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MEDIA LITERACY SECTOR MAPPING

Estonia Country Report

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Introduction

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

Although the term “media literacy” does not have a single definition, and could be interpreted in different ways (for example, to fit in with a donor’s agenda), the definition used for the purposes of this analysis is put forward by the European Commission (2021): “Media literacy refers to all the technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow us to access and have a critical understanding of and interact with media. These capacities allow us to exercise critical thinking, while participating in the economic, social and cultural aspects of society and playing an active role in the democratic process”.

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

Methodology

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

- Desk research
- Semi-structured in-depth expert interviews
- Online survey

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

For the **semi-structured interviews**, the scheme of selecting experts was created. This included selecting at least three experts from the following clusters: government related; non-government related; academia and media related; supporters and donors related. 12 experts were interviewed by using the same interviewing guide with five subsections of questions.

Survey - **the online survey** was created to collect qualitative data on activities and audiences used by different media literacy actors. In the survey active actors were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The survey included four sections, including the profiling of selected media literacy activities. The research team used available

conferences and meetings to collect additional information needed to make an analysis, which focused on 1) cross-sectoral cooperation and networking; 2) evaluation of media literacy activities; 3) sustainability and funding; 4) the role of media in increasing media literacy.

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1. General overview

1.1. Policy regulations

Media literacy components have been addressed in Estonia for quite some time from different angles. However, much like the good child in an old saying, media literacy has been referred to by several names and terms.

As Jaakola 2020 notes, there are three primary levels on which media literacy has been developed – government/state, school and civil society (Jaakola 2020, 151). On the state level, one could often notice terms like media (and communication) [*meedia ja kommunikatsioon*] and education [*haritus, meediakasvatus*] (Kõuts-Klemm et al. 2019). On the school system, common terms include communication competence [*suhtluspädevus*] and digital competence [*digitaalne pädevus*] (Ministry of Education and Research 2014). In the school systems, the information environment [*teabekeskkond*] is also mentioned as a cross-curricular topic. On the civil society level, however, terms commonly used include media literacy [*meediapädevus*] and media (and information) literacy [*meedia- (ja info)kirjaoskus*] (Ministry of Education and Research 2020b).

Formulating the underlying structure

The background, goals and concepts concerning media literacy were broadly set out in the Concept of Estonian Information Policy [*Eesti Infopoliitika Põhialused*], under the term "infopolitics [*infopoliitika*]", published in 1998 (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 1998). The document defined infopolitics as: "*the part of the state administrative policy that reflects the principles of the state's functioning in the creation of the information society, the areas under the state's attention in the age of rapid technological change and the mechanisms for their regulation. The state information policy takes into account the goals pursued by the government in regulating other areas of life and shows new opportunities for offering solutions in the bottlenecks of these areas*" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 1998, § 1).

Hereby, the term information society has been broadly defined, leaving room for future changes: "*the information society is an all-encompassing concept. It embraces the whole social reality in which we live. The information and communication technology revolution has changed and is changing our world today, although we are not yet fully aware of the many changes that lie ahead*" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 1998, § 4).

The concept thus covers a wide spectrum, mentioning legislation, cooperation between the private sector and the state, communication between the state and the citizen, and finally, awareness of the (current and possibly occurring) problems of the information society. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 1998, § 7).

After the approval of the Concept of the Estonian Information Policy in 1998, four new documents were issued in the field over time - "Concept of the Estonian Information Policy II 2004-2006", "Estonian Information Society

Development Plan 2013", "Estonian Information Society Development Plan 2020" and finally the currently valid "Estonian Digital Society Development Plan until 2030" with the term "information society" being replaced with the "digital society" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 2004, 2007, 2014, 2021).

Documents analysis shows that the requirements for information competence have increased over time. For example, if the 2007 Information Society Development Plan sets the goal of "ensuring that everyone lives a full life in the full potential of the information society and is an active participant in public life ('No one is left out and no one is left behind')", then the 2020 plan already states that "the use of computers and the internet by Estonian people is a bit one-sided [...] The internet is primarily used for communication, searching for information and entertainment. It has been less used to increase personal competitiveness and well-being" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 2007, 2; 2014, 9). Thus, indicating that besides focusing on participation, personal competitiveness and well-being were also considered in the second concept. Furthermore, the 2020 development plan also incorporated a vision to "stand up for the basic issues of the information society, such as internet freedoms, protection of privacy, etc." (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 2014, 2). To this end, a 2020 concept also included a plan to establish a globally oriented think tank that focuses on the information society (ibid, 2).

The latest Development Plan of the Estonian Digital Society, however, furthermore expands the focus by including the "development of digital skills", "training of specialists", "development of the research sector", "development of legislation", "development of society", "sustainability of language and culture", and "development of digital literacy" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 2021, 45-47). "Digital literacy" is a new term that seems to be a synonym for the "information literacy" used in the past. Digital literacy is defined as a skill that will help people to "use digital solutions in a useful and safe way" (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 2021, 46). In addition, the latest development plan also brings out that it is compatible with EU sectoral framework documents, digital learning action plans, is based on principles agreed upon between EU member states at the e-governance field, and finally, is also connected with the EU's vision for the digital decade (digital compass).¹

However, based on content analysis, it is found, similarly to other studies, that the vital skills needed to be competent in today's information society largely come down to digital literacy, digital competencies and (basic) skills of information and communication technology (Merimaa 2018, 27; Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 1998; 2007, 3; 2021, 45-47). For example, the second Estonian Information Policy Concept mentions 'information literacy' [infokirjaoskus], but when looking at the context of documents analysed, the meaning either comes down to basic internet skills or to a broader spectrum of information and communication technology skills (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications 2004, 10; 1998; 2007, 3; 2014, 16; Merimaa 2018, 26-27).

