



Communication and Information Sector



Building trust in media through media and information literacy



Position paper on Media and Information Literacy in Kosovo*¹

2018

¹**All references to Kosovo are made in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244*

1. Introduction

Kosovo currently has a 77.7% internet penetration rate as of 2013, over 40 national and local televisions and thousands of online news outlets in the Albanian language alone.² These statistics clearly indicate that Kosovo citizens have substantial exposure to information as well as media outlets. The range of credibility, transparency, implicit and explicit bias and accuracy of information in these information outlets is also varied. The benefits of the free access to the breadth of information also comes with the responsibility of consuming this information critically. To do so, an individual needs to be able to understand the functions of media and other information providers, to critically evaluate their content, and to make informed decisions as users and producer of information and media content. Media and Information Literacy (MIL) seeks to create legislative and strategic frameworks to develop these skills for all people.

MIL is a multi-sectional approach to a range of issues. At the forefront stand the issues of information and media literacy. Typically, information literacy is a set of abilities that enables individuals to know when and what information is needed, where to find it, evaluate it and use it to solve a problem at hand. Media literacy uses some of the same concepts, and is defined as a set of skills needed to access, analyse, evaluate and create media. When combined, media and information literacy form the basis of skills necessary for a citizen to be an effective user of the digital information landscape, a crucial skill in today's digital knowledge environment.

Media and Information Literacy, however, also includes a number of cross sectional issues. It focuses on the equal access to learning and information for diverse communities through its Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID) component. It also focuses on the necessity to develop the ethical and professional aspect of media and information consumption and creation.

In Kosovo, indirect MIL concepts have been included at several stages of the formal education system. The development of information and communication technology skills, competency in critical thinking, research and critical evaluation of information have been included as core competencies in the curricula of Kosovo schools. However, a harmonized MIL strategy which would concert the policies and actions of state and non-state actors has not been developed. With the aim to initiate the process of the development of an MIL strategy, actors from several sectors of Kosovo's public spheres have held continuous consultations on MIL.

These consultations have led to the position shared by a comprehensive group of governmental (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Prime Minister's Office, Independent Media Commission), Civil Society and private sector on MIL in Kosovo. It is the shared position of all the aforementioned actors that Kosovo needs to engage the development and execution of a national MIL strategy that harmonizes all national policies in formal, informal and non-formal education, the media as well as civil society and private sector on MIL.

² Kosovo Association of Information and Communication Technology (STIKK), "Internet Penetration and Usage in Kosovo", p.13 - http://www.mfa-ks.net/repository/docs/STIKK_raport_eng_2013_short_web.pdf.

2. Position on the development of MIL in Kosovo

The MIL stakeholders hold that there is an immediate need to formulate a framework strategy for the harmonization of all MIL efforts and channelling support to specific areas of focus. As a result, a set of strategic framework goals, along with initially responsible stakeholders was established. The stakeholders also believe that a state actor with reliable institutional memory and the ability to drive a multi-generational strategy is the optimal carrier of this harmonization and development effort.

In order to establish a sustainable and cohesive approach toward the development of MIL, all stakeholders agreed on a set of common principles that will guide the development going forward.

- **Media and Information Literacy strategies in Kosovo needs to be particularly designed to address critical thinking.** Developing the ability to critically evaluate information, processes, biases and beliefs is crucial to ensure internalization of MIL as a composite concept.
- **Media and Information Literacy should foster open, respectful and fact – based dialogue.** Without discrimination on topic, an inclusive and successful dialogue needs to be fully participatory – actively seek to include marginalized groups – and informed – actively encourage critical informed citizens who participate in dialogue.
- **MIL adoption requires involvement from all.** Incentive based involvement can only partially help in uptake of MIL. Stakeholders’ involvement needs to be self-fuelled, for the benefit of all.
- **Involvement in MIL efforts is a benefit to the participating party.** Involvement in the MIL efforts should provide a benefit to the parties covering their share of work in any MIL efforts in Kosovo. Design of these efforts needs to ensure that benefits to the participatory stakeholders are also taken into account.

3. Objectives

The stakeholders, based on the research and discussions conducted throughout the consultation period for the MIL efforts in Kosovo, outlined a key set of strategic objectives. These objectives have been developed in order to efficiently develop an MIL strategy in Kosovo, being aware of the reality in the ground, adapting MIL to the Kosovo context and making use of existing structures and efforts by varied actors concerning MIL.

