

MEDIA AND INFORMATION

Literacy in the Western Balkans:
Closing the Gap Between Policy and Practice

Media and Information Literacy in the Western Balkans: Closing the Gap Between Policy and Practice

This Policy Paper is prepared by the Education Team of the Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme 2025/2026 (RYLMP).

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The Regional Youth Leadership Mobility Programme is a collaborative effort between the Centre for Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV), the Youth Educational Forum (YEF) from North Macedonia, and the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) from Serbia with the financial support of the Open Society Foundations in Western Balkans (OSFWB).

The views in this document are solely of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project cohort nor the Open Society Foundation Western Balkans (OSFWB)

List of Acronyms

AMA	Audiovisual Media Authority
ASCAP	Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education in Albania
AVMU	Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
MLI	Media Literacy Ireland
REM	Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media in Serbia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZUOV	Institute for the Improvement of Education in Serbia

Executive Summary

This policy paper examines how Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is integrated and implemented in secondary education systems in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. It focuses on the gap between policy recognition and institutional delivery. Although MIL is formally acknowledged across all three systems, it remains unevenly structured, weakly monitored, and dependent on individual teachers, civil society initiatives, and donor-funded projects rather than stable public education mechanisms.

The analysis uses a qualitative comparative policy approach, combining desk research with six semi-structured expert interviews to examine how formal policy frameworks align with implementation realities and to identify key institutional bottlenecks.

Desk research shows that MIL has entered education policy in all three countries, mainly through competence-based cross-curricular models. Albania embeds MIL within broader competencies such as critical thinking and information processing, but without dedicated teaching time, structured learning outcomes, or assessment tools. North Macedonia has developed guidance materials and a multistakeholder collaboration mechanism, yet implementation is stronger in primary than in secondary education. Serbia combines cross-curricular approaches with the elective course Language, Media and Culture, but access remains uneven, especially for vocational students.

Across the three cases, the main challenge is not the absence of MIL from policy discourse, but the weakness of the systems designed to deliver it. Four constraints recur: fragmented delivery across subjects and schools; dependence on teacher motivation and capacity; lack of national monitoring and evaluation frameworks; and weak cross-sectoral coordination. The findings suggest that holistic approaches and MIL networks are insufficient unless they are supported by clear learning outcomes, continuous teacher support, and proactive stakeholder engagement.

The paper therefore calls for a regional shift from recognizing MIL as a policy priority to translating it into an institutional responsibility. Joint recommendations include guaranteeing universal access to MIL in secondary education; integrating MIL into initial teacher education and continuous professional development; translating cross-curricular commitments into binding curricular guidelines; establishing national monitoring frameworks; formalizing civil society as a structural partner; incorporating successful donor-funded initiatives into public education systems; activating media regulatory bodies as MIL governance actors; and creating

standing cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms in Albania and Serbia, drawing on North Macedonia's Media Literacy Network model. The paper also presents country-specific recommendations for MIL stakeholders, tailored to the contexts of each specific country.

1. Introduction

In today's societies, access to information plays a central role in shaping how individuals think, make decisions, and participate in democratic life. The rapid expansion of digital communication has intensified both the opportunities and the risks this creates, enabling wider access to knowledge while simultaneously allowing misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative narratives to circulate widely and often without adequate verification (Council of Europe, 2022).

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has emerged as the primary educational response to this challenge. MIL is a broad concept that integrates three interconnected areas: information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy. As emphasized by UNESCO, MIL brings together individuals, communities, and institutions in shaping an inclusive and informed society. Beyond serving as an umbrella term, MIL represents a comprehensive set of competencies that enable individuals to critically assess, analyze, evaluate, and engage with information and media in a responsible and informed way (Council of Europe, n.d.). Strong MIL education enables citizens to identify manipulation and disinformation, engage meaningfully in democratic processes, make informed decisions, and participate actively in public life, benefits that extend well beyond the classroom into the health, stability, and quality of democratic societies.

Despite the growing recognition of its importance, the development of media literacy skills has not kept pace with the expansion of digital media. Education systems have not sufficiently adapted to equip young people with the critical skills needed to navigate complex information environments, creating a widening gap between digital exposure and analytical competence. This represents a significant policy problem that increases vulnerability to misinformation and undermines informed democratic participation.