¹ 1) Shaping Europe's digital future: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_3.pdf
2) A European strategy for data: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/strategy-data>
3) Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market - Towards a European Gigabit Society: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TX/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0587>
4) EU cybersecurity strategy: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/eus-cybersecurity-strategy-digitaldecade-0>
5) An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0103&from=ET>
6) Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027): <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital/education-action-plan>
7) EU Skills Agenda: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>
8) Artificial intelligence action plan: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:22ee84bb-fa04-11e8-a96d01aa75ed71a1.0009.01/DOC_1&format=DOC
9) Tallinn declaration: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/ministerial-declaration-egovernmenttallinn-declaration>
10) Berlin declaration: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/berlin-declaration-digital-society-and-valuebased-digital-government>
11) Europe's digital decade digital targets: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digitalage/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_e

Developments in the security sphere

Media literacy components can also be found in the security sector. The three main documents in the field of security are the National Security Concept 2017 [*Julgeolekupoliitika alused 2017*] (hereinafter NSC) and the National Defense Development Plan 2017-2026 [*Riigikaitse Arengukava 2017-2026*] (hereinafter NDDP), and the newest Estonian National Defence Development Plan 2022-2031 [*Riigikaitse Arengukava 2022-2031*] (Estonian Government 2017, 23; Government office 2017, 2022a).

In the first two documents, information threat is covered as part of a wider "psychological protection" strategy that serves as a tool to construct a resilient, cohesive and united society (Estonian Government 2017, 5; Government office 2017, 18). The underlying idea is that "the more residents trust the state, the more resilient it is" (Estonian Government 2017, 19).

In this regard, Estonia has had a model for coordinating interinstitutional messages in place since the early 2000s, and according to senior officials in the Estonian Defence Forces, all the conscripts are also given a basic overview of modern information warfare and psychological protection (Voltri 2021, 108). Nevertheless, as Voltri 2021 points out about the first two documents, "contrary to what one would expect from security documents that follow the idea of a broad security concept, the Estonian security documents do not actually mention educating society about information threats (or media literacy) at all, focusing mainly on the goal of a resilient and cohesive society that is achieved with the integration of all segments of the society and effective strategic communication, intertwined with psychological defence (Voltri 2021, 106; Estonian Government 2017, 7, 10, 19-20; Government office 2017, 6, 18). Until 2021, the security documents stayed at an abstract level when promoting 'psychological defence', and the working plan was limited to informing the public about information related dangers, manipulation and disinformation while ensuring that all sections of society have access to diverse information (Voltri 2021, 106-107; Estonian Government 2017, 20; Government office 2017, 18). The new National Defence Development Plan 2022-2031, however, also brings out the media literacy term in the light of growing information influence (Government Office 2022a, 23). The new documents sets three goals – "availability of high-quality and fact-based Estonian, Russian and English language information", "develop Estonian university education and academic research in the field of information influencing activities" and finally "increase the media literacy of the Estonian population so that the Estonian people are less affected by information influencing activities" by integrating media literacy into the Estonian education system (Government Office 2022a, 23).

Developments in the education system

Regarding the education system, cross-curricular "media education" was first introduced in the Estonian national curricula in 2002 (Loit and Harro-Loit 2010, 146). The current basic and upper secondary school curricula identify eight key competencies, out of which the two closest to media literacy are "communication competence" and "digital competence" (Estonian Government 2020, § 4; 2021, § 4). The other six include: "cultural and value competence," "social and citizen competence," "self-management competence," "learning to learn competence," "mathematics, natural sciences and technology competence," and "entrepreneurship competence." (ibid.). "Information environment" thereby being one of the eight cross-curricular topics that aim "for the pupil to develop into an information-conscious person who senses and is aware of the surrounding information environment, can analyse it critically and acts according to his or her aims and society's communication ethics" (Estonian Government 2020, § 14, point 3, section 5; 2021, § 10, point 3, section 5).

However, neither the currently valid basic school curricula nor upper secondary school curricula include media literacy competence as a separate competence. In the basic school curricula, the only noticeable integrat-

ed competence that is connected to the media literacy concept aims to teach how to work with different sources and ensure their reliability (Estonian Government 2020).

Media literacy-related competencies are more noticeable in the upper secondary school curricula (Voltri 2021, 56, 110; Estonian Government 2021). For example, the upper secondary school curricula include a compulsory subject called "media and influence" as part of the Estonian language class, that aims to shape critical media users by teaching them to differentiate between quality journalism and entertainment, characteristics of the democratic information society, demagoguery and manipulation techniques, media ethics and media criticism, advertising etc. (Estonian Government 2021, 10-12). In addition, from 2019, schools can also offer an optional course called "Human in a contemporary information environment," giving an overview of a wide range of topics like media and information influence, the role of big data, social media algorithms, trolling, hate speech, propaganda, astroturfing, fact-checking etc. (Kadri Ugur and Talv. 2019, 16). A positive development in the education system has also been the creation of the Chief Expert for General Competence position in 2019, which should make it easier to synchronise and update different competencies at the state level (Voltri 2021, 55-56).

In summary, however, the documents reveal that media education in Estonia, until 2021, has been primarily associated with strategic or market communication or with general technical information competence and in some cases, there are significant shortcomings in the Russian-language curricula. For example, as illustrated by Voltri, "whilst the learning content for those taking Estonian language in their 3rd stage of study includes main linguistic influencing techniques, the nature of media and its present-day objectives, central principles of media ethics, the principle of freedom of speech and its boundaries, and public and hidden influence, these topics are not expected to be covered in Russian" (Kõuts-Klemm et al. 2019; Voltri 2021, 111). However, as nowadays the media landscape has become increasingly complex, with traditional media and public service media being challenged by a number of new players, some of them with malicious intent, the provision of focused media and communication education has become increasingly important. To contribute to this end, this study aims to map different activities related to media literacy in Estonia to create a comprehensive overview of the sector and highlight opportunities for further development. The study will begin with an empirical overview of key actors, their target audiences, as well as key activities focused on advancing media literacy. The empirical factor is then followed by a chapter focusing on country-specific findings, where the study presents its evaluation of the situation, focusing on cross-sectoral cooperation, media literacy activities, sustainability and funding and the role of media in increasing media literacy.

