

GLOBAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY WEEK 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

Proposed Theme:

“Media and information literacy for the public good”

Host: South Africa

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” – Nelson Mandela

Media and information literacy empowers people to develop themselves and their societies through enhanced capacities in communication and information.

Executive Summary

This concept note sets out the background to Global Media and Information Literacy Week. It traces key developments in recent years, and how media and information literacy as an essential tool for people’s development, so that they can benefit from today’s information environment, mitigate the problems of potentially harmful content and reinforce rights to information and freedom of expression.

The five sub-themes for the 2021 Global Media and Information Literacy Week are:

- 1) Positioning media and information literacy in the post-pandemic world,
- 2) Enhancing co-operation among stakeholders to sustain media and information literacy development,
- 3) Promoting the second edition of UNESCO’s Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators and Learners,
- 4) Increasing funding opportunities, and
- 5) Advancing media and information literacy research and knowledge.

These sub-themes inform the activities and sessions for the Week, as well as the Feature Conference and Youth Forum. Together they aim to ensure tangible advances in the role of media and information literacy to uphold the vision of information as a public good, as the world slowly begins to move towards a new post-COVID normal.

Background and new developments

Critical thinking through information, media and digital competencies, combined with free expression and access to information are needed to: 1) preserve knowledge societies, 2)

address the spread of disinformation and misinformation, 3) enable people to engage with information while respecting the rights of others, 4) align with international human rights standards, 5) support democratic societies, and 6) combat expressions that cause harm to human rights and the public good.

In the current ecosystem of complex and sometimes contradictory messages and meanings, it is hard to conceive of the public good being advanced, if the public is disempowered in the face of opportunities and threats. Capacity building is needed of our competencies in order for each individual to understand the stakes - and for the public to contribute to and benefit from information and communication opportunities. Specific knowledge and skills are needed, and UNESCO aggregates these under the banner of media and information literacy.

This year marks 10 years since the seeds of Global Media and Information Literacy Week were planted in Fez, Morocco, and captured in the Fez Declaration on Media and Information Literacy (MIL)¹. This was long before the exponential rise in disinformation, political polarisation, increasing influence of digital platforms and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Five key developments have taken place over the past decade:

I. The period has been a turning point in the recognition of the urgency to promote MIL for all. UNESCO's 193 Member States underlined the issue by proclaiming Global MIL Week, to be held annually on 24-31 October, at the 40th session of UNESCO's General Conference in 2019. On March 25, 2021, the United Nations General Assembly also proclaimed Global MIL Week on the United Nation's international calendar, calling on countries around the world to, "to develop and implement policies, action plans and strategies related to the promotion of media and information literacy, and to increase awareness, capacity for prevention and resilience to disinformation and misinformation[...]"².

Looking ahead, the challenge is to ensure and support worldwide implementation of the Week and the development of MIL policies and programmes at the national level.

II. MIL is resonating with many policymakers in governments and corporations who increasingly recognize that this set of competencies intersects with technical digital skills. However, much more must be done to integrate this package into formal, non-formal and informal education.

III. A third important development is that new actors, such as digital communications companies and the media are placing more interest in advancing the MIL agenda. This has important implications for the reach of MIL - especially in digital spaces. Many more people can be reached and empowered if these stakeholders were to upscale their engagement in media and information literacy. Media and information literacy promoted by the companies themselves dovetails with the UNESCO initiative, "Letting the Sun Shine In: Transparency and Accountability in the Digital Age", which proposes 26 principles to address issues related to

¹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/news/Fez%20Declaration.pdf>

² <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/267>. Accessed on 4 June 2021.

content and process, due diligence and redress, empowerment, commercial dimensions, personal data gathering and use, and data access³.

As for media institutions role in MIL, these entities are key to help their audiences understand the distinctiveness of quality journalism, the risks of conspiracy theories, the techniques of advertising, and the emotions that story-telling can arouse.

IV. MIL was featured as one of the key topics at the 2021 World Press Freedom Day Global Conference, held in Namibia with the overall theme “Information as a Public Good”. As an outcome of the conference, the Windhoek+30 Declaration was adopted on 3 May 2021, noting that MIL helps people navigate through the evolving information landscape, and that freedom of expression and access to information should be promoted for the public good⁴.

V. Finally, there is a small uptick in funding for MIL-related activities, such as funding MIL skills for fighting dis- and misinformation and supporting fact checking. But as yet, the momentum is not enough in terms of the level of resources needed globally.

Thinking Critically, Click Wisely: MIL for the “next normal”

Against this background, it is necessary to focus on how the global community can use Global MIL Week to build MIL as key to a vision of information as a public good. While the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how lies can cost lives, the challenges of false and hateful expressions also go much wider - affecting our identities, our sense of human solidarity and peace, our democratic systems, and progress on human rights and sustainable development.

