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# Position Paper on National Media and Information Literacy Policies and Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

## **MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY: A TIME FOR A STRATEGIC APPROACH**

### **Executive summary**

Despite the increasing development of new technologies and the growing role played by media in society, there is no adequate government action nor public discussion in Bosnia and Herzegovina on issues related to media and information literacy.

Children and youth in B&H have very limited, if any, opportunities to gain skills and competencies needed for successful living in a digital age. Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are not equipped to demand free access to information through independent and diverse media, and chaotic digital media landscape opens up opportunities for spreading various forms of distorted news and distorted information. Libraries across the country are mostly unused and although they have a potential to play a significant role in the process of lifelong learning, they are not recognized as institutional support for achieving the goals of the information society.

This Position Paper on National MIL Policies and Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina advocates for a strategic approach to the field of media and information literacy. An approach that will result in the integration of media and information literacy into formal, non-formal and informal education.

### **Why is MIL important?**

Democracy does not work without its citizens and their active participation. The well informed and educated citizen is a cornerstone of democratic processes. The civic literacy set of skill and knowledge necessary for every citizen today include strong media and information literacy (Vajzović 2017).

Advances in Information and Communication Technology during the past decades have enabled societies across the globe to transform the ways information circulates and the way people interact, access information, communicate, create new knowledge, learn and work. Information, communication, media, and education landscape is changing and this creates opportunities and challenges for modern societies. New technologies have boosted global development, but they have also made it even harder for millions of people to engage with media and be part of global knowledge societies, reinforcing inequality between countries, and – within countries – inequality between communities and individuals (UNESCO, 2013).

Despite the increasing development of new technologies and the growing role played by media in society, there is no adequate public discussion in Bosnia and Herzegovina on issues related to media and information literacy. Even when there are debates and initiatives, they do not include many stakeholders such as representatives of competent ministries, regulatory bodies, industry, the academic community, or the NGO sector.

In the education sector, insufficient negligible attention is dedicated to the development of MIL skills in curricula. Teachers do not have adequate skills in the area of MIL education nor the possibility to access quality teachers' training. However, there are several examples of a new approach to education that show that changes in perceptions occur.

In the media sector, the main actors in promoting MIL are the Communications Regulatory Agency and the Press and Online Media Council. Both actors recognized the importance of media literacy and actively promote it. Certain results have already been achieved regarding clarifying MIL concepts to professional communities, and the real challenge is the creation and implementation of activities that will reach the general public.

Libraries are not recognized as institutional support for achieving the goals of the information society, and archival and museology studies in the context of information and communication sciences are not existent. The non-governmental sector in a certain way has been trying to compensate identified oversights in the formal education system through informal education, discussions, seminars, train the trainer sessions, publication of analyses and other publications on the topic of media literacy, etc.

Media and information literacy is almost not mentioned in B&H public policy documents. This, however, does not mean that various aspects of MIL are not covered by legal decisions. Hence, media legislative framework, in general, promotes freedom of expression, limits undue influence on the media, and establishes the professionalism of the media in terms of acceptable restrictions on freedom of expression. In certain educational strategies, the need for changing the classroom approach is emphasized, by shifting the focus from “teachers” to “learners” and implicitly refer to MIL competencies, such as searching and accessing information, assessing sources and critical thinking. Information Society Development Policy of B&H points to the “low level of digital literacy and skills” and underlines the need for the development of activities that should result in guidelines for digital literacy enhancement together with “framework for recognition of ICT skills”. Legislation treating youth and youth issues accentuate youth rights on education, organizing and voluntarism, and employment. This means that young people have the right to good living conditions, and the right to be involved in and affect their own lives, their local environment, and development of society in general. Law on gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina defines that everyone has the right to equal access to media, prohibits degrading and demeaning representation in media, and obliges media to develop consciousness on gender equality through their programs.

There are many reasons why B&H needs MIL policies. These policies are needed not only for citizens but also for governments to fulfil their role in the digital world. These policies need to reach all parts of the population and prevent processes that lead to the spread of disparities and increase of digital divide in society. Also, these policies provide a framework for finding adequate responses to the growing problems of spreading various forms of distorted news and distorted information on the Internet in general. Bringing MIL into the education system of B&H can enhance gaining skills and competencies among children and youth needed for successful living in today’s digital age. MIL policies can contribute to empowering citizens to

participate and direct public debates about issues that are relevant to them. This opens up opportunities for meaningful dialogue among citizens of different ethnic, religious, ideological, and political groups. In the process of joining the European Union, there are various opportunities for developing MIL policies in different sectors. There is no doubt that Bosnia and Herzegovina will in the future, through its commitment to European integrations, have to put a greater emphasis on media and information literacy, especially through Chapter 10 of the *Acquis Communautaire* – Information Society and Media.

### **A strategic approach**

National consultations held within the framework of the project: “Building Trust in Media in South East Europe and Turkey”(financially supported by EU and UNESCO) involving various actors from the government, education, media, library and non-governmental sectors have shown that B&H needs a strategic approach to the field of media and information literacy. An approach that will result in the integration of media and information literacy into formal, nonformal and informal education.

The options to do nothing or to let different stakeholders act in different directions do not promise much. On the contrary, they guarantee that B&H will continue to lag behind not only for the developed Western democracies but also for the countries of the region. Furthermore its citizens will face even greater problems in the application of information and communication technologies, engaging with media and participation in the global knowledge societies.

