

# Media and Information Literacy: The time to act is now!

## INSIDE

### **UNDERSTAND**

the impact of the changing face of communication and content

### **LEARN**

how to support critical engagement with content

### **HIGHLIGHT**

the urgency of Media and Information Literacy for all

Introduction and highlights of the second edition of UNESCO's **Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators and Learners**

**MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERATE CITIZENS:  
THINK CRITICALLY, CLICK WISELY**



# The rise and importance of content creation and use

Access to information in all its forms is a basic human right and need. From the days of the first printing press many centuries ago, to the fast-paced nature of social media today – the ability to create and share content opens up a whole world of possibilities for every individual, as well as new risks.

For the past 40 years, Media and Information Literacy has helped people to think critically about the messages conveyed across different content providers – print, broadcast and digital. It is now a vital life-skill.

**The number of individuals that use the internet in general has also increased, from 3.2 billion in 2015, to 4.66 billion people actively online in 2020 – a 32% increase in just five years – that's 59.5% of the global population as of January 2021<sup>1</sup>.**

**We're moving towards 70% of the world's youth having some kind of internet access. For all generations, the need to distinguish between disinformation and reliable content has become more urgent than ever.**

With increased access to digital communications and content, so there is a need for increased capacities.

As a power for potential good, the Internet content providers like social media should promote social trust, highlight verified information and counter hate speech. Providers like news media institutions should inform, educate and entertain. These providers often do not live up to these expectations, which is where Media and Information Literacy comes in.

We have seen problems of providers implicated in disinformation and hate during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has come home to us clearly why the skills to understand, interpret and ethically engage with content across all types providers has to be a priority concern.

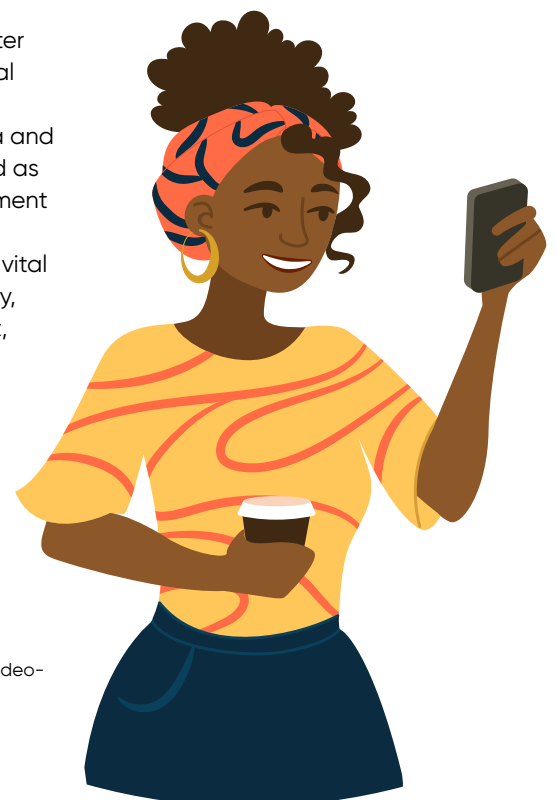
The sheer volume of content available online provides unprecedented choice, but can also be a barrier to using it critically. We can experience an overload of messages, making it hard to assess and act on content with certainty about its accuracy. We risk being confused and diverted away from universally agreed aspirations like human rights and sustainable development.

This is why it's now time to heed the call from many stakeholders for greater emphasis on enabling people's critical competencies through Media and Information Literacy. We need Media and Information Literacy to be recognized as integral to the international development agenda. And as key for the 2030 sustainable development goals – as vital for advancing health, gender equality, education, jobs and the environment, amongst many other social goods.

Falsehoods are filling the airwaves. Wild conspiracy theories are infecting the Internet. Hatred is going viral, stigmatizing and vilifying people and groups.

The world must unite against this disease, too<sup>2</sup>.

António Guterres,  
Secretary-General of the United Nations



<sup>1</sup> ITU World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database, 2019. See also Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-04-14/secretary-generals-video-message-covid-19-and-misinformation>

# Supporting the information verification and evaluation challenge

Media and Information Literacy gives people the competencies to be able to think critically about:

- content they receive... and share with others
- the providers they use
- their role in communicating for human rights and sustainable development

## But it's not a once-off skill to learn

Media and Information Literacy should be a fundamental part of lifelong learning. The knowledge and competencies that underpin it are constantly changing. There are always new skills to acquire to ensure that content continues to be used in a discerning way.

