

**Written submission on behalf of Media Literacy Ireland to the Joint Committee on
Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media on the State’s response to online disinformation
and media/digital literacy, including social media and fake news.**

1. Introduction

1.1 Media are now an integral part of our lives. Technological developments mean that people have more power to create, shape, and engage with the media than ever before. At the same time, new practices and social norms are developing in response to digital media. All this places a great burden on individuals who must develop new knowledge and skills and there are clear ramifications for the wider health of society and democracy. Media literacy is at the heart of efforts to ensure everyone has the skills to make the best of digital technologies and to minimise any risks.

1.2 This report aims to provide clarity on what media literacy is, how it can help in the fight against disinformation (among other issues), and where some of the current challenges and opportunities are for **the State’s response to online disinformation and media/digital literacy, including social media and fake news.**

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Media literacy is a necessarily fuzzy concept that adapts in line with developments in media and technology. It involves a constantly evolving set of skills and knowledge, which are required by people to function effectively, safely, and ethically in a world where digital communication is an integral part of daily life. As such, media literacy includes “all competencies related to information literacy and media literacy [and] digital or technological literacy”¹. Media literacy is widely accepted as being important for democratic participation

¹ UNESCO (2023) Media and information literacy: <https://iite.unesco.org/mil/>

and citizenship; the knowledge economy and competitiveness; and lifelong learning and personal fulfilment.

2.2 It is important to understand that media literacy is not something that is acquired in the same way that the skill of reading (literacy) is acquired. Media literacy is multi-dimensional and a matter of degree. For example, some people may have a very good understanding of how to evaluate news sources while having a very limited understanding of algorithms and their role in the presentation of online information. The media literacy needs of individuals and different demographic groups vary considerably, but media literacy, of some degree, is needed across a person's lifetime.

2.3 From a policy perspective, media literacy doesn't respect policy boundaries. As illustrated later in this report, aspects of media literacy can be anchored in very different policy areas – making it difficult for Governments to identify 'policy owners' for it. This can result in short-term planning and funding and/or piecemeal approach to the effective delivery and evaluation of media literacy interventions.

2.4 Disinformation is a complex and multifaceted problem, but it is not a new problem. What is new is how the use of connected technologies and algorithms can influence the speed, reach and impact of disinformation. Beyond new, and emerging, communications technology there are factors that influence how susceptible and vulnerable particular groups are to disinformation such as social, political and economic factors. As a result, countering disinformation will require a complex and multi-faceted approach that is likely to touch on a range of different policy areas and require a well-coordinated multi-stakeholder approach.

2.5 In States, such as Finland, who are seen as best-in-class in terms of using media literacy to help counter disinformation, this multi-stakeholder approach is used. Another important factor is ensuring that at least one body is empowered to provide leadership and take responsibility for the long-term coordination (including funding and evaluation) of media literacy.

Increasingly, media regulators are taking on a leadership role in the promotion of media literacy, not least because of responsibilities placed on them as a result of new legislation (e.g. the Audio Visual Media Services Directive and the Digital Services Act) and international guidelines (such as those from the Council of Europe), but also because media literacy is a recognised regulatory lever that can help to counter a range of media related issues.

2.6 In Ireland, Coimisiún na Meán provides that leadership role in line with its statutory duties, as did the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) previously. In 2016, the BAI developed its media literacy policy which, although not a national policy, did lead to the development of a national network for the promotion of media literacy - Media Literacy Ireland (MLI).

2.7 Although facilitated and funded by Coimisiún na Meán, MLI is an independent, informal alliance of people and organisations working together (on a mainly voluntary basis) to promote media literacy in Ireland. MLI has established itself as the 'go-to' body for media literacy in Ireland and has created a successful communications and project delivery infrastructure involving many stakeholders and sectors across Ireland.

2.8 The work and approach of MLI has been recognised as best practice by the European Platform for Regulatory Authorities (EPRA), the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA), the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) and others.

