not have the necessary immunity and the necessary skills to face fake news and misinformation, it does not have the necessary critical approach to distinguish the truth, to distinguish what is fake news, and what is real news etc. The Media Literacy Index of 2018 puts Albania almost at the bottom of the list of European countries, leaving behind only Turkey and Northern

Macedonia.¹⁾ This ranking signals the need for immediate intervention and the planning of strategic interventions to improve the level of media education and information in Albania.

Substantial changes in the media and information landscape show that schools are no longer the only sources of knowledge and learning. This also means the role that informal and intermediate teaching institutions should play, such as libraries, archives, museums and other cultural institutions.

In Albania, preparations and efforts for media and information education are still in the first steps and the project in question is one of the most consolidated interventions as it aims to make EMI part of the official curriculum in pre-university education.

II. MIL context in Albania

In our country ***there is not yet a strategy that guides national policies on media and information literacy to respond to the needs in this field.*** Various national strategies (National Strategy for Development and Integration; Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education, Digital Agenda, National Strategy for Culture, etc.) mention one or more elements of MIL, such as the digitalization of services and increasing the computer skills, ***but it is lacking the holistic approach towards developing MIL competences*** (critical thinking, evaluation of information and information sources,

1 Lessenski, M. (2018). Common sense wanted. Resilience to post-truth and its predictors in the new media literacy index 2018*. Open Society Institute, Bulgaria.

ability to access and localize information resources, content creation, promotion of active citizenship, understanding of media and information systems, etc.).

The lack of a strategy is reflected in the three levels of education, formal, non-formal and informal. Although in the pre-university system priority is given to the use of ICT during the teaching and learning process, ***this priority is limited only in terms of technological education and use of equipment, not focusing on other MIL competencies.*** The integration of the MIL curriculum into the pre-university education curriculum, which is the goal of this project, would increase the knowledge and skills of students and teachers in the field of media and information literacy.

At the university level, certain concepts of MIL are taught by different academic training programs on Bachelor and Master cycle, in the faculties of public universities (University of Tirana, Aleksandër Moisiu, Aleksandër Xhuvani, etc.) and private universities (Beder University, etc.). Depending on the study program, these concepts include media literacy, audience, digital competence, multimedia content production, etc., ***but what remains to be emphasized is the lack of general training for MIL. It is imperative that EMI interventions be made at university should be planned at three levels: 1) operational (including promotion, awareness 2) analytical (critical thinking, analytical skills, verification of sources, response to fake news and propaganda, etc.) and 3) creative (developing the ability to create content as well as publish it).***

Based on the identified needs and gaps that are existent, this document, drafted according to a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, ***suggests objectives for MIL policies and strategy, which should be extended to formal education (university and pre-university level); in non-***

formal and informal education thus affecting all members of society with the aim of increasing the level of education on media and information in Albania.

The need for media education and information has been recognized and has begun to attract the attention of various actors. The fact that there are initiatives, although sporadic and short-term, is a positive indicator in this regard. Although initiatives are present, the lack of strong community-level organizations and associations in the field of education, media, and information has hindered the further development of non-formal education in the field of EMI.

From the research that has been done, it is noticed that the initiatives and contribution given to EMI in formal education is mainly focused on ICT and digital competencies; in non-formal education is short-term, sporadic and uncoordinated between key actors. These initiatives are mainly focused on journalism, multimedia creativity, digital education for children and young people, but there is still no real contribution to EMI as defined by UNESCO. While in informal education, EMI has focused on access to information, provision of digital services, as well as promoting reading and increasing the number of attendees in relevant institutions, thus contributing to some elements of the holistic approach of EMI, but not to the whole his.

Based on the identified needs and gaps in existing initiatives, within this project, MIL curriculum for pre-university teachers was drafted in cooperation with the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP). The curriculum is based on the competencies of UNESCO and will become part of the official curriculum in the cycle of pre-university education, which will be piloted initially in 20 schools, primary and secondary, in Tirana, Durrës, Lezha and Elbasan, as in rural and urban areas. This

will be the first integrated curriculum for EMI in formal education in Albania.

III. Key principles (on policies)

The guiding principles in this document adhere to democratic values that include the right to information and the right to expression, as well as the contribution that these values make to the wider involvement of citizens in democratic processes and democratic communication.