These challenges are particularly pronounced in the Western Balkans. Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia rank among the countries with the lowest levels of media literacy in Europe, reflecting not only educational gaps but deeper structural vulnerabilities in their media environments and democratic development. The [2026 Media Literacy Index](#) (Open Society Institute Sofia [OSI Sofia], 2026) places all three countries in the bottom cluster of European rankings, a position consistent with their below-average digital skills performance relative to the EU average and their classification as only partly free by Freedom House (2026).

These indicators are interconnected. Low media literacy contributes to greater susceptibility to misinformation and manipulative narratives, which in turn weakens informed public participation and erodes trust in democratic institutions. At the same time, constrained media freedom limits citizens' access to reliable information, narrowing the foundation on which media literacy skills can be meaningfully applied. The benefits of strengthening MIL in this context are therefore substantial as they include greater civic resilience to disinformation, stronger democratic participation, improved capacity for informed decision-making, and a more informed and engaged citizenry capable of holding institutions accountable. Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia thus represent both urgent and relevant case studies, countries where the stakes of improving MIL education are high and where the conditions for meaningful change are present. This paper examines how that change can be achieved.

1.1. MIL in formal education: Lessons from top performers

While Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia are positioned at the bottom of the fifth cluster, Denmark, Finland, and Ireland are among Europe's leading countries in media and information literacy (OSI Sofia, 2026). These countries therefore serve as useful reference cases for identifying the key features of high-quality media and information literacy education.

Across these three case studies, two main features stand out:

a. Employing a holistic approach to Media and Information Literacy

A shared feature across these examples is that media literacy is not treated as a standalone educational topic. Instead, it is integrated into broader democratic, civic, and digital education objectives. In Denmark, media literacy is embedded within digital education and treated as equally important as technical digital skills. This approach is supported by coordination among educational authorities, media regulators, and civil society organizations, ensuring that media literacy is not only included in curricula but also reinforced through resources and institutional cooperation (EDMO, 2024). Similarly, Finland has developed one of Europe's most institutionalized approaches to media literacy education. Rather than introducing MIL as a separate subject, Finland integrates it across all levels of formal education through a cross-curricular model supported by clear policy objectives, dedicated institutional responsibilities, and long-term government commitment (KAVI, n.d.).

b. Multistakeholder coordination and collaboration

Another important feature of these countries' approach to MIL is their emphasis on coordination and shared responsibility. Ireland, for instance, has developed a model based on cooperation among public institutions, media actors, civil society organizations, and education stakeholders. Through Media Literacy Ireland (MLI), media literacy initiatives are coordinated across sectors, creating opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing rather than relying solely on formal classroom teaching (Media Literacy Ireland, n.d.). Similar coordination models can also be found in Finland (KAVI, n.d.) and Denmark (European Commission [EC], 2026). While these countries operate in wealthier and higher-trust media environments than the Western Balkans, North Macedonia's Media Literacy Network, discussed below, shows that the coordination model can take root in the region.

2. Methodology

2.1. Approach and Methods

This paper adopts a qualitative comparative policy analysis approach across Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia to examine how MIL is integrated and implemented within secondary education systems. The research combines desk research with semi-structured expert interviews in order to identify the main policy and implementation practices related to MIL.

The desk research involved a systematic review of policy documents, national strategies, curriculum frameworks, and relevant academic and grey literature on MIL across all three countries. The analysis aimed to understand which institutions are responsible for MIL development and implementation, how it is integrated into school curricula, what coordination mechanisms exist among relevant stakeholders and what approaches and practices are the most common among countries that rank high in Media and Information Literacy.

To complement the desk research, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with experts working in the fields of media literacy, education policy, and media regulation. A total of six interviews (two in each country) were conducted during April and May 2026. Experts were selected based on their professional expertise and the relevance of their institutions within the national MIL landscape.

The interviews followed a shared approach covering four main themes: i) curricular integration of MIL, ii) teacher training and capacity, iii) monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and iv) cross-sectoral cooperation between institutions and organizations. This structure ensured

comparability across countries while also allowing interviewees to reflect on country-specific challenges and experiences.

The interview findings were analyzed by identifying common themes, recurring challenges, and shared policy gaps across the three countries. These insights were then compared with the desk research findings in order to better understand how policy frameworks are reflected in practice and to identify possible areas for improving MIL within secondary education systems.