2.9 While the structure and approach adopted by MLI has been very successful in promoting various aspects of media literacy, and in particular helping to counter disinformation (see the Be Media Smart case-study below), the voluntary nature of MLI means that the existing infrastructure is vulnerable to changes in attitudes, fortunes and policies of its members. In addition, as a body with no legal status, MLI is unable to receive or distribute funding and is reaching the limit of its potential in its current state. It is also notable that there are no Government departments or agencies involved in MLI which limits the potential for comprehensive coordination of activities (and funds) at a national level.

2.10 Based on the experience of MLI, and the best practice from other States, a number of elements need to be brought together in order to deliver media literacy for all and empower people to change behaviour in a sustainable way:

- **National Coordination:** The effective roll-out of media literacy initiatives on a national basis to counter many media-related issues, including disinformation, will require effective coordination at a national level. The absence of a clear ‘policy-owner’ can result in a ‘piecemeal’ approach to countering disinformation via media literacy.
- **Insights and evidence:** It is essential that a comprehensive body of evidence is created which researchers and practitioners can use to create effective interventions as well as monitoring and advising on how projects need to evolve and be refined in order to meet changing social and technical norms.
- **National Delivery Infrastructure:** Countering media literacy related issues, including disinformation, will require a reliable, well-resourced, cross-sector infrastructure that can facilitate the delivery of messaging and practical support in a tailored way to a diverse set of people over an extended period of time.
- **Media literacy as lifelong learning:** The ‘cradle to grave’ approach to media literacy, adopted by States such as Finland, ensures all citizens have the opportunity to develop their media literacy skills and knowledge throughout their lives - not only helping to address the issues of concern today, but laying the groundwork to deal with media-related threats and issues that may arise in the future.
- **Establish a secure and fair model to fund initiatives:** Securing appropriate levels of long-term funding is critical for the development, evaluation, refinement and rollout of long-term behaviour.

2.11 MLI has the potential to help exploit these opportunities and be a key part of a well-coordinated national approach to promoting media literacy and countering a range of media-related issues including disinformation. However, this may require a restructuring and/or enhancing of MLI including a clear legal standing, which may include greater involvement and support from Government departments.

3. An Overview

3.1 Understanding Media Literacy

3.1.1 There is no universally agreed definition of media literacy. However, there is broad agreement that media literacy concerns a constantly evolving set of skills and knowledge, which are required to function effectively, safely, and ethically in a world where digital communication is an integral part of daily life. As such, media literacy includes “all competencies related to information literacy and media literacy [and] digital or technological literacy”². However, media literacy should not be reduced to information literacy or digital literacy³. The empowering role of media literacy entails learning about the media system (e.g., how different kinds of media are produced, how meaning is derived) as well as the acquisition of digital and information skills.

3.1.2 There is widespread agreement that media literacy has important societal dimensions. Media literacy is tied to democratic participation and citizenship; the knowledge economy and competitiveness; and lifelong learning and personal fulfilment. As such, media literacy touches upon many different policy areas including media and communications, education, innovation, integration, and so on. In recent policy, media literacy is often defined for its ability to help individuals evaluate media. This reflects concerns about disinformation but fails to address the equally important goal of empowering people to create their own content and express themselves in ways informed by media literacy.

3.1.3 The revised Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), defines media literacy as the “skills, knowledge and understanding that allow citizens to use media effectively and safely... Media literacy should not be limited to learning about tools and technologies, but should aim to equip citizens with the critical thinking skills required to exercise judgement, analyse complex realities and recognise the difference between opinion and fact”⁴

3.1.4 The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022⁵ describes media literacy as meaning “public understanding of material published in print, broadcast, online or other

2 UNESCO (2023) Media and information literacy: <https://iite.unesco.org/mil/>

3 <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle-preprints/20/>

4 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2018/1808/oj>

5 <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/41/enacted/en/print.html>

media, including understanding of— (a) the nature and characteristics of published material, (b) how material is selected, or made available, for publication, (c) how individuals and communities can create and publish material, and (d) how access to published material is or can be regulated.