Based on the UNESCO's definition of media education and information, this study seeks to harmonize the comprehensive approach to MIL and apply this concept to the Albanian situation. The aim is to encourage an approach that empowers citizens, fosters critical thinking, promote cultural diversity, social inclusion and gender equality.

This document is based on the involvement of many stakeholders in this process, following the UNESCO concept of media education and information. The purpose of this paper is to serve as an incentive starting point for the design and implementation of policies on MIL, building on existing policies and key actors in Albania.

IV. Overall positioning

Based on the results of the study on the current situation of Media and Information Education in Albania, at the three educational levels (formal, non-formal and informal) this report advises a comprehensive approach and policies regarding MIL, which respond to the needs of all members of society, without distinction.

National consultations and interviews with key stakeholders contributing to the advancement of Media Education and Information issues in the country highlighted the need for intervention in regulating media and information illiteracy. Although MIL efforts and initiatives have increased over the past four years, they remain sporadic, uncoordinated, and uncoordinated. The need to have synergies between actors and the initiatives that are taken remains at the top of the list.

A good starting point for creating synergies is the multilateral approach, which was also followed in this study, to gather stakeholder suggestions on the national strategy for media education and information. Such a strategy has not existed to date; therefore, the contribution of key actors is very valuable in shaping it.

Important actors in advancing media education and information remain the central government - the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which has shown interest and readiness to integrate the MIL curriculum into the formal pre-university education curriculum. The Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education is a key party in this project and has contributed to the drafting of the curriculum for teachers, which will be the basic document that will guide teachers to pass on knowledge and teach MIL competencies to students.

In addition to central institutions, important stakeholders are actors in the field of university education, business, private and public libraries, museums, information operators, representatives of the private sector and civil society. Given the fact that this is a very new concept, which has not been sufficiently taken into account by current policies, it is possible to develop a clear and comprehensive strategy on EMI, which will take into account all aspects, concepts, objectives, mechanisms and actors, as well as ensure their full involvement in the process.

The main suggestions from the national consultations emphasize the development of a comprehensive strategy that addresses the needs for media education and information at all three levels of education, formal, non-formal and informal, which simultaneously affects all age groups (children, youth, students, adults.) and promotes large-scale media and information education.

V. Strategic directives on MIL

To develop and approve the National Strategy for Media Education and Information that will serve as a guide for specific programs and policies to be created in order to promote MIL in formal, non-formal and informal education.

To address MIL in the Strategy and policies from the UNESCO perspective and to include all areas, such as media education, information education, digital education, critical thinking, media creativity, etc., so that this concept can be included in strategic documents, as well as in the regulations or guidelines that will follow.

To support and promote the integration of MIL in the official curricula of pre-university education in the primary, 9-year and secondary cycle.

To support and promote the integration of MIL in the official curricula of university education, specifically in three areas: 1) operational (including promotion, awareness 2) analytical (critical thinking, analytical skills, verification of resources, response to fake news and propaganda etc.) and 3) creative (developing the ability to create content as well as publish it).

To organize awareness and promotion campaigns and activities to acquaint the general public first with the MIL concept, as it is not widely recognized.

VI. Strategic Recommendations from the national consultations for MIL

- To give priority to MIL in formal, non-formal and informal education in order to guarantee the sustainability and creation of a culture for media and information.
- University-level education programs to provide specific education and continuing education to improve media and information literacy among young students and professionals.
- MIL programs at pre-university level provide specific education and continuing training to improve media and information literacy among teachers and students.
- MIL programs should be designed in such a way as to enable the widest possible involvement of citizens in this process (regardless of age, level of education, gender, employment status) by improving their relations with the media and information, as well as helping the crystallization of critical thinking about them.
- MIL programs should promote the improvement of media professionalism and the creation of self-regulatory bodies that will assist in the process of educating citizens about media and information.
- MIL programs to promote the values of media, archives, libraries, museums and other conductors of information to improve social inclusion, anti-discrimination policies, and lack of development in areas with limited economic opportunities.

VII. Conclusions

The need to challenge and address media and information illiteracy is crucial. National consultations emphasize the need for intervention at the national level in this regard.

Interventions are suggested to be made in formal education (university and pre-university cycle; in non-formal and informal education, with the aim of having a broad achievement of all groups in society, to increase the overall level of education on MIL in Albania.

Creating synergies between stakeholders in this process, to ensure the coordination of joint efforts in the field of media and information education, remains a gap that needs to be fulfilled.

