



POSITION PAPER ON MIL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN ALBANIA

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I What is MIL

This document is based on the concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL,) understood as a composite concept that harmonizes the approach between media and information literacy. MIL as a composite concept includes a broad range of skills and sources of information, such as: library literacy, news literacy, digital literacy, computer literacy, Internet literacy, freedom of expression and freedom of information literacy, television literacy, advertising literacy, cinema literacy, and games literacy¹. In this context, the notion of MIL includes in its base a multi-stakeholder approach. Policy and strategy documents in Albania mostly focus on digital literacy, and this document offers a holistic approach of MIL as a composite concept.

II MIL background in Albania

Although the negotiation process has not started yet for Albania in the framework of the EU accession, the integration process has had important impact in the legislative area affecting MIL, such as in the cases of audiovisual media regulation, e-commerce regulation, digital switchover, electronic communications, etc.

Albania is still in need of formulating a *formal, official strategy and policy treating MIL as a complex concept, even though* some aspects of MIL are present in Albania's policy and strategy. Digital literacy and information literacy are recognized through strategic documents related to education framework and to information strategy. The government and the civil society are tackling different aspects, sometimes through joint cooperation. In addition, international organizations such as OSCE, EU, and UNESCO, have also cooperated with government and local organizations in this field. Still, the different component and approaches that make up MIL could, and should, be addressed in a comprehensive and strategic manner in terms of policy, strategy, and implementation. In this context, *initiatives and coordination involving a multi-stakeholder approach to develop MIL policies and strategies could be a base on which to formulate and develop MIL policy and strategy.*

¹ See UNESCO, MIL Policy and Strategy Guidelines

Against this background, *the National Consultations on MIL Policy and Strategy were held on February 21st 2017, within the framework of the EC-UNESCO project “Building trust in media in SEE and Turkey,” organized by Albanian Media Institute and co-organized with relevant government ministries, more specifically with the Ministry of Education and Sports. This event brought together an array of different actors from the governmental and non-governmental sector. The discussion emphasized that a need for MIL is no longer negotiable in our current context and in general, under the leadership of government ministries, stakeholders from different sectors agreed with the recommendations included in the Background Document on national MIL policies and strategies in Albania.*

Albania’s preparations in the field of MIL policies, strategies, and their implementation need to advance. Even though MIL is not recognized as a concept in any strategic document of Albanian government, or in any law, regulation, or guidelines, the representatives of the government and other stakeholders during the National Consultations showed their willingness to start initiatives that would better address MIL. In the education sector MIL is implicitly and partially recognized within the *Law on Pre-University Education*, which highlights that the pre-university education system is built on a competency-based approach. Some competencies are related to MIL, and in this way it can be said that some MIL skills are implicitly assumed as outcome². In terms of policy development digital competencies are more developed and pronounced in the documents related to university education. The *Strategy of Development of Pre-University Education 2014-2020* envisions the improvement of technological infrastructure in schools, as well as the development of multimedia materials for the curricula, mobile labs for the schools, and integration of ICT in different subjects of the school curricula. Furthermore, the *Curricula Framework* considers technology and ICT as one of the main learning areas and recommends that in order to see a quick advancement of students in this area, it should be integrated with all other learning areas, in a graduated form, across the pre-university education system cycles.

Regarding ICT, the main document that lays out the government policies on information society is the *Digital Agenda Strategy (2015-2020)*, which was first preceded by the *Inter-Sectoral*

² Article 13 of the Law on Pre-University Education (2012, amended in 2015,) lists the basic competencies defined in the legal framework on pre-university education: communication and expression; thinking; learning to understand; competencies for life, enterprise, and environment; personal skills; civic skills; and digital competencies.

Strategy of Information Society (2008-2013.). The Strategy drafted in 2008 identified the need to introduce ICT as a subject in schools, but also to educate the broad public on how to find and take advantage of information, against the background of growing internet access among the population³. More specifically regarding ICT in education, the *Action Plan of the Strategy (2015-2020)* states that some of the steps to be taken include digitalization of libraries in pre-university education institutions, training for teachers in ICT, developing e-learning system, and continuing work with ICT in pre-university education.

The *Law on Libraries in the Republic of Albania* considers libraries as part of the national information system. In this context, they are regarded as cultural and informative institutions, offering free access to information to everyone, in whatever form it is available. Albanian legislation provides for existence of both public and private museums and archives. However, as in the case of libraries, the regulation and guidelines need to specifically address the importance of these institutions in information literacy. In addition, despite the progress made in digitizing their content, more should be done in this respect, as some of these institutions find that the content they safeguard might still be at risk.

III Guiding/fundamental principles (or policies)

Guiding principles of this document stem from *democratic values* that include the right to freedom of information and freedom of expression, as well as the contribution of these values in increasing informed citizen participation and democratic communication. Based on UNESCO's concept for MIL, this paper aims to harmonize the approach between media and information literacy, and apply this concept to the Albanian situation, hoping to encourage an approach that empowers citizens, fosters critical thinking, promotes cultural diversity, social inclusion, and gender equality. Furthermore, the document is based on a multi-stakeholder approach, following UNESCO MIL concept, and is based on existing policies and actors on MIL, aiming to further develop and complete initiatives in this field in Albania.