3.2 Media Literacy and Disinformation

3.2.1 Although disinformation has existed in some form throughout history, the rise of digital media has revolutionised how content is created, distributed, and consumed. Today, almost anyone can generate misleading information, spread rumours and conspiracy theories, and amplify social divisions.

3.2.2 Even apparently ‘harmless’ misinformation can sow seeds of doubt which can be exploited at a later date to erode trust in established channels of communication / public representatives / models of operations.

3.2.3 While people can encounter unreliable or inaccurate information across all media platforms and even through word-of-mouth, social media and connected technologies have made the spread of unreliable information faster and easier than ever before. Compounding the issue is the use of algorithms⁶ and user profiling by bad actors to identify and exploit the genuine concerns, fears and hopes of people to create false narratives that powerfully resonate with particular groups of people.

3.2.4 At the heart of media literacy is the ability to understand and critically evaluate media narratives - whatever the source - in order to make an informed decision about the use of media. These critical thinking skills are also at the heart of maintaining information integrity and media literacy is increasingly being recognised as a tool for helping to counter disinformation as reflected by its rise on policy agendas and in legislation.

3.2.5 For example, the voluntary EU Code of Practice on Disinformation⁷ outlines a set of commitments for technology companies, including commitments to develop, promote and/or support or continue to run activities to improve media literacy and critical thinking

⁶ Algorithms also have the potential to make online experiences more positive for individuals by promoting high-quality information and reducing the spread of borderline content and harmful misinformation.

⁷ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2022-strengthened-code-practice-disinformation>

such as campaigns to raise awareness about disinformation (Measure 17.2), and includes a requirement for signatories to report on the number of media literacy and awareness raising activities organised and or participated in, as well as sharing quantitative information about the effects of the campaigns they have built or supported at the Member State level.

3.2.6 Media literacy is based on the reasonable assumption that developing analytical skills and knowledge about how our media works, how messages are created, by whom and for what reason, should help people make more informed judgements about the content they consume. However, people form beliefs for complex reasons. In the case of countering disinformation, empowering people with the skills and knowledge to judge the accuracy and reliability of information, does not guarantee that logic will win out over socio-emotional factors.

3.2.7 Therefore, it is important to note that while media literacy increases resilience to many of the issues that are associated with digital communications, media literacy should not be seen as a short-term solution. The changing nature of media literacy means that it must be viewed as a life-long learning process, and not a ‘once-off’ training or learning programme.

3.2.8 In addition, digital technologies are designed to create behaviours in people and some aspects of media literacy (and countering disinformation) should actually be viewed as behaviour-change programmes. Changing behaviour is much more challenging than raising awareness of issues, or even the development of new skills. Achieving sustained behaviour at scale is expensive, time-consuming and requires specialist support for a potentially diverse set of partners.

3.2.9 As acknowledged in the ERGA *‘Improving Media Literacy Campaigns on Disinformation’* report⁸, technological developments are a factor in the changing shape of media literacy but, as the report notes, media literacy “should not be primarily about technology per se, but about developing ‘civic competence’: it should relate to broader themes like diversity, ethics, sustainability and social inclusion” (ERGA 2021, page 3)

⁸ <https://erga-online.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ERGA-SG2-Report-2020-Improving-Media-Literacy-campaigns-on-disinformation.pdf>

3.2.10 If ‘demand’ for disinformation is generated, at least in part, by human emotions, the ‘supply’ is embedded in the infrastructure and economics of the information ecosystem. Long-term solutions are likely to require changes on both the supply and demand side.

3.3 Key stakeholders for targeting disinformation via media literacy

3.3.1 The cross-policy nature of media literacy and countering disinformation means that a relatively large number of Government departments, state bodies and other stakeholders have an interest, if not a responsibility, in either media literacy or countering disinformation. However, a smaller number of stakeholders are interested and/or involved in countering disinformation *via* media literacy. The list below outlines some of the key stakeholders who are looking at the role that media literacy plays in countering disinformation - but even this list is not exhaustive.