2.2. Merits and Limits

The mixed methods approach employed in this study provides a comprehensive basis for the examination of both formal policy frameworks and the practical challenges related to implementing media literacy education in secondary education systems. By combining desk research with expert interviews and adopting a comparative perspective across three countries, the study identifies common regional patterns, institutional dynamics, and shared policy challenges.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis draws on qualitative data from a relatively small sample of purposefully selected experts across the three countries. Therefore, findings reflect specific professional perspectives and experiences related to MIL policy and implementation. In addition, the desk research relied on publicly available policy documents and secondary literature, which may not fully capture informal practices or ongoing developments. Despite these limitations, the findings provide valuable insights into the current state of media literacy education in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, as well as opportunities for future policy development and cooperation.

3. Comparative Analysis of MIL in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia

Stakeholders responsible for Media and Information Literacy Policies

Across Albania and Serbia, MIL is not established as a distinct public policy field; rather, it is embedded within broader policy domains such as digital skills development, education reform, civic education, and critical thinking frameworks. As such, the development of MIL involves a range of institutional actors rather than a single responsible authority. By contrast, North Macedonia has designated a National Focal Point for Media and Information Literacy. This

role is covered by the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMU), which also hosts the Media Literacy Network. The network was launched in 2017 and, to date, counts a total of 86 members that include representatives from public institutions, education institutions, media and civil society organizations (Media Literacy Network, n.d.).

Media regulatory bodies, including the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) in Serbia, the AVMU in North Macedonia, and the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) in Albania, support public media literacy mainly through awareness-raising campaigns and educational materials.

Ministries responsible for education include media and information literacy within the formal education system through their authority to design curriculum frameworks and issue education policies. These frameworks are implemented by curriculum development and teacher-training institutions, including the Institute for the Improvement of Education (ZUOV) in Serbia, the Bureau for the Development of Education in North Macedonia, and the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP) in Albania. These institutions oversee curriculum design and monitor learning outcomes in pre-university education.

Although this reflects an interdisciplinary understanding of MIL, limited resources and weak institutional cooperation have led to an overreliance on donor-funded initiatives and project-based civil society interventions rather than sustainable public education structures. USAID, the European Union, and UNESCO programmes have provided both financial and methodological support for initiatives typically implemented through non-formal education formats, including workshops, campaigns, teacher trainings, and youth-focused activities.

While these initiatives play an important role in addressing gaps within formal education systems, their impact remains limited by fragmentation, short-term funding cycles, and weak integration into national education policies. Consequently, media literacy is frequently developed through parallel and temporary educational structures rather than through coordinated and institutionalized policy frameworks.

Media Literacy within the secondary education system

Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia share an implicit and interdisciplinary integration of media literacy but differ in the degree of formalization. MIL is recognized within education

systems, primarily through its integration into broader competencies such as critical thinking, digital skills, and civic education.

The integration of MIL within the secondary education system unfolds in one of the following forms:

- *Scattered in competence-based curricula: Albania's Case*

Albania indirectly embeds media and information literacy within key competencies related to critical thinking and information processing in the national curriculum. Although this conceptual inclusion reflects an awareness of the importance of media literacy, it is not supported by structured curricula, dedicated teaching hours, or assessment mechanisms. As a result, MIL remains largely theoretical within formal education.

However, Albania is making notable progress in teacher training and pilot initiatives. Between 2021 and 2026, a large-scale training programme implemented by the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP), in cooperation with the Albanian Media Institute, reached a significant number of teachers across various subject areas (1219 in total)¹. These trainings focus on integrating media into teaching processes, developing critical thinking, and using media as a tool for student expression.

- *Competence-based curricula with clear guidance: The case of North Macedonia*

Similarly to Albania, media literacy in North Macedonia is integrated into the formal education system primarily through competency-based curricula, rather than as a standalone subject. Through the YouThink project, implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Bureau for the Development of Education, media literacy elements were introduced into primary education curricula, particularly within mother tongue instruction and across disciplines such as social studies, informatics, and history. To support this integration, a series of Guides on Media Literacy and Media Culture was developed for primary schools, providing teachers with practical resources and methodological guidance for planning and delivering lessons that incorporate media literacy and media culture topics (Macedonian Institute for Media, 2023).