Sub-themes for 2021

Freedom of expression, countering hate speech and right to information are central topics to this year’s Global MIL Week and all stakeholders are encouraged to organize local events in line with these and the sub-themes listed below.

1. *Positioning media and information literacy as a necessary intervention to uphold information as a public good:* Ensure that MIL learning supports understanding and engagement with digital platforms, media and libraries.
2. *Enhancing multi-stakeholder cooperation around MIL:* Promote participation for an expanded role of digital communications companies to promote media and information literacy knowledge and skills;
3. *Wide-scale adaptation and use of the new UNESCO resource “Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think critically, Click wisely* (Second Edition of the

³ Letting the sun shine in: Transparency and accountability in the digital age.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377231>. Accessed on 1 July 2021.

⁴ https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/windhoek30declaration_wpfd_2021.pdf

UNESCO Model Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators and Learners)”;

4. *Increasing funding for the development of MIL policies and practices at the national level: Mobilise for increased resources.*
5. *Advancing knowledge generation and sharing: Advance good practices in MIL .*

The Global MIL Week 2021 will include:

- A Feature Event (12th International Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue Conference, and
- The 6th Global MIL Week Youth Agenda Forum).

It will also launch several new resources including:

- *Mapping Media and Information Literacy Development Globally – a thematic report in the UNESCO series “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development”*
- *Online Multimedia Media and Information Literacy Teaching Resources Tool*
- Primer version of the curriculum resource “*Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think critically, Click Wisely*”
- *Global Recommendations on Media and Information Literacy Curriculum Development Guidelines*

Draft programme elements/elements

- 1) High-level Opening Session
- 2) MIL: An enabler for media viability and digital platforms' transparency
- 3) Dialogue on an International Multi-Stakeholder Framework for Private/Digital Platforms to Promote MIL (Policies and Programmes)
- 4) Leave no one behind in MIL: An International Media and Information Literacy Fund
- 5) MIL for global citizenship and addressing digital transformation
- 6) Disinformation about scientific facts: helping people understand science
- 7) A festival of media and information literacy teaching ideas: Communities of practice
- 8) Early and late starters: Media and information literacy for children and the elderly
- 9) Africa Agenda 2063: MIL citizens as change agents (A focus on media and information literacy in Africa)
- 10) Social media regulation and threat to freedom of expression: The MIL alternative
- 11) Youth, MIL and digital leadership
- 12) MIL to help secure the safety of journalists
- 13) Cultural expression and freedom of expression: Bridging the gap with MIL
- 14) MIL in journalism and journalism education
- 15) Second United Nations Roundtable on media and information literacy
- 16) World Cities Day and Global MIL Week 2021 dedicated session (To decide on a theme)
- 17) **Featured Side-Events** (Discussions ongoing with key partners such as the European Commission, Deutsche Welle Academy, the UNESCO Media and Information literacy Alliance, etc.)

Outcomes and deliverables:

The 2021 Global MIL Week aims to:

- Build on momentum of the endorsement of Global Media and Information Literacy Week by the UN General Assembly to mobilize additional stakeholders to come together to further advance MIL to uphold information as a public good – in particular, engage more UN actors, Member States worldwide, media and digital communications companies, and private, public and civil society sector actors from the health, media and culture sectors;
- Put attention on the need for MIL policies to be adequately resourced in terms of knowledge development and sharing, as well as in terms of programmes for implementation;
- Publicize key knowledge resources that can support and improve understanding of MIL trends and curriculum implementation;
- Carry forward the Windhoek+30 Declaration and ensure the implementation of its recommendations related to MIL.

Conclusion:

Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2021 will be decisive in mainstreaming this important period in the annual global calendar across an unprecedented spread of stakeholders. It can set the pace for exponential growth in future years, by achieving unprecedented geographic reach and numbers of activities during 2021.

This concept note is therefore a call for action, to galvanize ideas and programmes relevant to the international context and linked to these themes. With global goodwill, the 2021 Global Media and Information Literacy Week can indeed advance the proposition that to defend and uphold the vision of information as a public good media and information literacy must be expanded, and that media and information literacy contributes to the public good.

Annex: MIL and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Although media and information literacy is related to all SDGs, particular attention can be given to:

- SDG 4: Targets 4.6 (“ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy”), and 4.7 (“ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development”), by affording youth and adults with critical information, media and digital competencies that enable quality education, global citizenship and peacebuilding;
- SDG 5: Target 5.b (“Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women”). By enhancing people’s abilities to detect and counter gender stereotypes, hate and racial discrimination in all types of media and digital platforms;
- SDG 16, Target 16.10 (“ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms”) and SDG 11 (“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”), by raising citizens’ critical awareness of their access to information; and raise their power of communication in this regard, their fundamental freedoms, and critical engagement with information that makes cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.