Actors

Similarly, to the broad nature of the media literacy concept, the results of this study indicate a wide range of actors in the field with activities often intertwined.

For clarity, based on the desk research, in-depth interviews and survey, the media literacy actors are divided into the following five general sectors: 1) Governmental, 2) Education and Academia, 3) NGOs and professional associations and societies, 4) Public and Commercial media; 5) Supporters / Donors (external international/ other non-Estonian nationals).

Based on the data gathered, the largest share of media literacy actors operates in the academia and education sector, followed by state, research, media, NGO, and donor fields. Therefore, the main focus is on teaching the media literacy, followed by various fact-finding and media content analyses. Initiatives that provide financial support or monitoring and legal assistance are also widespread.

State-level

From a regulatory point of view, the main actors in the field of media literacy are state agencies, headed by the Ministry of Education and Research (hereinafter MoE), Government Office and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. Regarding media literacy, the dominant actor in the public sector seems to be the MoE, which develops the curricula, and coordinates multiple projects and events like the annual media literacy week, for example. MoE also has several subordinates like the Estonian Education and Youth Board and Information Technology Foundation of Education (HITSA) that are actively involved in the development of media literacy on an ongoing basis (Ministry of Education and Research 2022a, 2021a, 2022b; Education and Youth Board 2022). As an example, MoE and its subordinates, in cooperation with universities and the private sector, organise training, studies, events and campaigns (Kairit Tammets et al. 2021; Ministry of Education and Research 2021b, 2021c; Information System Authority 2022).

The MoE is also the one who has defined media literacy and media education in Estonia. Media literacy is seen as a *"set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that help to critically analyse and evaluate the information presented in different channels and to form adequate assessments"*. Media education's task, on the other hand, *"is to support and develop the student's development into a person who adequately perceives the surrounding information environment, is able to critically analyse and evaluate textual, pictorial, figurative and oral content, is aware of social-ethical norms and is able to create content himself/herself"* (Ministry of Education and Research 2020a).

Additionally, from the state side, an important actor is also the Government Office, whose main areas of activity are communication with the media, government communication and cooperation, crisis communication, shaping visual identity and strategic communication (Government office 2022b).

The Estonian police also play a noticeable role. They have their own web officers who represent the police on the internet, and on some occasions, they also visit schools to talk with young people, organise their own projects, or do some events in cooperation with other institutions like the Academy of Internal Affairs, for example. In one of the recent, slightly amusing projects, according to an interviewed police officer, they called together the Russian-language media journalists because there was a problem that police speed measurements were repeatedly portrayed in a baselessly negative light. After an introductory lecture on how traffic and police work, this problem disappeared.

Furthermore, the participants of the study also highlighted the role of opinion leaders and prominent people. For example, in the field of foreign policy, for example, Marko Mihkelson, the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, and Jüri Luik, the Estonian Ambassador to NATO, were mentioned.

Education and Academia

In the academic field, however, schools and teachers themselves play a key role in making sure that students would acquire basic media literacy skills from a range of subjects. In the field of higher education, the Baltic Film, Media, and Arts Institute of Tallinn University (BFM) and the University of Tartu (UT) can be highlighted. For example, besides curricula that include skills related to media literacy, BFM, in occasional partnership with UT, also has separate free media literacy courses for teachers, primary school students and kindergartens staff (Baltic Film 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). Moreover, both universities have been playing an active role in the MoE's media literacy week, where they have organised different lectures and workshops. Tallinn University of Technology and Baltic Defence College also contribute (Ministry of Education and Research 2021a; Baltic Film 2019-2020).

NGOs and professional associations and societies

Among the non-profit associations, one of the most highlighted was the Estonian Debating Society and Propas-

top, who have been working on fact-checking the information in the public domain and countering disinformation activities through research, respectively (Estonian Debating Society 2022a; Propastop 2022). Furthermore, the Estonian Debating Society, with their annual Notice an Argument week, Estonian Union for Child Welfare, Opinion Festival and Estonian North Atlantic Treaty Organization were also mentioned as active participants (Estonian Debating Society 2022b; Estonian Union for Children Welfare 2022a; MTÜ Arvamusfestival 2022; Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association 2022; Estonian Union for Children Welfare 2022b, 2020).

Public and Commercial media

In the media sector, Estonian National Broadcasting (ERR) has been highlighted as a key actor. The purpose of the ERR set in the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act is to contribute to the fulfilment of the tasks of the Estonian state as they are provided in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia (Estonian National Broadcasting 2019; Riigikogu 2022). Since 2020 they have run a dedicated project called "*Meediataip*", together with a number of cooperation initiatives with other institutions and state bodies (Estonian National Broadcasting 2022b, 2022a).

Regarding private media, the most mentioned actors were the investigative editorial staff of *Eesti Päevaleht* (EPL) and *Postimees*. EPL is primarily focused on fact-checking or debunking, done often in cooperation with other actors, both national and external (*Eesti Päevaleht* 2022; *Delfi* 2020). *Postimees*, on the other hand, has created a media literacy-oriented collection of interviews in its education section and has been organising its own educational program for people who are interested in journalism (*Postimees* 2022a, 2022b, 2021).