Building on this foundation, the project is currently expanding its focus to secondary education, aiming to strengthen the integration of media literacy in high schools.

¹ Information received via FOI, March 2026.

Despite progress, empirical evidence highlights a core limitation. Secondary school students exhibit significant gaps in practical media literacy skills, including difficulty recognizing disinformation and verifying online content. Data from North Macedonia show that students demonstrate high levels of digital exposure but lack core media literacy skills in practice. For example, 96.3% of students report not knowing how to verify online images, while a majority indicate they do not receive sufficient media education in school (AVMU, 2024).

- *Competence-based curricula combined with elective subjects: Serbia*

Media literacy within secondary education in Serbia is integrated through a combination of elective programmes and cross-curricular approaches. It has been introduced in primary education as part of Free Learning Activities, where students can choose media literacy modules covering media analysis, digital content, and advertising (ZUOV, 2021). In secondary education, media literacy is most explicitly addressed through the elective subject Language, Media and Culture, as well as through its integration into subjects such as Citizenship education and Mother tongue (ZUOV, 2020, pp.142-143).

Teacher capacity-building in media literacy is supported through a combination of national frameworks, professional development programmes, and practical teaching resources. The Ministry of Education introduced the [Digital Competence Framework – Teacher for a Digital Age \(2017\)](#), while the Institute for the Improvement of Education (ZUOV) provides training programmes such as Media Literacy and Critical Thinking: A Path to Quality Education. These efforts are complemented by the development of teaching manuals and handbooks, which offer practical guidance, classroom activities, and methodological support for integrating media literacy into everyday teaching practice across subjects (EC, 2024).

4. Research Findings

The expert interviews conducted across Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia reveal a shared structural pattern: media and information literacy is formally recognized across all three education systems, yet this recognition has not been converted into consistent, well-resourced, or measurable implementation. Across all thematic areas examined, the interviews point to the same underlying gap: the distance between policy intention and classroom reality remains wide, and the mechanisms needed to close it are either absent or insufficiently developed. While country-specific conditions shape the nature and severity of these challenges, the cross-cutting finding is that MIL in all three contexts remains structurally underdeveloped relative to the demands of increasingly complex information environments.

MIL in Schools: Formal Presence, Fragmented Delivery

In all three countries, experts confirm that the dominant approach to MIL (i.e., cross-curricular integration rather than a standalone subject) is supported in principle but consistently described as insufficiently structured in practice. In Albania, an expert from the curriculum and education field notes that the updated curricula treat “Technology, society and media” as a cross-curricular theme, reflecting growing institutional awareness, but cautions that the integrated approach carries *“the risk of remaining fragmented across subjects without clear progression, consistent standards, or dedicated assessment tools.”* A second expert from Albania reinforces this, observing that MIL *“is often treated as an additional topic rather than a core competency.”* In North Macedonia, an expert from the regulatory field similarly notes that while media literacy has been introduced into primary education, it *“becomes less visible in later years, especially in secondary schools,”* and that *“strategies and policy documents exist, but they are often not fully implemented in practice.”*

Serbia offers the clearest illustration of the gap between formal existence and effective delivery. Since 2018, the elective subject “Language, Media and Culture” has provided a dedicated curricular space for MIL in grammar schools. An expert from the NGO sector in Serbia acknowledges the value of this *“the space has been created, it exists systemically in education.”* However, both experts from Serbia highlight structural conditions that undermine its effectiveness. One expert reports that the subject is frequently scheduled as the seventh or eighth class of the day and *“sometimes skipped if there is no time,”* while another notes that media literacy exists but is unevenly distributed across subjects without a coherent interdisciplinary framework. Critically, the subject remains unavailable to students in vocational schools, creating an equity gap that experts across both interviews explicitly flag. As one Serbian expert concludes, the subject appears to have been *“introduced merely formally, to show that it exists, rather than as a genuinely developed educational component.”*

Teacher Capacity: The Decisive Variable

The single finding on which all experts agree on, regardless of country, is that teacher capacity is the primary determinant of MIL quality in schools. An expert from Albania states it directly: *“The key factor is the teacher. If teachers are trained, motivated, and have access to the right tools, teaching tends to be effective. Without this, even good policies or materials may not have much impact.”* A second expert from Albania elaborates that even when curricula include MIL,

quality depends entirely on the teacher's ability to translate content into concrete analytical practice. In North Macedonia, an expert in the regulatory field identifies the limited number of trained teachers as a key structural shortcoming.