³ Inter-Sectoral Strategy of Information Society (2008-2013.)

IV Overall Position Statement

Based on the research results on MIL policies and practice in Albania, this paper suggests adopting a comprehensive approach and policy on MIL, possibly in the shape of a MIL Strategy. The National Consultations revealed that there is an opportunity based on multi-stakeholder discussions under government leadership to develop a more unified strategy for MIL development with clear definitions and roles that stakeholders from different sectors have. Different government bodies should be involved in this approach, especially the Ministry of Education and Sports, and the Ministry of Innovation and Public Administration, with the support of other public institutions, as well as academia, business, information intermediaries, private sector and civil society. Given the novelty of the concept and its partial and limited addressing in the existing policies, there is a good opportunity to draft a well-planned and clearly defined Strategy on MIL, which would address all necessary concepts, aspects, objectives, tools, and actors in a comprehensive manner.

V Strategic directions and specific positions this document is proposing on MIL

- **Adopting a strategic approach to fostering MIL:** adopting MIL as a composite concept, including media literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy, so that the concept can be included in strategic documents and follow-up guidelines and regulation.
- **Consider harmonization of formal education with MIL concept:** it would be important to gradually review school curricula in order to include MIL in different learning cycles.
- **Initiation of MIL capacity building programs for key stakeholders in formal, informal, and non-formal education:** specialized training for education agencies, teachers, librarians, museum representatives, NGO representatives, and other key stakeholders for MIL.
- **Supporting systematic research on MIL competencies in the country:** using the data of the research is necessary in order to reflect on MIL policies and the best way to implement them.

VI Key recommendations from the National Consultations on MIL Policy and Strategy, 2017.

1. Formulate an official strategy and policy harmonizing Media and Information Literacy, treating MIL as a composite concept and adopting the necessary policy guidelines accordingly.
2. Initiate research-based initiatives that focus on training of trainers on MIL and provide support for curriculum leaders to guide the integration of MIL in the official curricula at primary, secondary and university level of education.
3. Initiate and support pilot programs on capacity building for stakeholders in the educational sector mainly teachers and librarians through training of teachers on MIL; introduction of a pilot course on MIL in selected schools in primary and secondary education.
4. Encourage initiatives in the field of non-formal and informal education and extracurricular activities and initiatives from NGOs and private sector centered on teaching youth and citizens in general MIL skills;
6. Encourage initiatives of regulatory bodies such as Audiovisual Media Authority aiming at educating the public on MIL.
7. Encourage the establishment of self-regulatory bodies as a mechanism for improving media ethics and thus contributing to media and information literacy knowledge, skills and capacities among media and information users.
8. Foster initiatives of libraries, museums, and other similar institutions focused on introducing and teaching MIL skills to young generation and overall public through access to databases and activities aimed to improve information literacy.
9. Adoption of initiatives that improve access to information and databases, such as museums and archives (offline and online) to improve information literacy among youth and citizens.

VII Statements from Government Representatives

At the National Consultations all participants accepted recommendations delivered with the Background document and they generally recognized that the need for MIL is no longer negotiable and optional. The government representatives also showed their support to further developing MIL policies and potential follow-up actions, following a multi-stakeholder approach.

Milena Harito, the Minister of Innovation and Public Administration, reiterated the commitment of Albanian government to strengthening information infrastructure in the country, and expressed the support of her ministry and of the government for media and information literacy policies and initiatives. She pointed out that we are living in a world where the importance of fact-checking is becoming paramount, against the current crisis of trust in the society, and MIL education is essential in having an educated population that can contribute to improving trust in society and social cohesion.

Dritan Sallaku, director of Pre-University Education Section at the Ministry of Education, said: “Although competencies related to MIL exist in the education regulation in the forms of competencies that students have to gain, more should be done to bring the curricula in line with MIL and implement them in the teaching process. The cooperation with Institute for Development of Education will be paramount in the process, but all actors gathered here today and others that are interested in MIL should do their part in the overall process.”

VIII Conclusion

The initial phases of MIL development in Albania are recognized among different actors in governmental and non-governmental sector. During National Consultations challenges were recognized, such as educational reform, need for better training capacities of teachers, a more developed NGO initiatives in the field, and the need for presence of strong and active professional and community-based organizations. However, the national consultations indicated unanimously that the sooner MIL as a concept is introduced in the formal curricula or in other initiatives, the better will be for Albanian citizens, especially in an era of rapid changes of information and technology world. Another recommendation from the national consultations was the need to develop cooperation among different stakeholders in this respect, in order to

successfully cooperate in the area of MIL. However, even though the role of different actors was recognized, the consultations emphasized that the formal education system needs to consider taking a comprehensive approach and harmonize the curricula with MIL objectives.