

**Programme for**

**Promoting**

**Media Literacy in**

**the Republic of**

**Macedonia**

**Agency for Audio and**

**Audiovisual**

**Media Services**

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**Preface**

This document has been prepared using expert assistance under the EC-funded project – the *EuropeAid* programme titled “Enhancing the Administrative Capacities of Telecom and Media Authorities for Efficient Regulation of New Digital and Multiple Play Services”.

It follows an obligation of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services to promote media literacy under Articles 2, 6 and 26 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia”, Nos 184/13, 13/14, 44/14, 101/14 and 132/14).

It is also in accord with the obligation of the EU member states specified in the EU’s Audiovisual Services Directive to promote media literacy in Europe. With the activity of this project and the related activities of the beneficiaries, these obligations are expanded to include Macedonia.

Recognising the strategic importance of media literacy, with this Programme, the Agency plans to organise its work in this field in a structured way.

# Introduction

This document is aimed at providing directions for the development and promotion of media literacy (ML) in the Republic of Macedonia.

In a nutshell, media literacy is the citizens’ ability to effectively use, understand and consciously participate in all forms of communication, as well as in the democratic and political processes.

With the scope of the Agency’s mission in mind, to reach these objectives, the regulatory authority intends to engage the relevant stakeholders – policy-makers, the media, educators, civic organisations – in its work, using the traditional spaces for debate such as participation in workshops/conferences and events, publishing and utilising the online tools such as websites and social media, which enable broader direct impact and direct communication with people.

The Agency will be acting as a facilitator among the different players, as is the case in other countries. It will be cooperating with the stakeholders for the purpose of carrying out certain actions, while coordinating some others directly by itself. The consultation process will always be ensured starting out from this document.

In order to achieve effective implementation, it is necessary to reach previous consensus with the relevant players via the consultation process. The Agency plays an important role in facilitating this process.

The role and dedication of the stakeholders, i.e. the media industry, the educational and civic institutions, is key to ensuring effective results in the process.

Finally, the ultimate beneficiaries who should be identified are the people of the Republic of Macedonia – children, students, adults, parents or citizens, viewers, listeners, users or media experts. They can be named differently, depending only on the specific priorities and actions that are to be implemented. It is important that the policy makers bear in mind these beneficiaries, i.e. the citizens, when adopting policies - in other words, the common interest or the interest of the citizens in the sphere of audiovisual services (Article 6 of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services).

The intention is to produce a Programme that can be followed in the course of the following years in a pragmatic way. The Agency will be able to carry out some of the many actions suggested each year, depending on the priorities, resources and partnerships. Annual review of the achieved results is envisaged at the end of each year, as well as of the actions to be carried out in the following year, involving some fine-tuning and adaptation due to evolving technology.

Due to the above, this document is not meant to be part of a research, but rather a discussion paper and a plan for action. Nevertheless, some basic ML concepts need to be called to mind in order to facilitate the comprehension of the issues at stake. Certain parts of it do not go into detail, and these will be expanded as necessary based on further revisions and consultations.

Within the document, the following points should be considered as the key messages.

**Strategic importance of media literacy** – The number of media, in all of their forms, is anticipated to increase between ten and a hundred times in the next decade. Therefore, within the current environment and in view of the future development, it is no longer an advantage to be media literate; on the contrary, it is a debilitating disadvantage not to be.

**Critical understanding** – Critical understanding is the ultimate focus (and ambition) of media literacy. It should be identified as the key factor in the development of ML policies. This involves policies aimed at increasing the competences for understanding media content and function; enhancing the knowledge about the media context, and enabling sound judgement when adopting adequate behaviour as a user.

**Citizens’ empowerment** – An increased awareness of media literacy and development of the relevant skills – and of how these can be applied to democratic participation – will contribute to the citizens’ capacity to take part in the democratic life and improve the conditions for their doing so.

Citizens will learn how to use media as a resource, find information, produce content and communicate safely and appropriately. It is now widely acknowledged that media play a vital role in promoting democratic values. There is a painfully ironic dichotomy between the wealth of media available and their informed use on the citizens’ part. Therefore, it is imperative that the citizens be media literate, so that they can participate in every aspect of public life and in the democratic processes. They must be equipped with the skills to utilise – and thus benefit from – the media.

**Technology** – The provision of audiovisual services is evolving rapidly. The market and the platforms to enjoy audiovisual products have transformed considerably in recent years. Media literacy should facilitate and extend access to digital services, with a specific focus on online digital services, but it needs to be considered separately from the nearly exclusive emphasis previously given to technology. Policy in this field must, as a priority, encourage social inclusion and combat the digital divide.