The interviews conducted in Serbia provide information on why training, where it exists, fails to produce sustainable capacity. One expert identifies a foundational failure in pre-service education: *"It is unrealistic to expect that someone who has never dealt with this topic becomes competent after one or two seminars and then teaches it for years."* This problem is compounded at the in-service level. After the initial 2018 MIL training, teachers were effectively left without ongoing support in a constantly evolving field. The discontinuation of the IREX programme, a key accredited training initiative, has further narrowed the available infrastructure, and uncertainty remains about how readily civil society organizations can currently access collaboration channels with the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing (ZUOV), given the broader institutional climate.

The operational reality of how training reaches teachers reveals a structural dependence on civil society initiatives rather than on systemic delivery. Critically, every model depends on school administrators recognizing the need and acting on it, a condition the expert notes is unreliable, since school leadership *"often deals with completely different matters,"* leaving individual teachers to identify the need, seek out partners, and initiate engagement themselves. This places an unsustainable burden on teachers who, in most cases, do not teach MIL as their primary subject but as an additional assignment to fulfil workload requirements. As one Serbian expert observes: *"It is really too much to expect that the teacher will carry the entire story, so the system, the changes, searching for materials, and partnerships."*

Two further structural factors compound this. First, a demographic urgency: a significant portion of the current teaching workforce is approaching retirement and has limited technological literacy, while younger professionals with relevant competencies are not being systematically recruited into MIL teaching. Second, a pipeline failure at the university level is noted, as journalism programmes in Serbia do not include courses on artificial intelligence as of 2026, meaning the problem of under-prepared educators is actively reproducing itself in the next generation of graduates.

Across all three countries, the consequence is the same: implementation quality depends on individual motivation rather than on institutional support, resulting in wide variation among schools, regions, and teachers assigned to nominally identical subjects.

Monitoring and Evaluation: A Shared Absence

When it comes to monitoring and evaluation, the interview findings are strikingly uniform: no systematic, national-level evaluation framework for MIL exists in any of the three countries. An expert from Serbia states plainly that no official evaluation of the “Language, Media and Culture” subject exists, noting that a decade has passed without any assessment of how many students have completed the programme or what they have gained from it. A second expert from Serbia confirms this, reporting that despite thorough research efforts, no publicly available data on programme reach or effectiveness could be found: *“everything depends on year to year,”* since a subject that students choose this year may not run at all the following year.

In Albania, one expert reports that *“there is no systematic, nationwide monitoring of media literacy education,”* with evaluations conducted only within specific NGO or donor-funded projects. A second expert from Albania notes that while the Audiovisual Media Authority conducts reporting on its own activities, *“this does not yet constitute a national mechanism for assessing student outcomes in schools.”*

North Macedonia represents a partial exception. An expert describes research conducted through projects that measure both self-assessed and practical media literacy skills, such as the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services’ *Research on Media Literacy among First and Second Year Students in Secondary Education* (AVMU, 2024). Still, the expert emphasizes that *“there is still no broader national evaluation of how effective specific media literacy projects and initiatives are.”*

Experts across all three countries agree that effective measurement must combine self-assessment with practical competency-based tests and evaluate student outcomes, as well as teacher preparedness and the effectiveness of specific media literacy initiatives – dimensions that are currently not systematically measured in any of the three countries.

Cross-Sectoral Cooperation: Shared Responsibility, Fragmented Delivery

As indicated throughout the desk research, responsibility for MIL across all three countries is distributed among multiple institutions: ministries of education, curriculum agencies, media regulators, and civil society, without clearly defined coordination mechanisms. Expert interviews describe a governance landscape in which parallel effort, duplication, and dependence on short-term project funding replace sustained policy infrastructure.

In Albania, an expert in the field of education characterizes cooperation as existing but “*in a strengthening phase rather than fully institutionalized in a systemic way,*” calling for “*a permanent interinstitutional cooperation mechanism*” with shared objectives, clear roles, and regular monitoring. A second expert from Albania observes that “*different actors work in parallel rather than as part of a shared strategy,*” leading to missed opportunities for collective impact.