## Media and Information Literacy can:

- Empower people in all walks of life to find, evaluate and use content effectively... and to create their own messages of social value
- Promote dialogue and respect for the views and cultures of others
- Enable citizens to understand and act on content to achieve personal agency and autonomous development
- Help people to actively participate in achieving sustainable development goals and support democratic processes
- Support lifelong learning

Whether the content provider is a library, archive, museum, news media outlet or digital communication company, every individual should evaluate content based on how it is produced, the messages and values being conveyed, and the intended audiences or purposes.

And, each person should understand the strengths and weaknesses of different providers, and how to call for better fulfillment of the normative roles that society expects of them.

Media and Information Literacy is an essential dimension of moral and civic education. It is also a fundamental right of every citizen, in any country of the world, and thus it enables everyone to protect their privacy and find their place in a society whose technological environment is changing faster and faster.

Audrey Azoulay,  
Director-General of UNESCO, at the International Consultative Meeting on Media and Information Literacy Curricula, on 13 September 2019, in Belgrade, Serbia



# Bringing Media and Information Literacy to life

To understand the true value of promoting Media and Information Literacy (MIL), let's delve deeper into a few of the topical issues that MIL competencies cover.

## Making sense of the news among the noise

Media and information professionals have key normative functions in providing society with access to information, which facilitates democratic societies, peace and sustainable development. People depend on the news for decision-making and to form opinions. We navigate our lives partly on what we read, listen to, or watch, and on our mediated communications.

### Identifying messages in the news:

- What criteria underpin this content being treated as news? Is it really verifiable information or informed analysis in the public interest?
- Does a news story provide several views, while being sure to avoid treating misleading content as equal in status to authoritative and credible information?
- Which emotion does a news item arouse in you, and why?
- Can you recognize professional news in all its diversity, differentiating it from other kinds of content?

News media are expected to play the role of empowering individuals to exercise their freedom of expression and enabling public debate. Can we explain shortfalls in practice?

Who are the sources cited in the news – do they include the voices of women, children, poor and rural people, etc?

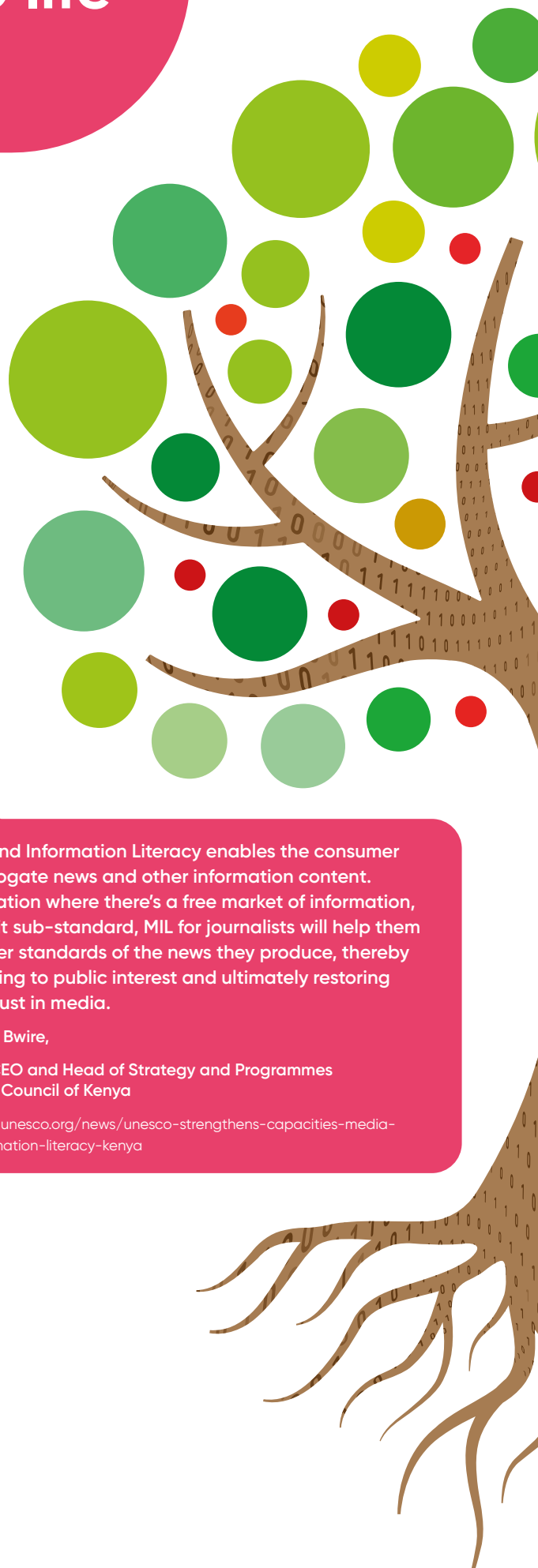
What is the contribution to news of user generated content and 'citizen' journalism?