Supporters / Donors (external international/other non-Estonian nationals)

Focusing on supporters/donors, the dominant actors besides state institutions turned out to be foreign councils, foundations, and embassies. Some of the most mentioned were Erasmus+, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the Nordic Council, the British Council and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Erasmus + and the European Solidarity Corps Agency 2022; IREX 2022; British Council 2022; Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia 2022; Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2022). In some cases, projects initiated jointly by private companies and universities were also mentioned, such as the projects like anti-bullying "The Greatest Courage" and elderly focused "Digital mentors' program" carried out in cooperation with Telia and the University of Tartu and other NGOs (Telia 2022a, 2022b).

In summary, there are several actors active on the field, however, there is no organisation in Estonia yet that unites all those actors under a single roof. Nevertheless, as a start, the MoE has compiled a list of the most influential media literacy actors available in the curricula system (Youth and Education Board 2022).

1.2. Target audiences

Regarding the selection of target groups, it became evident that in the development of media literacy, it has been realised across sectors that the priority is to increase the knowledge base through various trainings, organised mainly for experts and teachers. The second audience group often addressed were the young people from secondary and basic school, and thirdly, the minorities and residents from certain regions further away from the centre. As a central coordinating body is lacking, the main initiator for different projects and cooperation, according to the interviewees, was a common understanding of the issue based on which various actors then planned their work in an area where they had the capacity.

Creating a knowledge base

As the survey data shows, the projects related to media literacy carried out in Estonia are primarily related to the training of education professionals and teachers, as 92.3% of the respondents in survey have targeted their projects at them (Ministry of Education and Research 2021a; Baltic Film 2022b; University of Tartu 2020; Goethe Institut 2022). According to the survey participants, about half of the projects are also aimed at journalists and communication experts. In this area, however, it was pointed out during the interviews that the focus of a media literacy project often depends on the need for inquiries, and therefore a situation may arise where, for example, certain groups are overlooked. For example, those who carried out teacher training projects pointed out that therapists or kindergarten teachers have generally received less attention than schoolteachers and lecturers.

Educating the youth and parents

Another group that receives a lot of attention is young people and their parents. The target group receiving the most attention is high school students - 76.9% of the respondents have paid attention to their projects. About half of the respondents have also paid attention to the parents of basic (age 11-15) and primary (age 7-11) school children. Regarding the activities, besides education provided in school, various specific trainings, podcasts, live events and workshops are organised for them. Moreover, considerable attention has also been paid to teaching youth practical skills like how to fact-check, detect fraudulent calls, understand the impact of advertising or how to identify unlawful activities to prevent the spread of disinformation and fraud (Estonian Debating Society 2022b; Eesti Päevaleht 2022; Estonian Debating Society, Praxis, and Associations 2021; Baltic Film 2019; Ministry of Education and Research 2021a).

Addressing the minorities or a particular region

According to the survey, about half of the respondents pay attention to ethnic or linguistic minorities and, in some cases, to different regions that are far from the centres and need additional attention. Areas mentioned by interviewees included mainly the North-East and South-East regions.

However, the interviews revealed that in this case, too, the focus is mainly on young people. When addressing minorities, the main issue is still the language barrier. Nevertheless, the lack of interest from the staff of Russian speaking schools' has sometimes become an obstacle too.

Groups who receive little attention

Less attention is paid to the elderly, the homeless, or to politicians or working middle-aged people (the latter may be very vulnerable if they have a low level of education and have encountered hardships). Less than 8% of the respondents have paid attention to these target groups. It was pointed out that especially little attention is paid to the elderly with a minority background. This is mainly due to the difficulty in attracting their interest, difficulty in access and a language barrier. The effects of the lack of attention paid to Russian-speaking elderly people are already evident because, according to the Estonian police, they have been the main targets of fraudulent calls (Põhja Prefektuur 2021).

Noticeably, the interviewees indicated that the lack of projects for the Russian speaking elderly is not so much a problem as this issue has been around for quite some time now. Most of the Estonian media portals for example, have created their own Russian-language editorial offices like *rus.err.ee*, *rus.postimees.ee*, *rus.delfi.ee* etc., and different companies like Telia, Enefit Green, SEB Pank, Omniva, VKG and Luminor also carry out focused projects

with the older population (Pealinn 2021). The problem is, however, a lack of consistency and a systematic approach, as there are difficulties in finding staff and motivated people who have competence in the field and can speak Russian. Lack of staff is also causing problems in the education system, media coverage and elsewhere.

With companies and the middle-aged population, the problem seems to be in the low interest in the topic, as their priorities lie elsewhere.

Hence, to sum up, a unified education system should be seen as a priority, with media literacy included in the curricula, as a separate and uneven education system seems to be the critical factor that contributes to societal division and an uneven knowledge base.

1.3. Mapping the activities

After being asked to analyse their activities, more than half the actors pointed out the creation of educational material or campaigns, followed by more specific activities such as policy development, research, funding and teaching. Skills wise, the primary attention has been on developing critical thinking and understanding cognitive biases, followed by activities that focus on increasing civic participation, intercultural dialogue, and media creation.

Main focus areas

As could be expected after the target audience overview, the study shows that the most common activity to enhance media literacy has been creating resources like books, different educational materials and games, podcasts etc. More than half of the respondents have contributed to this field (Postimees 2022a; Eesti Päevaleht 2022; Kuku 2022; Ministry of Social Affairs 2022; Estonian National Library 2019).

A little less than half of the respondents have also engaged in training the instructors for media literacy and organised campaigns to promote media literacy advancement. Thereby, it is positive to see that, in addition to the national level, civil society organisations have been almost equally active in this area (MTÜ Arvamusfestival 2022; Estonian Animation School 2022).