In North Macedonia, cooperation is described as operating primarily through the Media Literacy Network and project-based collaboration, but an expert from the country suggests that it should be more continuous and coordinated, with institutions taking a stronger leading role rather than relying mainly on the NGO sector to initiate activities.

In Serbia, experts describe a more acute version of the same fragmentation. One expert draws a meaningful distinction between cooperation with ZUOV, deemed to be substantive and ongoing, and cooperation with the Ministry of Education, described as limited and contingent on individual relationships rather than institutional commitment: “*everything comes down to individuals.*” A second expert from Serbia describes the absence of genuine multi-stakeholder dialogue and notes that the NGO sector now faces additional pressure from the withdrawal of major international funding, including USAID programmes, further narrowing the resources available to sustain civil society-led initiatives.

The weakening of civil society poses a particular threat to the continuity of media and information literacy, since civil society organizations are identified as essential actors for the sector. One Serbian expert describes civil society as “*the only real bright spot*” in the MIL ecosystem, but their structural position faces a systemic risk. NGO involvement helps keep the topic present in public space, as one expert notes, but the dependence on project cycles means that when funding ends, activity stops. The implication drawn consistently across all interviews

is that civil society can supplement but cannot substitute for a functioning institutional framework, and that framework remains incomplete in all three countries.

Sustainability at Risk: Overreliance on Individual Efforts and Civil Society Initiatives

A cross-cutting element across the four thematic areas examined in this paper is the fragility of MIL education in all three countries. This fragility stems not from the absence of MIL in education systems, but from the fact that its continuity depends on conditions that are inherently unstable. Both the desk research and expert interviews indicate that weak institutional frameworks shift the burden of sustaining MIL education onto two actors that cannot be expected to bear it indefinitely: individual teachers and civil society organizations.

The overreliance on individual teachers produces a system where quality is a function of personal motivation rather than institutional design. Across Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, experts describe teachers who seek out training on their own initiative, partner with NGOs independently, and deliver MIL content as an additional responsibility on top of full teaching loads. This model produces pockets of good practice, but it is neither scalable, equitable, nor sustainable: when a motivated teacher retires, transfers, or loses interest, the MIL provision they carried disappears with them. The demographic pressures already noted in Serbia (an ageing teaching workforce without systematic replacement by technologically literate professionals) make this dependency particularly acute.

The overreliance on civil society interventions creates a parallel fragility at the systemic level. NGOs and international donors have been the primary drivers of MIL development across all three countries, filling gaps that formal education systems have not addressed. This has kept the topic present in public discourse and produced genuine capacity-building outcomes. However, as experts across all three countries note, project-based interventions stop when funding ends. The consequences of this dependency were made visible most acutely in Serbia, where the withdrawal of USAID funding, including the discontinuation of the IREX programme, removed a key pillar of the teacher training infrastructure overnight. What appeared to be a functioning support system was revealed as a structure built on external funding rather than institutional commitment.

Together, these two dependencies, on individual teachers and on civil society initiatives, leave MIL education in all three countries vulnerable to disruptions that are largely outside the control of the education system itself. Addressing this sustainability risk is the overarching

challenge to which the recommendations in this paper are directed. The lesson from leading European models is not only that MIL should be better integrated or better taught, but that it must be anchored in institutional frameworks robust enough to function independently of any individual teacher's motivation or any donor's funding priorities.

5. Instead of conclusions: What does it take to improve the quality of MIL in formal education?

Although Media and Information Literacy is conceptually included in curriculum frameworks, it remains underdeveloped in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, limiting education systems' ability to respond effectively to disinformation. Until recently, MIL has been treated less as a distinct competence requiring dedicated time and resources, and more as an indirect outcome of the education system.

Across all three countries, the main challenges are:

- i. partial curriculum integration;
- ii. fragile or absent monitoring of learning outcomes;
- iii. overreliance on individual teachers' efforts; and
- iv. dependence on project-based interventions by donors and civil society organizations.

As long as MIL depends on individual teachers' motivation or external donors' funding priorities, it will remain vulnerable to the disruptions already affecting all three countries.

