Media Literacy in the Time of Pandemic

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Words matter.

Especially for citizens who need to know how to navigate in the digital information space.

The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to the rapid spread of disinformation, misinformation and false news, not just in the Western Balkans, but also worldwide.

On 29 September, the **EU-Western Balkans Conference "Media Literacy in the Time of Pandemic"** brought together youth organisations, media representatives, fact-checkers and politicians to discuss this challenge and formulate ways forward.

Co-operation of fact-checkers, qualitative and up-to-date education, availability of trusted sources and open societies where media freedom and freedom of expression are respected, were among the main solutions proposed.

This glossary provides definitions of the main topics discussed. Because joint action begins with a joint understanding of the main problems and solutions.

Media Literacy

The skills, knowledge and understanding that enable citizens to access information and to use, critically assess and create media content effectively, responsibly and safely. This is an essential capacity for navigating in the information environment of the 21st Century.

Being media literate also means to understand that the information you are exposed to - via your favorite daily newspaper, TV or radio station, social media feed or any other channel - affects your perceptions, attitudes and choices in life. For example, it influences the way you vote, how you act during a health crisis, and which of all products offered on the market you choose to buy. Good education and training as well as engaging in open-minded conversations and debates will raise your ability to think critically and to distinguish good journalism from manipulative content.

Read here about the EU-Western Balkans Conference "Media Literacy in the Time of Pandemic".

Freedom of expression

A cornerstone of democracy and a fundamental right of the European Union. It is the right to hold, share and receive opinions, information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of borders. This also applies to views or ideas that are regarded as critical or controversial or that even may shock, offend or disturb.

When freedom of expression is curbed and reserved to privileged classes and those in a position of power, half-truths and lies can easily be presented as truth. Manipulation can prevent people from holding the power to account. Freedom of expression implies media pluralism. No country can join the EU without guaranteeing freedom of expression as a basic human right.

Read [here](#) how the EU helps to protect freedom of expression in the Western Balkans.

Media freedom

The right exercised by journalists to collect and publish accurate information on matters of public interest, and to do that without any interference or fear of prosecution, physical threats, economic pressure or job loss.

Media freedom is indispensable and one of the most accurate measures of democratic development of a country. The EU protects and promotes media freedom, which is also a key condition in the EU accession process. Independent professional media steer an open exchange of ideas on how citizens want to organise their societies, even if they are critical towards authorities.

Media freedom goes hand in hand with citizens' right to access information. Responsible, objective and ethical journalism is one of the key tools in the fight against corruption and abuse of power. It can be a lifesaver and is a strong antidote against disinformation.

Read [here](#) how the EU is supporting media freedom in the Western Balkans.

Disinformation

Creating and spreading false or misleading information with the intent to deceive the public in order to gain political power, make economic profit and/or to influence democratic processes at home or abroad.

Disinformation often harms societies. It hampers the ability of citizens to take informed decisions and undermines core values such as democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law.

Disinformation also divides and polarises societies, fueling fear and distrust among citizens. It is a global challenge, which we can only overcome by working together.

Read here about the EU Action Plan against disinformation, Code of Practice on Disinformation and what the EU is doing in addressing it.

Infodemic

The flood of false or inaccurate information about the COVID-19 virus, which spread quickly on social media worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) this undermined an effective public health response.

Amid the uncertainty and fear around the coronavirus pandemic, the lack of quickly available and scientifically proven facts created a vacuum that was often filled with false information. The use of social media and the global dimension of the crisis facilitated the rapid spread of incorrect and misleading content about COVID-19, its origins, symptoms and cures, causing a "second pandemic" or "infodemic". It made the world realise that disinformation can kill, create fear and spread conspiracy theories.

Read here about what the EU has done against disinformation related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Fact-checkers

Journalists, researchers, think tanks, civil society organisations and citizens who are specialised in actively detecting, exposing and correcting false information online and offline.

Fact-checkers debunk and expose various types of false content in the media, social media or public sphere that may harm the public interest: political statements or claims from other public figures, trending posts on social media and more.

Trustworthy fact-checkers are transparent about their methodology, their affiliation or the organisation they belong to and their financial resources. They contribute to fact-based debates. The [International Fact-Checking Network](#) (IFCN) has also developed a code of principles that guide conscientious fact-checkers in their everyday work.

Read [here](#) how fact-checkers in the Western Balkans have joined the Facebook network of fact-checkers in the fight against disinformation. Get to know more about the [European Digital Media Observatory](#) (EDMO), which brings together fact-checkers, media literacy experts, and academic researchers to understand and analyse disinformation.