Media and Information Literacy enables the consumer to interrogate news and other information content. In a situation where there's a free market of information, most of it sub-standard, MIL for journalists will help them set higher standards of the news they produce, thereby responding to public interest and ultimately restoring public trust in media.

Mr. Victor Bwire,

Deputy CEO and Head of Strategy and Programmes  
at Media Council of Kenya

<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-strengthens-capacities-media-and-information-literacy-kenya>





MIL is a key tool to combat hate speech, disinformation and misinformation and helps us to digest, critically analyze, and build on scientific evidence. It also helps in recognizing and challenging the narratives of violent extremists.

Her Excellency Ms Li Andersson,

Former Minister of Education of Finland

<https://en.unesco.org/news/journeying-world-games-media-and-information-literacy>

## Online opportunities versus offline challenges

Digital communications companies provide huge opportunities for people to enrich and improve their lives and the wider society, but also carry risks with this access.

Many children today grow up “online”, and are especially vulnerable as they find their sense of who they are, assess what norms are ethical, and explore what the world means to them.

At the same time, older generations can be left behind and playing catch-up when it comes to them ensuring the opportunities and risks are fully understood and managed.

MIL competencies can empower people of all ages to maximize the benefits while navigating the potential risks online, by engaging mindfully in online activities.

### MIL can help to:

- Stimulate self-improvement and encourage people to learn about their country and the wider world through better communications competencies
- Develop users' knowledge about benefits and risks that accompany internet apps
- Explain to users the issues of privacy, safety and security online, and how they can advocate for these
- Boost skills for self-protection
- Enable people to use the internet with greater awareness of the environment and businesses underpinning it, as well as with enhanced awareness of own rights and care about the rights of others

The virtual world opens up unparalleled benefits for every society but particularly the youth who are learning, socializing, creating and distributing content through this medium every day. But by giving young people a voice, the internet also stands as a permanent record of their views. This makes it all the more important to understand their digital footprint and the impact of their behavior online for real world interactions offline.

# Tackling stereotypes and pushing for the right to equality in MIL

We are surrounded by images, as well as the written and spoken word. These convey normative ideas about people, issues or events, often by signaling meanings linked to race, national origins, gender, sexuality, age or class. This is called representation.

Representation in content can take many forms. It can often involve stereotypical or oversimplified depictions, which can be used to label individuals or groups and justify prejudicial beliefs or attitudes. Although this may not be the intention of the author, it can be the interpretation of the recipient.

**Representations of women often violate rights. New research of more than 900 cases worldwide shows rising misogyny, online bullying and harassment of women journalists:**

**73% of the surveyed women journalists have experienced online violence in the course of their work**

**25% have received threats of physical violence**

**18% have been threatened with sexual violence**

**20% reported being attacked offline in connection with online violence they had experienced**

2020 findings of UNESCO's Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists

Where content incites conflict, hate speech or discrimination, the content producer should be accountable for their actions. And the content providers also have a part to play. But it is also important to have public debate and policies about diversity, and therefore necessary to strike a balance when defining different people as an "Other".

To be media and information literate, it is crucial to be able to examine and analyze images or text, as well as narrative context, and the relation to surrounding content and debate. In addition, people need to understand the importance of respecting each person's right to equality, dignity and peace.