Objective 1: Governmental Policy Development

To ensure sustainability of MIL efforts, MIL has to be communicated at all levels of mandatory and elective education systems. Additionally, MIL has to be reinforced throughout secondary public information and education systems, including libraries, galleries and integrated into other outreach efforts. This is particularly more important seeing as journalism professionals share the belief that critical reading of the media is a skill that should be taught at these levels above all other reasons.³ These professionals also believed that the lack of education of the public, and journalists and media editors themselves, concerning media and information, is the primary challenge with MIL in Kosovo. Therefore, harmonized and inclusive governmental policy development concerning education on MIL is a key strategic objective.

Specific Objective 1: Harmonize current education curriculum framework with critical thinking focus.

Specific Objective 2: Develop a framework of the inclusion of MIL throughout the curriculum.

Specific Objective 3: Identify and implement incentive structures and compulsory mechanisms for MIL inclusion in higher education.

Specific Objective 4: Revitalize libraries, galleries and other information centres and establish them as MIL dissemination channels.

Specific Objective 5: Develop ICT capacities in school environments.

³ INDEP national online consultation with media professionals and media researchers. 31 respondents to multiple answer question "Who do you believe would have the highest impact in educating the public on media and information?". Highest frequency answer is "Elementary and Middle schools" (67.7% of respondents) followed by Universities (58.1% of respondents). Answer options: 1) Parents and families, 2) Elementary, middle and high schools, 3) Universities, 4) Media, 5) Journalists and media professionals, 6) Civil Society and informal groups, 7) Informal and non-formal education, 8) MEST, 9) IMC, 10) Public Institution Public Relations Offices, 11) Journalist associations in Kosovo, 12) No education necessary.

Strategic Objective 2: Media Policy Harmonization and Development of Kosovo Media MIL Capacities

Recognizing the need to maintain a non-interference policy with media, while simultaneously ensuring the uptake of MIL concepts within said media, the goals of this strategic objective is to develop incentive structures that foster adherence of journalists and media to MIL concepts.

Based on the national consultations, multiple expert groups agree on the fact that in Kosovo, traditional media still maintain a considerable level of viewership and online readership. As such, they play a key role in the information of citizens and are active creators of opinions. This is both a benefit and a challenge. The beneficial aspect of this contextual reality in Kosovo is that it provides an address through which to target MIL concept to the public through media themselves. The challenge stems from the semi-traditional, non-transparent media sources that define part of the media spectrum in Kosovo, and an intrinsic inability to influence, or even identify decision makers, within these media.

However, the adoption of MIL education and outreach activities by the main traditional media outlets in the country has benefits for the media themselves. Primarily, the media that adopt such policies would stand to benefit from increased viewer/reader loyalty and increased credibility – which still are considerable drivers of revenue streams in Kosovo. Secondly, with the simultaneous development of continuing education programs for journalists – through online means – the media themselves would benefit from an increase in the professional capacities of its production staff.

As such, aligning voluntary incentive structures for uptake of public MIL education efforts by traditional media with ready-made training and education materials should ensure a successful outreach effort.

Specific Objective 1: Ideate a mechanism of action through which media would be active delivery vehicles for MIL education.

Specific Objective 2: Develop voluntary training curriculums in online format for MIL concepts for journalists and citizens.

Specific Objective 3: Create and sustain an active, informal, outreach mechanism to advocate to media for the inclusion of MIL concepts in their reporting and editorial policies.

Specific Objective 4: Develop a mechanism to enable media and journalists to serve as MIL educators in formal, non-formal and informal education channels.

Strategic Objective 3: Harmonize individual organization efforts to maximize impact.

Several MIL efforts in Kosovo are already under way by a number of local and international organizations. These efforts range from formal and informal education and training mechanisms, to activities related to MIL goals (such as providing ICT education to women). One common factor that runs throughout these efforts is coordination – at most, coordination is multilateral but not inclusive. As such, the need for a coordinated effort was identified.

The need for a coordinated approach serves to primarily best utilize the unique professional capacities of each organization as well as avoiding doubling efforts throughout the system. This coordination also would aid in the establishment of an input channel into other coordinated efforts.

Specific Objective 1: Establish a formal network of MIL oriented non-governmental organizations.

Specific Objective 2: Utilize formal network to provide input across all other strategic objectives.

Specific Objective 3: Involve informal academic and researcher organizations into the formal network.

Specific Objective 4: Design and implement research development agenda for MIL in Kosovo.

Strategic Objective 4: Secure comprehensive inclusion of marginalized groups throughout the MIL national strategy.

Inclusion is a key concept of MIL and as such any planning, design and implementation activities need to be filtered through a proactive inclusion lens. This lens needs to be applied by all actors at all stages of development and implementation.