The rest of the activities have received less attention which may be in large part due to the more specific nature of the activities. The fourth most common activity in which 23.1% of the respondents have been engaged is policy development, followed by research in which 15.4% of the respondents have been involved. The rest of the attention has been equally divided between providing funding, organising seminars and creating different content on problems related to media literacy. Here, civil society has played an active role as well. For example, local culture centres and theatres have created their own educational content and brought various quality films and documentaries to Estonian viewers. Youth centres have organised various trainings, podcasts or, in some cases, created their own website through which quality information is shared (Põlva county youth 2020/2021; Estonian Debating Society, Praxis, and Associations 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, and Estonian Institute of Human Rights 2022). Several interviewees also highlighted the importance of micro-level engagement in social media.

Key skills addressed

Regarding the skills, the results indicate that the key focal points have been developing critical thinking by addressing cognitive biases and different factors that influence decision-making and media use, focusing on the increasing complexity of the information environment. These two competencies have been on the agen-

da of 61.5% and 53.8% of the respondents. A little less than half of the participating actors also indicated that they have developed skills that help to increase digital competency and identify and counter political propaganda and disinformation.

Additionally, about a quarter of the respondents have paid attention to civic participation, intercultural dialogue, and media creation.

The two most prospective areas for development in future projects, however, were cognitive flexibility together with critical thinking and digital literacy. Closely following was the need to increase the awareness of ethical issues with both regular and social media, content analysis and evaluation capabilities, and content production skills.

To sum up, several actors have addressed many important topics. However, reaching target groups and widening the audience in general has remained problematic. Nevertheless, the interviewees indicated that improvements are already being made. MoE, for example, is developing new curricula and improving the sustainability of funding for media literacy projects. Furthermore, several additional national and international projects will be conducted according to the interviewed experts.

1.4. Funding

Funding, was not considered to be a decisive issue, although there could always be more of it. Instead, a deficit of systematic approaches and a strict bureaucratic approach were the restraining factors.

Money is not the decisive factor

Looking at funding, the results indicate that the main funders in promoting media literacy are state institutions, EU projects/funds, or various foreign countries through embassies or focused institutions or funds. On a smaller scale, other international organisations, like the United Nations, local authorities and various private sponsors also contribute (Kiisa et al. 2021).

Funding types indicate a similar trend - media literacy initiatives have received both project-based funding, including short and long-term projects as well as permanent financing with longer-term goals. The fact that funding options were usually accessible was also indicated during the interviews. Several interviewees stated that there typically are funding opportunities if the idea is good, and the project is well written.

Lack of coordination and occasional bureaucratic superficiality

However, as indicated by the interviewees and showcased by the data, which shows a diverse range of funders with a wide range of funding options, the problem is not so much the money but the deficit of systematic approaches. In other words, it is difficult to correct the shortcomings of the education system with subsequent projects.

For example, several respondents said that projects already delivered have been successful, but to reach a wider audience and achieve consistency, the education system needs to keep up.

In other instances, bureaucratic superficiality and lack of coordination also hindered the process. For example, a representative of an Estonian university mentioned an instance where no teachers showed up to a general education program about safety and security while a previously successful media carousel video project was

rejected by the commission, citing a lack of timeframe and inconsistent content, despite previous successes. Therefore, better coordination is needed before the funding is declared to avoid projects that look good on paper but do not work in practice.

When looking at what makes project applicants reject the application, it turned out to be the requirement for own funding. 38.5% of the applicants considered it the most discouraging, which was explained by the fact that media literacy is not a topic that the people in need would like to pay for, as they usually do not even understand that they would benefit from it. 15.5% of the respondents also mentioned one of the limitations to be the short duration of the projects, which does not allow to achieve a long-term impact.

In the rest of the cases, the problems highlighted were more specific and mainly caused by excessively strict requirements. Some of the issues that the respondents had named included the obligation to share documents, legal registration, the minimum year of business, donor visibility, need for recommendations, required evaluation and monitoring activities or tax system issues.

In conclusion, a general recommendation would therefore be to develop a comprehensive strategy that, besides including media literacy in the curricula, would set a general direction and objectives for the development of media literacy, including the input from different sectors, while leaving sufficient room for manoeuvre in the grant and funding requirements to allow innovative approaches.

1.5. Estonia in Indexes

	2019	2020	2021
World Press Freedom Index	11/180	14/180	15/180
Global Innovation Index	25/131	24/131	21/132
Global Peace Index	29/163	30/163	30/163

2. Country Findings and Recommendations

In this part, the study will highlight the essential findings and recommendations, evaluating the cooperation, media literacy activities, sustainability, and funding, and finally, the role of media in increasing media literacy.

2.1. Cross-sectoral cooperation and networking

The results of this study show that in Estonia, the development of different media literacy aspects have been carried out for a long time, but the competence has been addressed under several different terms and taught as part of many different subjects. Recently, however, increased focus has gone directly to the development of media literacy, and according to the experts, there are plans to introduce media literacy separately into national curricula.

There are many actors in the field of media literacy in Estonia, and cooperation is close. With regards to formal education, the MoE plays a leading role by developing the curricula, organising different events like the annual media literacy week, providing funding and organising different cooperation projects with various

partners (Ministry of Education and Research 2021a). Nevertheless, the circle of actors is vast, and cooperation between different fields is tight. For example, Eesti Päevaleht and Delfi have cooperated with Facebook and the Estonian Debate Society in the framework of their fact-checking series (Meta 2022; Eesti Päevaleht 2022). Several Estonian universities led by Tallinn and Tartu University have organised many different studies, conferences, lectures and events, often in collaboration with various partners (University of Tartu 2012; Baltic Film 2019–2020; Postimees 2021). State institutions, the private sector, civil society and the media individually, as well as in cooperation, have also created several educational websites and podcasts, public forums etc. (Estonian Academy of Security Sciences 2022; Erasmus+ 2022; Postimees 2022a; Estonian National Broadcasting 2022b, 2022a; Ministry of Education and Research 2022b).