- **The Department of [Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht\[1\], Sport and Media](#):** This Department has overall responsibility for implementing the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act and is leading on the National Counter Disinformation Strategy.
- **The Department of Education:** Media Literacy is not taught as a bespoke subject but aspects of media literacy are taught across various subjects and at different levels across the national curriculum since the early 1990s. The Department of Education also provides funding for Webwise.ie
- **The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science:** Responsible for the 10-year ‘Adult Literacy for Life’ strategy⁹ which recognises the life-long nature of media literacy and acknowledges that digital literacy as a foundational skill that enables full participation in life, work and leisure.
- **The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:** The lead department in relation to the Digital Services Act which will establish a regulatory framework to protect EU users of digital services and their fundamental rights online.
- **The Department of Foreign Affairs:** Leads on the Rapid Alert System (RAS) and the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) Toolbox.
- **Coimisiún na Meán:** With a statutory obligation in this area, CnaM undertakes a range of activities to promote media literacy in Ireland including facilitating and

⁹ https://www.adultliteracyforlife.ie/f/120607/x/133e8d1481/15607_all_strategy_web.pdf

funding Media Literacy Ireland. An Coimisiún's predecessor, the BAI published a [Media Literacy Policy](#) in 2016¹⁰.

- **EDMO Ireland:** The European Digital Media Observatory provides a collaborative structure for European stakeholders to exchange knowledge on disinformation trends and threats.
- **Public Libraries:** Media Literacy is included in the national 'Skills for Life' programme for Public Libraries.
- **Webwise:** Webwise is the Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre funded by the Department of Education which promotes the autonomous, effective, and safer use of the internet by young people.
- **NALA:** NALA has recognised that critical thinking, media and digital literacy are key elements of adult literacy and adult education.
- **SOLAS:** Oversees the implementation of the 'Adult Literacy for Life' strategy which aims to reduce the % of adults in Ireland without basic digital skills from 47% to 20%.
- **The Journal FactCheck Unit:** The only verified Irish signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network¹¹ (IFCN), they are also the fact-checker partner for the EDMO Ireland.
- **News and media organisations:** In recent years many news and media organisations are delivering media literacy to their audiences and supporting national and local campaigns.
- **Civil Society:** Civil society organisations are a critical part of the media literacy infrastructure in Ireland.
- **Media Literacy Ireland:** Media Literacy Ireland (MLI) is an independent alliance of people and organisations working together on a voluntary basis to promote media literacy in Ireland.

¹⁰ [BAI media literacy policy EN1.pdf](#)

¹¹ [International Fact-Checking Network - Poynter](#)

4. Media Literacy Ireland

4.1 The overarching objective for MLI is to empower Irish people with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices about the media content and services that they consume, create and disseminate – across all platforms.

4.2 Established in 2017 by the BAI, Coimisún na Meán continues to facilitate and fund Media Literacy Ireland and supports a range of activities including events, conferences and the Be Media Smart campaign.

4.3 MLI brings together over 300 members from a broad range of sectors. MLI members include EDMO Ireland, Webwise, Barnardos, CRAOL, CyberSafeKids, The Irish Film Institute, Learning Waves, NewsBrands Ireland, Safefood as well as public service broadcasters (RTÉ and TG4), commercial broadcasters (Sky Ireland, Virgin Media and independent commercial radio stations). There are also a number of MLI members from the commercial sector such as Trend Micro, Google, TikTok and Meta.

4.4 MLI is governed by a voluntary Steering Group representing a number of key sectors including Broadcasters, Digital Platforms, Youth, Information Education, Academia and the Community and Voluntary Sector. MLI operates independently of the Government and no Government or Ministry representative sits on the Steering Group. An Annual Work Plan is developed each year and members are called upon to support particular aspects of the Work Plan according to their interests, experience and availability.