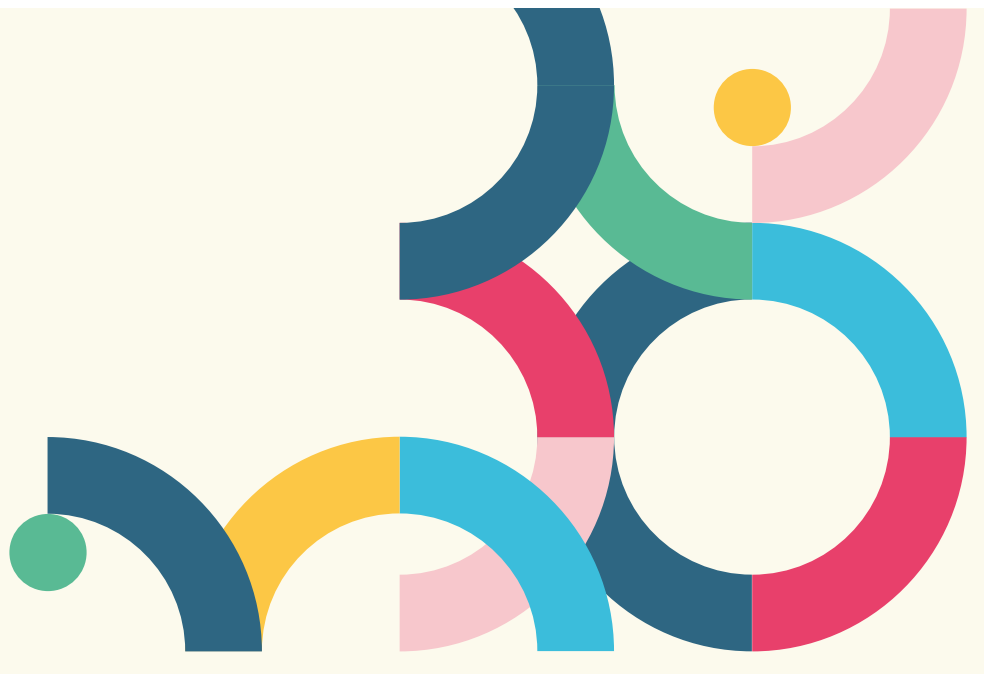
MIL is a very good and practical tool for counteracting racial discrimination or any type of discrimination. All types of discrimination are based on stereotypes and gaps between truth, disinformation and outright lies. MIL competencies give the opportunity for all people to have clear and solid real understanding of the roots of any discrimination.

Veronica Yarnykh,

Head of Global Programmes, UNESCO, Chair of Media Information Literacy and Media Education of Citizens for the Purpose of Social Transformations and Intercultural Dialogue, Moscow Pedagogical State University

<https://en.unesco.org/news/media-and-information-literacy-against-racial-discrimination-experts-nigeria-and-russia-speak>





## Who has access to my data and information and how is it used?

Privacy online and offline is a concern for everyone – no matter what you do or how long you spend online.

Everything we do online opens us to potential misuse of our data tracks. When our data is used to micro-target us, and to “nudge” us by hidden techniques, we lose our agency to make informed decisions.

Compromising privacy can also lead us to self-censor what we seek, send and receive. This can harm engagement in societal development and democracy.

### Five ways to be safer online:

1. Think carefully about personal information you share
2. Check the wording on apps for when they seek to influence you away from choosing settings that are pro-privacy
3. Browse ‘incognito’, or in private mode
4. Demand transparency from companies about data gathering, use, sale and leaks
5. Insist on effective regulation for personal data protection

## Countering disinformation and hate speech

Whether we are talking about disinformation, misinformation, mal-information, conspiracy theories or hate speech – many individuals and content providers amplify inaccurate and misleading content. It can be hard to identify and respond to such content, and to differentiate it from quality information within the wider noise.

It is important for individuals to understand how news and information can be manipulated to create distrust, division, intolerance, and prejudice among societies. Equally it is key to understand how the business models of content providers, through their architecture and algorithms, can work to propagate potentially harmful content.

MIL provides the competencies that enable us to prevent the further spread of false information and to push back on such content and the content providers that host it.

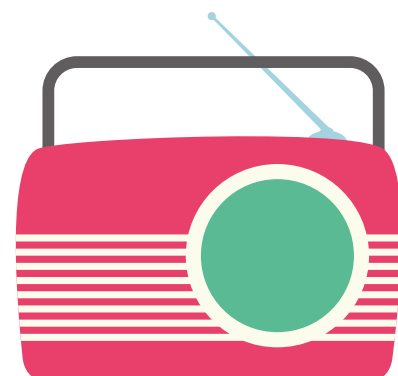
The MIL approach teaches how to develop critical thinking fundamentally in young people and adults. MIL methodology teaches them to carefully analyze messages and reality in a more objective way, without prejudices or cultural barriers such as those related to ethnicity, race, religion, different cultural identities, gender, and migration.