Stakeholders involved in national consultations agreed on principle that securing adherence to an inclusive agenda in MIL in Kosovo requires specific focus. This focus has been set out as a strategic objective in its own to both outline its importance, and also force self-compliance by all MIL participatory stakeholders.

Specific Objective 1: Actively include marginalized group representatives (women, youth and ethnic, sexual and other marginalized minorities) with veto power throughout the policy and harmonization initiatives and stakeholder groups.

Specific Objective 2: Actively engage marginalized group issue experts in policy formulation, independent of voluntary participation of marginalized group representatives.

Specific Objective 3: Funding should reflect intention when designing marginalized group aware policies.

Strategic Objective 5: Communicate, Measure, Analyse and Communicate again.

The most important aspect of a national MIL effort is communication – namely informing citizens throughout Kosovo about the initiatives, policies and efforts being made in the MIL sphere. The secondary aspect of this communication is measurement – ensuring that baselines are established and improvements to the strategies are done using evidence-based analysis.

Specific Objective 1: Executive a continuous and comprehensive public awareness campaign to solicit input on national level strategies.

Specific Objective 2: Ensure that all new policies and strategies include the generation of SMART goals, with a focus on measurements pre and post intervention.

4. Conclusions and Next Steps

Media and Information Literacy envelops a crucial set of interrelated skills necessary to be a functional, productive and effective member of society. The approach goes beyond the constituent components it stemmed from, instead placing all these skills under one harmonized umbrella. The benefits of this harmonized approach are multiple, enabling citizens to understand information and its nuances and developing the ability to think critically about information. Individuals also develop the ability to apply ethics and journalistic professional standards to the consumption and creation of information and other media. Finally, a harmonized MIL approach also enables individuals to use the aforementioned skills in constructive, open and informed dialogues whether online or offline.

The development of these skills is crucial for a country like Kosovo. These skills would help to guide citizens to navigate the multitude of information sources available to them. It would enable these citizens to distinguish fact from opinion, bias from objectivity, and discern credible information. This has a direct effect on the demand for better sources of information and ultimately the improvement of public dialogue and discourse. Finally, informed citizens are critical to the health of a democracy.

Varied stakeholders have been consulted throughout the process of drafting a national position paper on MIL. All stakeholders hold the position that a harmonized MIL policy and strategic framework is crucial to the interests of the public and institutions. Stakeholders were also of the position that it is crucial for a governmental actor to carry the torch throughout the harmonization and strategy development process. This would ensure that the work would be comprehensive, inter-generational due to sustained institutional memory, and ultimately accountable and transparent to all.

Stemming from the position discuss herein, the stakeholders reached a number of recommendations on the steps ahead toward developing a harmonized MIL framework in Kosovo:

1. The Office of Good Governance of Kosovo, as a result of the expressed commitment during the initial consultations, should take the lead, in collaboration with key civil society organizations, in deciding the organizational structure of an initial working group. The initial working group will also be responsible for voluntarily assigning a representative stakeholder for each identified stakeholder group – from individual minority representatives, topic experts, industry representatives, etc.

2. The initial working group will be tasked with expanding on the strategic and specific objectives developed above, as well as drawing an initial list of torch bearers and contributors in each chain of objectives. The initial working group should also ensure that prior to the initiation of any working sessions, all potential contributors to a strategic objectives have been contacted and will participate in the process.

2. The initial working group, under the supervision of the Office of Good Governance, in collaboration with strategic objective working groups, will also develop tracking mechanisms for

the strategy, policy and implementation process itself. These tracking mechanisms will serve to ensure that the process continues forward as well as tracking progress.

3. After the strategic objective working groups have been established, and strategic objective working group leadership roles have been assigned, these groups will develop detailed work plans, including the development of baselines studies thereof for the achievement of their respective objectives.

4. The aforementioned process should be inclusive of all key stakeholders. In the case of unrepresented marginalized groups, an exhaustive effort should be made to find marginalized group representatives or experts should voluntary representation prove hard to secure. It is critical that inclusion be ensured to be able to address the needs of the most vulnerable throughout this process.

5. An extensive awareness campaign should be conducted prior to the start of strategy work by the strategic objective working groups. The awareness campaign should educate the public at large about the initial concepts of MIL, the purpose of the initial working group and the strategic working groups as well as provide options for inclusion of feedback on the process for all citizens.

6. Detailed strategic, legislative, and implementation plans will be developed by all groups after the conclusion of the initial working sessions that will supplement and / or replace this document as an initial position paper on MIL in Kosovo.