4.5 MLI acts as an enabler for media literacy stakeholders in Ireland and focuses its work in four key areas:

1. *Coordination*: To be the acknowledged first port of call to provide support and advice for media literacy stakeholders (national and international).
2. *Innovation*: To inspire and facilitate the development of new media literacy projects, programmes and interventions, and encourage evaluation and sustainability.
3. *Communication*: To foster discussion and debate around all aspects of media literacy in Ireland with a view to helping to identify emerging issues, gaps in provision, opportunities for collaboration.

4. *Promotion*: To use the strength, reach and expertise of MLI members to collectively highlight media literacy related issues and sign-post to sources of support via multi-stakeholder public awareness campaigns.

4.6 Media Literacy Ireland is the acknowledged platform in Ireland for bringing media literacy stakeholders together and providing opportunities for collaboration. The work of MLI has been recognised in a number of other national frameworks and strategies such as the *Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework*¹², the *Adult Literacy for Life Strategy*¹³, the *National Public Library Strategy 2023-2027*¹⁴. The multi-stakeholder approach championed by MLI has also been recognised as best practice at a European level.

5. CASE-STUDY: Be Media Smart

5.1 [Be Media Smart](#) is an initiative of Media Literacy Ireland (MLI) which encourages people to Stop, Think and Check that the information that they read, see or hear is reliable and accurate.

5.2 The campaign was designed to raise awareness of the importance of knowing how to verify information; provide tips and guidance on how to check the accuracy and reliability of information, and signpost people to additional sources of support and training.

5.3 Facilitated by Coimisiún na Meán and supported by media, civil society organisations, libraries, educational, training and research institutions and search and social platforms, the Be Media Smart has been noted as best practice and the concept has been adopted in six other European countries.

5.4 First launched in 2019 in as part of a European initiative to counter disinformation in advance of the 2019 European elections, the campaign evolved in 2020 to focus on accurate and reliable information about Covid-19, and in 2021 the focus was on making informed choices about the Covid-19 vaccination based on accurate and reliable information.

¹² [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - *Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework* (www.gov.ie)

¹³ [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - *'Adult Literacy for Life' - a 10-year adult literacy strategy* (www.gov.ie)

¹⁴ *National Public Library Strategy 2023-2027 - 847de39a-85fa-4b55-a3e9-c71fefc27e86.pdf* (www.gov.ie)

5.5 In 2023, the Be Media Smart campaign evolved again to incorporate a new Be Media Smart Community Training Programme. The message was delivered across TV, radio and in news publications across community, commercial, public service and social media – in Irish and English.

5.6 All TV and radio adverts were produced, distributed and broadcast free-of-charge by MLI members from the media sector with additional support provided through editorial opportunities. The media campaign was boosted by a well-coordinated social media campaign with a diverse range of MLI members using freely available social media assets to promote the campaign and the call to action among their networks.

5.7 All the Be Media Smart communication directed people to the Be Media Smart website, (available in Irish and English) for advice and support, a FactCheck section and a new ‘Ask an Expert’ section, where members of the public can put media literacy related questions to a panel of experts.

5.8 The Be Media Smart Community Training Programme developed in conjunction with EDMO Ireland, trained over 100 community-based leaders, coaches, and librarians to use the *Be Media Smart Workshop in a Box* resource to deliver media literacy training in their own communities across the country, in English and in Irish.

5.9 Research carried out by Ipsos B&A in November 2023 noted that 23% of adults recalled the campaign, unprompted, compared to the 15% before the media campaign started. For context, 13% - 17% is considered very good recall for similar campaigns. 45% of respondents to the survey in December 2023 said that they would take action if they came across information that was false or misleading compared to 32% in April 2021.

5.10 This initiative clearly demonstrated the power of collaboration when MLI members play to their own strengths and was supported by a wide range of members.

6. Opportunities

6.1 To help improve the States response to online disinformation and media/digital literacy, including social media and fake news, a number of steps could be considered

6.2 National Coordination

6.2.1 The threats posed by disinformation - from whatever source - cut across all spheres of society. As outlined above, the promotion of media literacy, including efforts to counter disinformation, also cuts across multiple and diverse departments and institutions such as formal and informal education, media and communications, culture, digital, social cohesion etc.