The analysis shows that the core challenge is not the absence of media literacy models or mere policy recognition. Many existing approaches in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia already reflect elements found in leading European examples, including cross-curricular integration and multi-stakeholder cooperation. The real gap lies in the quality and consistency of implementation. In other words, holistic approaches and MIL networks only deliver results when paired with clear learning outcomes, continuous teacher support, and proactive stakeholder engagement.

In practice, this means that MIL should move from being a dispersed curricular theme to a clearly supported educational responsibility. The findings from the three countries show that cross-curricular integration can only work when teachers know what competencies they are expected to develop, when they receive sustained training and methodological support, and when institutions monitor whether students actually acquire practical skills such as recognizing

manipulation, verifying information, and critically evaluating digital content. Without these conditions, MIL remains formally present but educationally uneven.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are organized by institutional stakeholder and directed at the actors with the authority to address these gaps within each national context.

Joint recommendations for Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia

1. Ensure Universal Access to MIL in Secondary Education

Ministries of Education and responsible quality assurance agencies in all three countries should take active steps to guarantee that MIL content reaches all secondary school students, regardless of school type or elective subject preferences. This requires including MIL in core critical thinking skills development curricula, with dedicated teaching time and assessable learning outcomes, and extending it to vocational education tracks, thus removing structural barriers such as the elective-only provision of MIL. Where a standalone MIL subject is not feasible, ministries should issue binding curricular guidelines that ensure meaningful MIL exposure across all school types.

2. Provide quality continuous MIL training to Teachers at all stages.

Higher Education Institutions and Ministries of Education should work together to establish MIL as a compulsory component of initial teacher education programmes, ensuring that newly qualified teachers are equipped with updated MIL competencies from the outset. At the same time, education quality agencies and curriculum bureaus should institutionalize continuous professional development for teachers, moving away from one-off training events toward sustained, long-term support structures.

3. Embed MIL Competencies Across the Curriculum

Curriculum development bodies should develop clear and detailed guidelines for integrating MIL competencies into existing subjects beyond native language and civic education. Integration should extend to science, technology, social sciences and vocational subjects, reflecting the cross-disciplinary nature of media and information literacy. These guidelines should be accompanied by concrete learning outcomes and supported by teacher training, so that cross-curricular integration is actually implementable.

4. Establish Systematic Monitoring and Evaluation of MIL Implementation

Education quality and evaluation agencies should develop dedicated national frameworks for monitoring MIL education, combining self-assessment tools with practical competency testing. These frameworks should move beyond measuring inputs and toward measuring sustained outcomes, including whether trained teachers continue to deliver MIL content over time and whether students demonstrate improved competencies. Civil society organizations and academic experts should be formally included in the design and implementation of these monitoring processes.

5. Formalize Partnerships with Civil Society

Public institutions across all three countries should move beyond treating civil society organizations as project-based service providers and establish formal, standing mechanisms for civil society participation in MIL policy development, implementation, and monitoring. This means creating institutionalized cooperation agreements with defined roles, regular consultation cycles and shared planning processes. Civil society, in turn, should use these mechanisms to advocate for evidence-based, qualitative evaluation standards and to ensure that MIL policy commitments translate into measurable long-term outcomes.

6. Transition from Project-Based to Institutionally Embedded MIL

All relevant stakeholders such as ministries, agencies, higher education institutions, and civil society should collectively work toward reducing the dependency of MIL education on short-term project funding. Gains made through NGO-led initiatives should be systematically absorbed into permanent institutional structures, curricula, and professional development systems.

7. Activate Media Regulatory Bodies as MIL Governance Actors

Media regulatory authorities should assume a more active and formalized role in the national MIL ecosystem. This could include producing and disseminating educational resources, conducting and publishing regular MIL research, and, following AVMU's example in North Macedonia, hosting or co-chairing national coordination mechanisms.

8. Establish Cross-Sectoral MIL Coordination Mechanisms

Albania and Serbia would benefit from the creation of a formal, standing coordination body that brings together education ministries, media regulatory authorities, curriculum development agencies, higher education institutions and civil society under a shared mandate and planning cycle. The Media Literacy Network in North Macedonia, as well as its counterparts from Finland, Ireland and Denmark, provide good case studies for that. These mechanisms should be supported with core funding from national budgets, complemented by international donor support on a transitional basis, to ensure they have the necessary financial resources to contribute to Media and Information Literacy development in their context.