MIL framework also helps, through education, to recognize and unmask fake news, deep fakes and post-truths that can be conveyed in face-to-face communication, in traditional media or on the Internet, about black and indigenous people, women and other less favored groups.

Felipe Chibás Ortiz,

Associate Professor and Researcher,  
School of Communications and Arts,  
University of São Paulo

<https://en.unesco.org/news/media-and-information-literacy-against-racial-discrimination-experts-south-africa-and-brazil>



# The power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and MIL

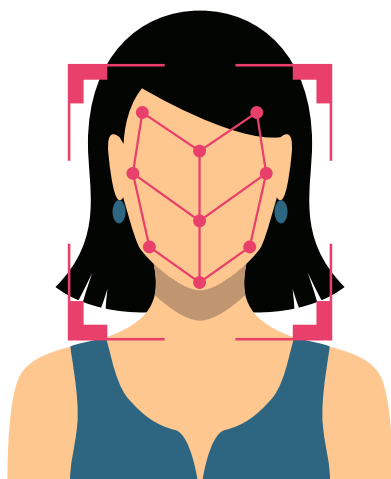
AI brings a whole host of benefits to our day-to-day lives, from virtual assistants that can answer a number of our questions, to applications that help our agencies get emergency supplies to people in dire need. Yet, it also begs many questions about risks.

Among the risks of AI are reliance on data sets which one-sidedly reflect a limited selection of humans – but which then lead to decisions applied to everyone. Similarly, algorithms can be biased by narrow world-views or commercial agendas, which disproportionately prioritise some processing outcomes (eg. self-driving personal cars) rather than others (eg. public transportation improvements).

When it comes to advertising, advances in AI and data analytics mean that companies can use our digital footprint to interpret and target us based on our psychographics – sometimes even before we know things ourselves. This is magnified when people knowingly or unknowingly give up their data to enjoy ‘free’ services or offers by digital companies and software applications.

## Thinking about challenges of AI

- The voices of young women in AI voice assistants can perpetuate stereotypes of women in traditional roles
- AI-driven content prioritization can favour emotional over factual content, through algorithms that equate “engagement” with “enragement”.
- The use of AI can drive marketing and purchasing decisions with both positive and negative implications



AI is increasingly used in digital advertising – and in prioritizing what we receive top of our social media content feeds and search results.

Historically, concerns were that advertising could skew news content, and blur the editorial and business sides of media companies.

In the digital environment, distinctions between news, advertising, sponsored content and other kinds of content are less obvious, including even in search results.

Further, not only advertising – but also other content – is increasingly micro-targeted, on the basis of audience profiling which in turn is based on our personal data that are collected, traded and monetized.

Today, companies are being called upon to be transparent when AI is used to remove or label posts. They are asked to show more care about AI enabling automated auctions which can generate advertising revenue for producers of disinformation and hate.