**Public debate, role and responsibility of the institutions, including the regulatory bodies** – In order to promote media literacy, one must also promote public debate, consultations and awareness of media literacy through national information campaigns. Politicians and decision makers should be provided with relevant information. More systematic research on media literacy should be available, stimulating the development of detailed studies. The adoption of ML policies is essential for employing the full potential of ML.

**Civil society and media industry roles** – To foster a democratic culture and common values, the role of civil society organisations and related media literacy initiatives should be sustained. In addition, a more effective participation in the public sphere should be facilitated, as should the activities of representative citizens’ institutions. Finally, active involvement by the media industry – audiovisual media in particular – should be encouraged. This should include literacy enhancing initiatives, involving the press and audiovisual products capable of reaching the general public. Attention should be given to mass media – including the traditional and digital, the public and private platforms, the content and the processes. The training of media professionals should also be considered a priority.

## What is Media Literacy?

Media Literacy (ML) is:

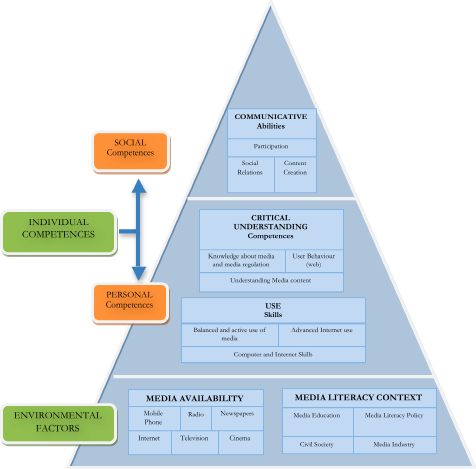
*“...the capacity to interpret critically the flow, substance, value and consequences of media content in all its many forms, so as to enable citizens to use the media and communicate effectively through it.”* (EAVIStudy titled “Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels”, European Commission, 2010[[1]](#footnote-1)).

Although there are various definitions of ML, as the one given above, ML is better explained by presenting its constitutive parts.

The ultimate focus of media literacy is the development of individual critical understanding and citizen participation, i.e. the empowerment and interaction of people in public life through the media and through the development of individual capacities for critical understanding of media literacy in the socio-political sphere.

The 2010 EAVI ML framework[[2]](#footnote-2) identified two dimensions of media literacy: one resulting from an individual’s ability to utilise the media, and the other dependant on the repeating contextual and environmental factors. These are identified as **individual competences** and **environmental factors**:

* **Individual competences (IC)**: IC may be defined as an individual capacity to exercise certain skills (including *inter alia* cognitive processing, analysis, communication, etc.). These competences include a broad range of capabilities and increasing levels of awareness, the capacity for critical thinking and an ability to produce and communicate a message.
* **Environmental factors (EF)**: EF may be defined as a set of contextual factors (affecting Individual Competences) that impact the broad span of media literacy, including informational availability, media policy, education and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the media community.

The base of the pyramid illustrates the necessary pre-conditions for media literacy development and the factors that facilitate or hinder the same. The second level illustrates the personal competences to facilitate the technical skills and the cognitive process, which in turn facilitates communicative ability, at the apex of the pyramid, which permits full engagement with media society.

Media literacy applies to all media, including television, radio, the Internet, mobile phones and tablets, newspapers and cinema.

Since we live in an unprecedented era of the media, basic literacy and numeracy skills are no longer sufficient, it is vital to acquire new and more complex skills and expertise so as to be able to actively participate in social life. With media being so omnipresent in modern society, it is no longer simply an advantage to be media literate, but rather a debilitating disadvantage not to be.

Citizens must be equipped with the skills to utilize and benefit from the media and, to do so, Europeans need to acquire new competences beyond those of traditional literacy. Media literacy falls within the long-term educational strategies. As has been said already, media literacy is the literacy of today. Its broad objectives are to promote critical thinking, problem-solving capacity, analytical skills and citizen awareness. Additionally, the promotion of freedom of speech, the right to information, democratic sustainability and civic participation contributes towards an increased active citizenship, intercultural dialogue and critical awareness of the media users.

Consequently, media literate citizens are those who are aware of the content they use, of how they found it, who has created it and who provides it. Furthermore, they use it wisely, ethically and effectively.

Literate citizens would be able to fully participate in public life, interact with their peers, benefit from the services and use media as a resource in a safe way. They would have the skills to learn, explore and have fun with the media. They would also be informed consumers when shopping and locating reliable sources of information[[3]](#footnote-3).

## Why is media literacy important?

In Europe, the European Commission acknowledges the strategic value of media literacy and, as a result, it has produced a number of relevant documents, including communications, recommendations and Directives.[[4]](#footnote-4) The European Parliament has stated an obligation for the member states to promote media literacy. Other international organisations, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, have also been very active in the field.