In the case of cooperation, the coherence and motivation of interests and a shared understanding of the problem were considered the most important – indicating that a common information space is vital as it defines whether the person or focus group is interested in media literacy in the first place. Furthermore, the interest of the target groups was also pointed out as a contributing factor, proving that for best results, it is necessary that the content and approach to media literacy suit the target audience.

Regarding the type of approach, the results indicate that a project-based approach dominates at the moment, and hence a stable approach should be introduced as a matter of urgency through the addition of media literacy into the education system curricula, as it needs to be addressed continuously to create a lasting impact.

Strengths

- Multifaceted approach and cooperation between the sectors, which unites the state, private sector, civil society and media organisations.
- There are strong civil society actors in Estonia and many grassroots initiatives.
- General availability of funding in the case of a well-defined and written project.

Weaknesses

- Lack of human resources and the need for double funding due to two different language groups. The Estonian and Russian-speaking communities need different methodological approaches, and it is often difficult to find enough Russian-speaking people who are competent in the field of media literacy.
- The strategy for reaching the most vulnerable is patchy. Fact-checking does not always reach those who already believe that mainstream media is lying to them. Similarly, the most vulnerable often do not recognise that they should improve their media literacy.
- Under the current strategy, particular emphasis has been placed on secondary schools and universities. However, students in vocational schools have received significantly less attention.
- When working with social media giants, they have the final say, and there is little room for regulation at the national level.
- The online format decreases interest in participation – face-to-face work with target groups is more engaging and thus effective.

Threats

- Lower level of involvement and social results of Russian speaking minority in different spheres due to the language barrier and dual education system which facilitates separation.
- Russian state-controlled media that consciously builds divisions and spreads disinformation.
- Emergence of different actors like conspiracy theorists, radicals or opportunists who consciously or unconsciously spread disinformation for personal gain.

Opportunities/Recommendations

- Greater involvement of vocational schools has excellent potential to increase the level of media literacy in society.
- More attention and resources needed for Russian speaking and rural regions. An idea to consider would be the creation for internal exchange system, where students from Russian speaking areas and vice versa could be emerged in a different environment.
- Work on media literacy advancement is often done based on an individual state organisation, company, media organisation or donor's initiative. Creation of a coordinating structure or plan of objectives would help systematise these efforts.

2.2. Evaluation of media literacy activities

When evaluating the performance, it was generally agreed that media literacy projects could not be well assessed with quantitative methods because different target groups have specific problems that require tailor-made solutions. Imposition of strict requirements for increased effectiveness of quantitative evaluation is not recommended either because, according to the respondents, strict requirements often resulted in excessive generalisation and limited freedom of decision, which in turn led to either superficial results or resignation of proponents. Nevertheless, it does not mean that evaluation is not important, as interviewees also pointed out that project assessment is vital for continuous improvement. Therefore, a qualitative evaluation that considers target group specifics should be the preferred methodology.

When looking at the results of the evaluation itself, the sectoral overview demonstrates that the focus in Estonia has currently been on creating a knowledge base – educating teachers, young people (especially between 20-34) and parents, as well as creating new materials, literature and various educational content for the web. However, the elderly (65+) and young children up to 12 years of age receive the least amount of attention, based on the results of the questionnaire. Thereby, the interviews especially emphasised the need to start engaging young people from an earlier age (up to 12 years of age), as the balance between learning and gaining experience has been altered due to the early entry of children into the information sphere through social media and digital tools. Regarding the young (up to 12 years of age), it was also emphasised that the work should start with the development of the basis of social knowledge, as youngsters often do not grasp that their actions online bear real-life consequences.

Capabilities wise, the attention has been on teaching various practical skills and increasing awareness of the effects of cognitive bias in decision-making, the functioning and impact of today's information society, or the dangers of the digital revolution, and the spread of misinformation. On the other hand, less attention has been paid to the participation of different cultural groups, to the development of communication between

them and to the explanation of fundamental values and the foundations of a democratic system. Similarly, teaching content creation (articles, comments, pictures, videos, etc.) and explaining the implications (how my content affects others) have also received less attention.

As has become evident from the interviews, regarding the Russian speaking minority, the problem is often rooted in the low interest and involvement rates, which in turn leads to the lack of policy implementers because there are not enough people who are competent in the field of media literacy, but also speak two languages. Therefore, media literacy eventually recedes to the education system and the disadvantages of two different (Estonian and Russian) school systems, as such a system perpetuates segregation in society and therefore makes minorities more vulnerable.

To sum up, systematisation and coordination of media literacy-oriented activities is needed. The general education system should be the starting point as it needs increased emphasis on the development of general knowledge of different influence strategies, awareness of threats as well as on basic social skills. These skills could be later enriched in higher education or extra-curricular activities with more specific content.

Strengths

- Much attention is paid to the development of practical skills such as fact-checking, distinguishing between different sorts of information, and the use of digital tools.
- At the state level, a so-called media literacy-oriented white paper is also being created, which will create a political basis for its development.
- A broader approach is currently being taken, covering the psychological and emotional effects of today's information society and digital environment, such as how disinformation and policy play with emotions to influence human decision-making or why it is essential to pay attention to digital well-being when operating online, etc.
- Media literacy has been covered from a wide range of angles thanks to cross-sectoral cooperation between multiple actors, including state institutions, private sector, academia, media, and civil society.
- Systematisation of funding, more people and new policy documents from the state create preconditions for broader coverage.