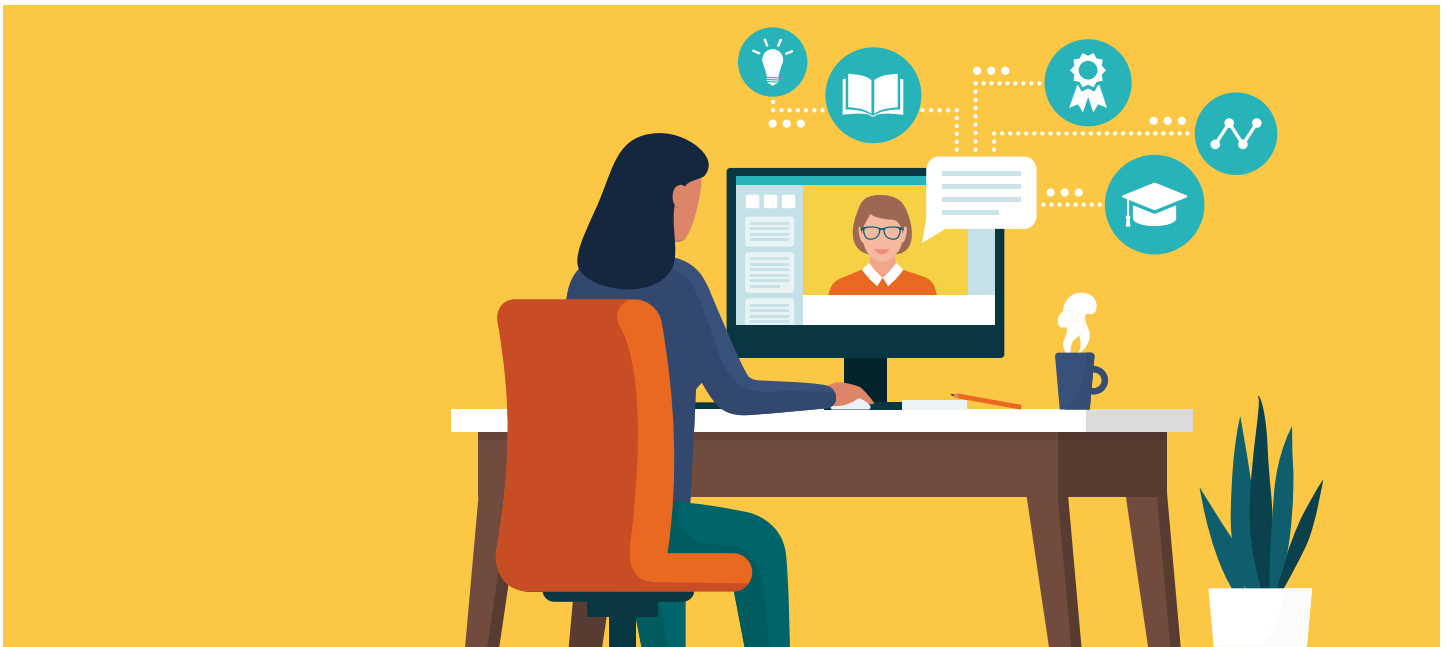
The development of Media and Information Literacy is also essential to countering the spread of disinformation and misinformation, including combating false and misleading information that is strengthened to divide communities and delay achievement of the SDGs (sustainable development goals).

The Honourable Mitch Fifield,

Australia's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations

<http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/general-assembly/watch/general-assembly-58th-plenary-meeting-75th-session/6243931778001? Video at 1:22:33>





## How MIL relates to the sustainable development goals (SDGs)

Being able to use content, including information, for the good of society and to support global SDGs is a key purpose of MIL. Promoting media and information literate citizens relates to all the SDGs including achieving the target (16.10) of ensuring public access to information and fundamental freedoms. This is by MIL raising awareness of and engagement, and understanding the social context of content.

By learning to decode, and construct, messages across in a wide range of content providers – citizens can have a much better understanding of how access to information and fundamental freedoms can help ensure their societies are safe, resilient and sustainable.

In times when we all aspire to empower citizens to respond to social, economic and environmental challenges and actively participate in our societies, media and information literacy becomes literacy for life.

**Her Excellency Ms Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili,**  
**Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Serbia to UNESCO**

<https://en.unesco.org/news/journeying-world-games-media-and-information-literacy>



# Media and Information Literacy for public good

UNESCO has developed a comprehensive Curriculum which provides a framework for training teachers. But it is also a foundation that will also be of help to others: to learners, to content providers like internet companies and news media outlets, and to citizens of all ages as they consume, create and use content, including information.

The second edition of the learning resource has been significantly expanded since the first publication in 2011. The MIL Curriculum reflects the changing nature of the information landscape. It now includes insight from a broader range of content providers than before, including libraries, archives, museums, media, and digital communications companies.

The Curriculum is designed to empower educators and learners in general – from schoolteachers to those involved in training, the media and libraries, governments, and NGOs – to train people to spot misrepresentations and disinformation, and most importantly develop critical thinking competencies.

Through a curriculum and competency framework in Part 1 and 14 modules in Part 2, the Curriculum addresses a number of broad learning outcomes, competencies and attitudes which are imperative for everyone to survive and thrive in the contemporary times.

In this way, media and information literate educators can impart key knowledge onto learners and society at large. In addition, every person can use this Curriculum to become a peer-educator of MIL.

## Five steps to achieving MIL as a public good:

- 1. Note that MIL entails a combination of competencies about content, institutions like media and Internet companies, and digital know-how. These span values, attitudes, knowledge and skills**
- 2. Acknowledge that citizens need knowledge about finding, using and creating information within the mass of other kinds of types of content**
- 3. Ensure that all generations, as well as women, men and marginalized groups, such as people living with disability, indigenous peoples or minorities, should have equal access to MIL**
- 4. See MIL as an essential aid for intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and cultural literacy**
- 5. Develop national policies and strategies to make MIL a mainstream reality in every society**



MIL enables (and empowers) individuals to assess media misrepresentations and disinformation which are purveyors of discrimination and hatred and incitement to violence.