Country specific recommendations

Albania

Ministry of Education and Sports

1. Introduce Media and Information Literacy (MIL) as a mandatory standalone subject across all upper secondary schools, including both general and vocational education.
2. Establish specialized teacher training pathways for Media and Information Literacy instruction.
3. Develop national competency standards and measurable learning outcomes for MIL education.

Higher Education Institutions

1. Integrate Media and Information Literacy as a semester-long course within journalism, language and literature, teacher training, and other social science study programs.
2. Establish formal cooperation agreements between universities and the Ministry of Education to support MIL outreach in secondary schools.
3. Develop national and regional summer schools focused on media literacy and critical thinking.

Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP)

1. Institutionalize continuous professional development programmes for practicing teachers in Media and Information Literacy.
2. Develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for MIL implementation in schools.

Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA)

1. Strengthen cooperation with the Ministry of Education and ASCAP to promote student engagement in identifying and reporting disinformation.
2. Develop nationwide awareness campaigns on misinformation and digital safety targeting young audiences.

Civil Society Organizations

1. Establish structured cooperation mechanisms with public institutions for the development of MIL educational materials.
2. Advocate for sustainable and long-term MIL initiatives rather than short-term project cycles.

North Macedonia

Ministry of Education and Science

1. Strengthen the position of MIL within secondary education by ensuring that all students are exposed to structured and continuous MIL learning.
2. Establish regular and long-term teacher support programmes focused on media literacy and digital competencies.
3. Increase institutional support for the integration of MIL across all subjects, not only within language or civic education, but also in science, technology, and vocational subjects.

Higher Education Institutions

1. Expand the presence of media literacy within university programmes, especially in teacher training, journalism, communication, and social science studies.
2. Encourage stronger collaboration between universities and secondary schools.

Bureau for Development of Education

1. Prepare more detailed curricular recommendations explaining how media literacy competencies can be incorporated into existing subjects.
2. Introduce a more systematic approach to evaluating media literacy education in schools.

Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMU)

Increase educational outreach activities aimed at young people through campaigns and workshops addressing misinformation, online manipulation, digital safety, and critical consumption of media content.

Civil Society Organizations

1. Continue advocating for the integration of media literacy into long-term educational policies and public institutions rather than depending mainly on temporary project funding.
2. Strengthen cooperation with state institutions through formalized partnership mechanisms that ensure civil society input is not occasional but consistently integrated into decision-making processes.

Serbia

Ministry of Education

1. Extend MIL content to vocational secondary schools.
2. Guarantee regular access to MIL content for all grammar school students despite elective preferences.
3. Introduce MIL competency trainings as a mandatory requirement for high school teacher certification.
4. Remove regulatory provisions that prevent journalism and communications graduates from teaching MIL-related subjects.

Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduce MIL as a compulsory course during the initial teacher education programmes.
2. Develop accessible certification pathways for journalism and communications graduates to qualify as MIL trainers.
3. Ensure study programmes reflect current developments in the information environment such as artificial intelligence.

Institute for the Improvement of Education (ZUOV)

1. Develop binding interdisciplinary guidelines for integrating MIL competencies into existing subjects across all secondary school types, particularly social sciences, Serbian language and literature, and IT.

2. Institutionalize long-term continuous professional development for practising teachers.
3. Establish institutional long-term collaboration framework with NGOs working in MIL.

Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education

1. Develop a dedicated national monitoring framework for MIL education in cooperation with ZUOV, civil society partners and academic experts.
2. Adopt a monitoring methodology that combines self-assessment with practical competency testing.

Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM)

1. Assume a proactive role in MIL Governance
2. Advocate for the creation of a Media Literacy Network according to the example from North Macedonia, Finland, Denmark and Ireland.

Civil Society Organizations

1. Advocate for a formal, standing cross-sectoral MIL coordination mechanism that gathers in the same space the Ministry responsible for Education, Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, REM, and civil society with a defined mandate, clear roles, and shared planning cycles.
2. Engage as expert partners, not service providers.
3. Push for qualitative evidence of sustained implementation, such as tracking whether trained teachers continue delivering MIL content beyond project periods, and shift evaluation from participant counts to measurable outcomes.

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