Weaknesses

- Lack of a focused approach towards media literacy in the current education curricula – media literacy needs to be introduced into the primary and secondary school curricula (especially in the Russian-language curricula where there are currently gaps as highlighted in the chapter 1.1).
- Existing projects are sometimes underfunded because higher costs due to the need for a separate approach for language groups were not considered in the beginning.
- There are few actors who can reach the Russian speaking minority.
- In the light of the war in Ukraine, there is an urgent need to raise awareness and equip people with practical skills on how to act in a crisis. Moreover, there is a need to improve people's content evaluation capacity and to raise awareness about disinformation strategies.

Threats

- Systematic Russian propaganda aimed to divide the Estonian society through broadcasting disinformation to local Russian speaking minorities is still an issue. The bronze soldier crisis in 2007 was a warning.

Opportunities/Recommendations

- Act as soon as possible to move towards connecting the school systems. There is interest and wish present in the society and considerable gains to expect. When addressing people who have already finished school, the focus should be on those who encounter different target groups and have an impact.
- There is a need to develop a definition of media literacy that covers a wider sphere than media education, and that is cross-cutting in nature. It should then be implemented in various documents. The main question should be whether the individual is able to cope with the information environment of his / her choice, is able to assess the quality of the content, spread his / her message, understand his / her opportunity and responsibility, and be able to adapt.
- There is support, interest, and funding for focused media literacy education in different sectors. However, a systematic approach is lacking.
- Respondents and data indicate that the local Russian language tv channel ETV + has been accepted, so work with it should be continued.
- The study has found that the ground is fertile for cooperation to develop a lifelong learning system for media literacy.
- Various hobby schools, youth centres and camps have also worked well, as there is no obligation and children from different schools and classes are mixed up.
- Various interactive and practical tasks and tests work well for involving people.

2.3. Sustainability and funding of media literacy related projects

In Estonia, activities related to media literacy are mainly financed from the state budget (to a lesser extent from local government), followed by EU funding and then direct funding from other countries. In rare cases, another international organisation (e.g. UN, OECD, or European Commission), a national private donor or self-financing will also contribute, but these are rather rare, accounting for less than 8% of cases. An exception is the media organisations, which mainly earn their own money.

In terms of project duration, it was found that most project-based programmes are short-term. Nevertheless, a considerable number of projects were also long-term. However, there were fewer medium-term projects with permanent funding, indicating that projects outside the education system have shorter-term objectives, and therefore, the inclusion of a media literacy component in the education system was seen as a necessity to achieve better consistency and funding.

An analysis of the problems encountered revealed that the predominant reason for abandoning projects was the need for own funding or a too short and superficial approach to projects, which would not lead to a lasting impact. Therefore, as pointed out by Lauri Hussar, consideration should be given to a pan-European project aimed at raising media literacy in general education schools, as this is a topic of European significance and importance.

Strengths

- Different funding options are available.
- Strong and independent media organisations have been willing to contribute to media literacy advancement.
- Web police officers' presence has contributed to many fields ranging from detecting online crime and fraud to going to schools to talk about what the new technological environment entails. Society has widely accepted them.

Weaknesses

- Lack of a media literacy specific component in the education system which in turn leads to media literacy work lacking depth and being mostly project based.
- Lack of people who can speak Estonian and Russian and have the necessary skills to develop media literacy; this in turn is causing some fatigue in producing original ideas
- Campaigns for large projects are often too general and do not go into great depth, resulting in a broad and diffuse topic approach which can create fatigue and boredom regarding the topic.
- Public Broadcasting lacks the funding for additional media literacy advancement.
- Lack of a general and easily accessible overview of funds available.

Threats

- Since disinformation campaigns are getting more sophisticated, donor organisations should be aware and set clear criteria in place to maintain quality and to ensure that no one could start disseminating disinformation under the media literacy projects.
- Little coordination or bureaucratic hurdles can push away potential applicants because they do not find the funding options on time, or their projects get turned down due to their inability to cope with excessive technical requirements.

Opportunities/Recommendations

- The inclusion of media literacy in the curricula and its continued funding to achieve a wide-ranging outcome is a matter of national security and should be a priority.
- Funding should be designed to include multiple actors to reduce risks and burdens. Ideally, funding could be pan-European, and the focus and objectives of funding should be regularly updated. Estonian practice has shown that the best result is achieved by combining the financing of an international organisation and the network of a regional/local organisation.
- The Education and Youth Board of the MoE already has a website with a collection of curricula related to media literacy, descriptions of learning processes, instructional materials, books in the field, a guide for updating learning outcomes and a list of prominent actors. However, a list of the main funders through which funding could be provided for media literacy projects is missing and would provide a valuable addition (Youth and Education Board 2022).
- It is advised to build more capacity building programs for civil society, teachers, journalists, young peo-

ple, etc., to provide an overview of legal practices, funding applications, but also the wider meaning of media literacy to raise awareness of different trends, challenges and capabilities and thus reduce human resource issues.

2.4. The role of media in increasing media literacy

Estonian media policy has been best characterised by Freedman's (2014) concept of negative policy, where the state organises as little as possible and with as little intrusion as possible. (Kõuts-Klemm et al. 2019, 19-20; Freedman 2014).

The basis of the Estonian media's activities is the Estonian Code of Journalistic Ethics [*Eesti ajakirjanduseetika koodeks*], according to which the role of the media is to support the democratic system through a free press that provides truthful and honest information and critical oversight of political and economic power (Estonian Association of Media Companies 2022).

There is no central media content regulator or media support funds such as the Latvian Public Electronic Mass Media Council (SEPLP) and Media Support Foundation or the Lithuanian Radio and Television Commission (RTC).