6.2.2 While this collective attention to the problem of disinformation, and the role of media literacy in addressing it, is positive, the cross-policy nature of both media literacy and countering disinformation presents a particular challenge in terms of identifying a clear 'policy-owner' who has ultimate responsibility for developing a strategic approach and managing the resourcing and implementation of that strategy.

6.2.3 The absence of a clear 'policy-owner' can result in a 'piecemeal' approach to countering disinformation, with significant effort (by different sectors) put into addressing different aspects of the problem, and risking duplication effort, wasted resources and missed opportunities.

6.2.4 The development of a National Counter Disinformation Strategy and the recognition of the role of media literacy as part of the strategy for countering disinformation is very positive.

6.2.5 The draft Principles of the National Counter Disinformation Strategy recognise that an effective, long-term, sustainable strategy for countering disinformation will require broad stakeholder engagement, cooperation and alignment of existing countermeasures.

6.2.6 The EU Code of Practice on Disinformation requires signatories to partner or consult with media literacy experts in the EU, including for instance the Commission's Media Literacy Expert Group, ERGA's Media Literacy Action Group, EDMO, its country specific

branches, or relevant Member State universities or organisations that have relevant expertise.

6.2.7 If, as expected, the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation becomes a Code of Conduct under the Digital Services Act, there may be an even greater focus on media literacy as part of a multi-stakeholder toolkit to help counter disinformation.

6.2.8 Best practice from other countries such as Finland suggest that, given the ‘cross-policy’ nature of media literacy, and of disinformation, the effective roll-out of initiatives to counter disinformation require effective coordination at a national level. Effective coordination of a diverse range of cross-sector stakeholders (State and others) will require resourcing and should, ideally, be ‘led’, an organisation who can

- Carry out a comprehensive mapping and engagement plan for all key stakeholders
- Encourage information-sharing
- Support the identification and implementation of best practice, and
- Exploit opportunities for collaboration on national and international projects.

6.2.9 In his evidence to the Committee on December 6, 2023, Dr. Leo Pekkala (KAVI) said that “It is hard to stress enough the importance of having a national policy for promoting media literacy. The policy is the backbone for all media literacy work done in Finland and supports different organisations in their work in promoting media literacy.”

6.2.10 He also noted that KAVI in Finland is not unique in having a legal basis for promoting media literacy and that the Nordic countries all now have a governmental office that has the same legal duty, more or less.

6.2.11 The approach adopted by MLI to coordinating media literacy efforts has been recognised internationally as best practice, especially in relation to its work with EDMO Ireland. However, as an informal alliance, with no legal status or mechanism for receiving or distributing funding, there is a limit to what MLI can achieve.

6.3 Insights and evidence

6.3.1 To develop counter-measures to disinformation, we must understand the nature, infrastructure, contributing factors, and the impacts or harms of disinformation. To achieve this, research expertise is needed from multiple disciplines including, for example, communication and journalism, computer science; education; psychology; politics and policy, and sociology.

6.3.2 It is essential that a comprehensive body of evidence is created which researchers and practitioners can use to create effective interventions as well as monitoring and advising on how projects need to evolve and be refined in order to meet changing social and technical norms.

6.3.3 Media literacy is a set of ever evolving skills and knowledge. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution and no ‘quick fix’. In order to create effective media literacy based counter-measures to disinformation (and other media and online related threats to society), it is essential that we can identify what works, and what doesn’t work, for particular groups.

6.3.4 But the ever-changing shape of media literacy, and the life-long nature of media literacy, pose particular difficulties for measuring the long-term impacts of media literacy interventions.

6.3.5 To address this key issue, researchers and practitioners need access to a national, longitudinal research programme that will provide in-depth base-line measurements on a wide range of media literacy indicators and monitor changes over time.² Delivery

6.4 National Delivery Infrastructure

6.4.1 Media literacy related issues, and the problem of disinformation in particular, has the potential to negatively impact all citizens, in different ways. Countering these issues will require a reliable, well-resourced, cross-sector infrastructure that can facilitate the delivery of messaging and practical support in a tailored way to a diverse set of people over an extended period of time.