MIL provides the competencies required in intercultural communication and interreligious dialogue.

These competencies include understanding commonalities among diverse groups/sectors; respect and value differences; tolerance and openness to differences; and building trust and enabling understanding and harmony.

Ramon R. Tuazon,

President, Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication,  
The Philippines

<https://en.unesco.org/news/media-and-information-literacy-against-racial-discrimination-experts-philippines-and-india>



# The MIL Curriculum: a living resource for citizens and communities

Media and Information Literacy encompasses a living set of human capacities. Over the past 10 years in particular, its scope, urgency and application have gathered force.

The competencies which underpin these capacities can make a difference to every person across the globe.

This overview brochure introduces the impact and opportunities that MIL can bring. The full Curriculum itself has much more detail.

It is the culmination of years of work and collaboration by UNESCO and our partners, to compile an updated resource which can be used and adapted by every region across the globe, to reflect the needs of their society and citizens.

It has been designed to be of value to key stakeholders including schools, training centres, community centres, youth organizations, news media and digital communication companies. The Curriculum is also hugely relevant to government officials and ministries, and international development organizations.

Alongside the Curriculum, UNESCO is developing an Online Multimedia MIL Teaching Resource Platform, which will allow sharing and access of resources by the general public, educators and stakeholders, and providing a community for collaboration around MIL. See also other existing UNESCO MIL material on this link: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy>.

Following the proclamation of Global MIL Week in 2019 by UNESCO Member States, 193 countries showed support for the importance of MIL. On March 25, 2021,

the UN General Assembly, in a resolution proclaiming the International Week, further cemented MIL as a mainstream and urgent public matter. The launch of the latest edition of the Curriculum is the next significant step forward in keeping up the strengthening of MIL development in the public consciousness.

We need to stop being spectators and targets of today's communications ecology. We need to step up as creative subjects, empowered with critical thinking and new capacities.

This MIL Curriculum can help us on this road.

**The European Union and its Member States are committed to media and information literacy in our internal policies but also through EU development assistance in partner countries and taking part in meaningful activities organized by UNESCO since 2011. Enhancing media and information literacy globally is crucial to enable citizens of all ages to navigate the modern information environment and take informed decision.**

**H.E. Mr Andrejs Pildegovičs, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations, speaking on behalf of the European Union**

<http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/general-assembly/watch/general-assembly-58th-plenary-meeting-75th-session/6243931778001>.  
Video at 1:30:43

## Testimonials about MIL

The students now clearly understand their right to express their opinions, and they have greater awareness of their right to access information from all sources.

**Intisar Al-Bdour,**  
Principal

<https://en.unesco.org/news/passionate-educator-overcomes-adversity-media-and-information-literacy-club-maan>

MIL is exciting. I have been watching cartoons as a kid but today I learn critical thinking through MIL games produced by UNESCO.

**Student**

<https://en.unesco.org/news/media-and-information-literacy-critical-thinking-nigeria>

You know this course is changing my life, my perception, and correcting certain myopic views of mine. I am just so glad and I so wish I can educate every child so they won't grow with certain stereotyped perception and ignorance.

**Iredumare Ojengbede Opeyemi,**  
participant of UNESCO MIL MOOCS

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy/moocs>

The greatest medium of information propagation is our individual attitudes. How do we show of ourselves? Let's start with working on ourselves, building our relevance and striking a balance not to create the [same] problem we are fighting against...

**Yvonne Imenger Sende,**  
participant of UNESCO MIL MOOCS

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy/moocs>

As a resource for educators, the UNESCO MIL Curriculum was a vital reference in our advocacy for an MIL literate society in the Philippines. It contained a wellspring of ideas on how MIL can be integrated to the various K-12 subjects.

**Arniel Ping,**  
President of the Philippine Association of Media and Information Literacy (PAMIL)



To find out more about the Curriculum and how it can help you and your community to think critically and click wisely – both on and offline – visit <https://en.unesco.org/themes/media-and-information-literacy>

Follow us on UNESCO MIL CLICKS, <https://en.unesco.org/milclicks> to keep up to date with tips and insights on becoming media and information literate.