Media regulation is therefore technical in its nature. There is a Media Service Act [*Meediateenuse seadus*], which sets out the principles for the provision of media services, the application for license of operation and the protection of information sources. This law regulates, for example, the protection of personal data (including the protection of sources), the protection of minors, the conditions of competition and various technical requirements, such as the obligation to store content for 20 days in the event of a judicial obstruction for example (Riigikogu 2010).

The main regulators that come in contact with the media are the Data Protection Inspectorate and the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority, which deal with technical supervision, consumer protection and market regulation respectively (Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority 2022a; Data Protection Inspectorate 2022). On the 15 of March 2022, the Consumer Protection and Technical Surveillance Authority, however, created a precedent by issuing an injunction to telecommunications companies to block access to 7 websites related to Russia on the grounds of protecting consumers from war propaganda and incitement to hatred (Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority 2022b).

As the role of the media has been regarded as the delivery of honest information to the people and the oversight of political and economic power. The promotion of projects, specific content creation, or focus on certain parts of population, even if in the public interest, has been avoided to retain media freedom. The only place where certain goals are set is the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act [*Eesti Rahvusringhäälingu seadus*], where the objectives of the National Broadcasting in paragraph 4 include three points such as the need to "indicate the circumstances that may endanger the survival of the Estonian state and the Estonian nation", to "contribute to the social cohesion of Estonian society" and to "promote democratic governance" (Riigikogu 2022).

On this basis, National Broadcasting has created a separate website called *Meediataip*, which publishes various articles, video lectures, games, data and podcasts focusing on promoting media literacy (Estonian National Broadcasting 2022b, 2022a). The portal is available both in Estonian and Russian.

Private media, on the other hand, do not have any legal obligation as to whom they should address, what topics to cover or what activities to conduct. Nevertheless, private media have been promoting media literacy as well. For example, *Eesti Päevaleht* cooperates in the international debunking project and has a fact-checking page, *Postimees* is running an education program, and its editorial staff has created a series of lectures focus-

ing on media literacy (Eesti Päevaleht 2022; Delfi 2020; Postimees 2022a, 2022b, 2021). Furthermore, Delfi also has a pilot project in Russian called *Dokopaemsya Do Pravdy* which focuses on debunking and explaining different strategies and narratives forwarded by the Russian media and state institutions or by conspirators (Delfi 2022).

The main findings of this interdisciplinary study are as follows.

Strengths

- The media has a great ability to reach a wider audience and Estonian media has in general high trust and viewability.
- Presence of wide range of projects and actors from different fields involving a solid brainpower.
- Active cooperation between various actors in many areas.
- Many innovative and creative approaches like games, websites, discussion forums etc. created.

Weaknesses

- Currently, private media is in the unequal conditions of competition with global online companies, as the advertising in the traditional media is taxed while large global companies such as Facebook, Google, Amazon etc., are not. Hence local private media channels often need extra funding for content which has educational aims or serves public good.
- Voluntary projects inevitably have a small footprint, so they may not reach the most vulnerable groups in society.
- There are few opportunities for journalists to receive additional training on emerging threats, political advocacy strategies, and disinformation.

Threats

- Regarding public attention and trends in the world, there should be increased attention paid to journalist security.
- The approach to media literacy is often very field-specific, so some essential aspects may be left out. Therefore, when developing media literacy, a broad approach should be pursued with the basics covered in the education system.

Opportunities/Recommendations

- Estonia, together with the EU, should actively work towards creating equal competition conditions for both global (Facebook/Meta, Google etc.) and local media organisations. As a possible solution, Estonia could propose at the EU level the taxation of advertising by global tech giants through listing them as publishers.
- Adding media literacy development to the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act as an objective of National Broadcasting as it is in line with the promotion of democratic governance and would help the National Broadcasting to better coordinate and systematise its activities.

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- Develop the provisions of open data to create new analytical and service development capabilities for the domestic media sector. That would considerably ease the work of journalists and allow for thorough analysis and reporting to be created.
 - A capacity-building fund should be considered to allow media organisations and other professionals to access additional training to stay up to date with the latest developments. The fund would allow increased participation because, currently, people working in the field found it hard to participate in additional training since that meant their everyday work suffered.

Conclusions

- Media literacy advancement should be raised at the European level as this is a topic of European significance and importance. Through a common approach, better funding and sustainability could be achieved.
- Estonia, together with the EU, should actively work towards creating equal competition conditions for both global (Facebook/Meta, Google etc.) and local media organisations. As a possible solution, Estonia could propose at the EU level the taxation of advertising by global tech giants through listing them as publishers.
- At the national level, Estonia should complete the development of a definition of the term media literacy and apply it widely, starting with curricula.
- The term should be broad enough to cover the whole spectrum, and learning should start at an early age and start with a base of social knowledge.
- The Education and Youth Board's media literacy website could be further developed to include different ideas and funding providers. Information on practical skills could also be gathered there, and at a central level, trends and focus could be highlighted. It would be like an atlas of media literacy, where all the information and general guidelines are gathered. Furthermore, it could include an overview of the work done and MoE could set new goals there every year based on their evaluation. An annual meeting could also be organised as part of this activity where different organisations could meet and plan their activities in cooperation with each other.
- Two different (Estonian and Russian) school systems perpetuate segregation in society, making minorities more vulnerable. United Estonian language education system should be a state priority.
- There should be a program as part of lifelong learning for professionals and practitioners in the field where they could occasionally update their knowledge and skill. Currently, additional courses on legal practices and opportunities to apply for funding are especially needed.
- A capacity-building fund should be considered to allow media organisations and other professionals to access additional training to stay up to date with the latest developments. The fund would allow to increase participation because, people working in the field found it hard to participate in additional training since that meant their everyday work suffered.

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