6.4.2 As demonstrated by the success of the MLI-led Be Media Smart campaign, there is already a well-functioning, cross-sector, media literacy infrastructure in place in Ireland.

6.4.3 However, the voluntary nature of this infrastructure leaves it vulnerable to changes in commercial, corporate and Government policy. In addition, the current media literacy infrastructure is short-term in nature, due to limitations in how MLI can access funding from additional sources.

6.4.4 Enhancing the existing media literacy infrastructure will help to ensure delivery of media literacy for all, and the empowerment of people to change behaviour in a sustainable way.

6.5 Media literacy as lifelong learning

6.5.1 The ‘cradle to grave’ approach to media literacy, adopted by States such as Finland, ensures all citizens have the opportunity to develop their media literacy skills and knowledge throughout their lives - not only helping to address the issues of concern today, but laying the groundwork to deal with media-related threats and issues that may arise in the future.

6.5.2 Many adults lack fundamental skills in Ireland and although there are some initiatives and NGOs that support older adults such as Age Action’s ‘Getting Started’ programme, and MLI’s Be Media Smart campaign, many digital literacy and media literacy initiatives in Ireland (and in other countries) tend to focus on children and young people in formal education. Not least because a) schools provide a convenient delivery network, and b) school-children and young people are primed for learning.

6.5.3 But even within the formal education sector, there are challenges when delivering media literacy education. According to the [2022 Media Pluralism Monitor report](#)¹⁵, media literacy remains essentially optional at the Senior Cycle level (16–19-year-olds) and there

¹⁵ [Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era : application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey in the year 2021. Country report : Ireland \(eui.eu\)](#)

remains substantial scope for mainstreaming media literacy into Irish primary and secondary education curricula.

6.5.4 While digital literacy is recognised as an essential skill alongside literacy and numeracy more developed concept of media literacy - or digital media literacy - would seem necessary to counter disinformation and equip people with the ability to navigate complex media worlds. To achieve this, it likely to require additional training for teachers and ensuring schools have access to up-to-date and best-practice resources.

6.5.5 Beyond formal education, reaching the wider 'public' for any kind of learning behaviour can be difficult - even when there is strong evidence of need.

6.5.6 In 2022, Accenture conducted a survey of Irish adults to assess the digital divide¹⁶. It found that 32% of Irish adults describe themselves as being 'below average' for digital skills and 35% percent of those with poor digital skills did not see a need to improve. Regarding disinformation specifically, this is challenging because those most in need of support may be the least likely to seek it out.

6.5.7 In the last couple of years, there have been two important opportunities for rolling out media literacy for all and anchoring the development of media literacy skills in community education.

6.5.8 The inclusion of media literacy skills in the 10 year literacy strategy for adults 'Adult Literacy for Life' was a positive acknowledgement of the importance of media literacy skills.

6.5.9 Similarly, the 2023 National Public Library strategy includes media literacy in the national 'Skills for Life' programme that will be available all public library staff and users.

6.5.10 However, in the absence of a national media literacy strategy, it may be difficult to see how, or even if, these programmes will work together to help to fill the media literacy knowledge gaps that exist.

¹⁶ <https://www.accenture.com/content/dam/accenture/final/a-com-migration/manual/r3/pdf/pdf-174/Accenture-digital-index.pdf>

6.6 Establish a secure and fair model to fund initiatives

6.6.1 With the exception of initiatives targeting children and young people, media literacy interventions in Ireland are, to a large degree, funded by a combination of private and philanthropic funding, tech industry funding and European funding programmes. There is a tension between the long-term / life-long learning nature of media literacy interventions and the short-term funding cycles.

6.6.2 Securing appropriate levels of long-term funding is critical for the development, evaluation, refinement and rollout of long-term behaviour change and life-long learning programmes.