The only meaningful approach is one that involves the development of a national strategy on media and information literacy, in which the main implementors of activities will be identified, their obligations, the principles of cooperation between different actors, the financial resources necessary for the implementation of the planned activities, as well as the deadlines for fulfilling the activities. While it is not realistic to expect that all levels of government in B&H will approach with the same enthusiasm the fulfilment of the strategic goals envisaged by this document, its value will not be significantly reduced because it will offer guidelines for both the state level institutions and the lower levels of government.

It also makes sense to follow the UNESCO concept of media and information literacy. Not only is it accepted in an increasing number of countries, it also provides an integral approach to addressing the issues that are being mentioned here. UNESCO concept of MIL includes a combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices required to search, access, critically analyse, evaluate, use, contribute, and communicate information and knowledge wisely and ethically, understanding their rights offline and online, and engaging with information, media, and technology for sustainable development.

### **Recommendations**

Based on current state of MIL in B&H, available studies and literature on MIL in B&H, Workshop on MIL in B&H (21/04/2018) and National Consultations on MIL Policies and Strategies in B&H (23/04/2018), the main recommendations are as follows:

#### **1) CREATE A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY IN B&H.**

This strategy needs to coordinate all policy areas that have powerful reciprocal relationships with education, including

- The development of ICT infrastructure;

- The development of easily accessible government information and services;
- Good governance supporting regulatory systems for broadcasting and media selfregulation;
- Protection of the memory and knowledge through libraries, archives, and museums;
- E-commerce;
- Privacy and copyright regulations;
- Regulatory systems of the content on Internet, particularly safety for children and youth;

This document should be drafted by the Council of Ministers of B&H and should be based on cross-sector expertise. A special responsibility lies with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Transport, Communications and the State Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina for UNESCO and Communications Regulatory Agency. As Ministry of Civil Affairs BiH has a coordinating role for education at the state level they will accordingly work with entities' educational system.

## 2) **DETERMINE THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY THAT WILL HAVE A COORDINATING ROLE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MIL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES**

A possible solution would be to assign the coordinating role to the Communications Regulatory Agency B&H, which is one of the leaders in promoting media literacy in B&H with support of Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Transport and Communications and the State Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina for UNESCO. Ministry of Civil Affairs as coordinating state body for education in BiH will involve all 13 ministries of Education in BiH.

Communications Regulatory Agency operates at the state level, has highly trained and professional staff and has a certain degree of independence from political influences. All this is a solid foundation for effective and timely implementation of planned activities.

## 3) **HARMONIZE FORMAL EDUCATION SECTOR WITH MIL**

**OBJECTIVES**, together with the capacity building for those who will be implementing the policies and the educational practice, as well as strengthening interdisciplinary academic programs. Special attention should be paid to current curricular reforms at all levels of governance. The main activities in this area are the following:

- Revision of the existing curricula and syllabus of primary and secondary education, the inclusion of MIL and utilization of media.
- Identify and train experts that can lead the process of curriculum adaptation.
- Integrate MIL into schools' extra-curricular activities to complement formal classroom settings (MIL clubs, school journals, etc.)
- Development of school libraries (pre-school, elementary school, high school, faculty libraries) as crucial places for knowledge accumulation, research, and analysis of all available information and media forms.
- Introduce MIL as stand-alone subject and cross-curricula, through different subjects and with a different thematic focus like gender equality, discrimination, stereotypes, minorities' rights, children's rights, etc.

- Introduce online media into classroom especially those that young people use most - social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, etc.).
- Developing the Pilot MIL Curriculum and Guidelines for professionals, including teachers.
- Organizing the teachers' training for the teachers of mother language(s), computer science and civic education
- Production of new learning materials such as textbooks, guidebooks for teachers, and practical examples of teaching media literacy, online and printed, with adaptation of the existing MIL resources and the integrate MIL in formal teacher education curriculum.
- Increase the number of MIL related courses in all academic years and levels of higher education (BA, MA, PhD) for future teachers and educational experts.

Key institutions for the implementation of these activities are ministries of education and science and educational institutions. However, these activities should be planned and implemented with NGOs and academia which already showed MIL expertise.

- 4) **START DEVELOPMENT OF MIL FOR ADULTS IN NON-FORMAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION CONTEXT**, in order to build environment for the continual development of necessary skills for active citizenship and employability.
- 5) **STRENGTHEN THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES** and other heritage institutions as key actors in the lifelong learning process, in particular learning with the support of new media and technologies, and transferring MIL knowledge to broad user communities.

## About study

This Policy Brief on MIL Policy and Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina is developed by a multidisciplinary team of experts engaged by the Institute for Social Science Research, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo. It is based on the findings of the study „The Background Document on MIL Policy and Strategy in B&H“ and the conclusions of the National Consultations that included multi-stakeholder participation and cross-sector debate, organized by the University of Sarajevo (Faculty of Political Science and Faculty of Philosophy, Chair of Library Science) and Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the support of the State Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina for UNESCO in April 2018. The full report and other relevant documents are available online at <http://fpn.unsa.ba/b/medijska-i-informacijska-pismenost/>

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