The Agency has a strong belief – which is shared by the above-mentioned international organisations, the research community and the politicians – that media literacy is key to, and will increasingly boost, citizens’ ability to participate in democratic life.

Civic participation and democracy rest largely upon citizens’ media literacy. This means that the activities promoting media literacy also promote citizens’ engagement for effective participation in democratic life. Its promotion is widely advocated.

Media literacy is closely related to a number of well known issues that the Agency is dealing with. These include the protection of minors, media pluralism, access to the media for people with sensory impairments.

It is especially important for Macedonia to invest in ML, given that the latter’s development may contribute to a richer media landscape, an opportunity to enhance viewers and listeners’ understanding on how and why media work and, more generally, to more room for citizens’ participation. Broadcasters and media professionals would also benefit by being offered opportunities to enrich their skills and professionalism.

Furthermore, having people acquire new digital skills will improve their employability and will have a positive impact on innovation, cultural diversity and democracy.

# *The context for developing media literacy*

The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services first tackled the issue of media literacy while working on the current *Strategy for the Development of Broadcasting Activity, 2013-2017*. The *Strategy* contains a short assessment of scarce evidence of the characteristics of the context for ML development in the Republic of Macedonia. Namely, until that moment, the most active factor was civil society as most of the projects were conducted by citizen organizations and referred to the fields of education and safe usage of the Internet and the social networks. As for media-related education – there were certain efforts to introduce media literacy in the curricula through the mother tongue lessons in the primary schools and, partly, in the secondary schools. However, there was no mention of ML in the media policy, nor were there any related activities within the media industry.

***ML entry into media policy and the regulatory activities***

Media literacy entered media policy during the process of harmonization of media-related laws with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive. The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, which entered into force in early 2014, vested the Agency with a direct obligation to promote media literacy, cooperating with all the relevant stakeholders, and to report on its activities in the annual work reports it submits to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia (Article 26).

Aware of the fact that promoting media literacy cannot be a solo venture, the Agency decided to develop this three-year Programme for Promoting Media Literacy, hoping that it would help create a network of relevant stakeholders working together. Rethinking its previous activities, the Agency set its own course towards following the citizens’ access to media and their manner of using and understanding media content, as well as towards raising the awareness of the providers of audio and audiovisual media services about their role as socially responsible media and the importance of adhering to the highest professional standards.

***Media landscape, access to and understanding content***

At the time of the Programme’s development (first half of 2015), the media landscape in the Republic of Macedonia consisted of the Public Broadcasting Service (MRT), 132 commercial TV and radio stations, three non-profit radio stations, one on-demand audiovisual media service, a number of TV-like services on the Internet and around 30 daily newspapers and magazines.

The regulatory body commissions annual surveys of the public’s opinion on the TV and radio programmes. These regularly provide data on media accessibility, as well as on how the audience perceives, reads and understands media content. The 2014 survey[[5]](#footnote-5) showed that 51.8% of the households received their TV signal through cable operators, 20.9% through an IPTV platform, 16.1% through a digital platform, 6.2% by digital terrestrial means (free to air), 3.2% had their own satellite dish, 1.2% received it through a satellite service provider, while the rest either did not know the answer or did not own a TV set.

A total of 75.9% of the respondents had Internet access from their homes, while 61.5% of them mostly used it to access social networks.

The TV stations were the dominant source for acquiring information – 82.7% of the people used it on a daily basis. This percentage was growing steadily during the previous three years (for example, in 2012, it had amounted to 75.4%, and in 2013 – to 79%), whereas the number of those using print media has decreased. However, it is interesting to note that, as the level of respondents’ education rose, the number of those using TV as a source of information on a daily basis decreased, while the number of those who used the Internet and print media for this purpose on a daily basis was on the rise. The cluster of questions dealing with the issues of objectivity and trustworthiness of the TV news gave interesting and, to a certain point, opposing data. Namely, the respondents assessed that the newscasts of the national TV stations were fully or mostly objective (the data mainly showed that this was the opinion of nearly half of the respondents, the lowest percentage being around one third). Nevertheless, when asked which TV station’s news they believed the most, the highest amount of expressed trust was 17.4%, while 14.1% did not trust any TV station. On top of this, 66.7% agreed fully or to a certain extent with the statement that the TV news often speculated with unverified information.

This method provides a certain insight into how people read and perceive media content. However, to obtain a better picture, one needs further data. Having concluded in its *Strategy* that there is a need for initial studies that would establish the level of media literacy in the country, the Agency decided to conduct two such studies – one on a representative sample of children aged 5-15 and the other on respondents over 16 years old. The methodological approach was developed through domestic and foreign expert assistance, following the risk-based approach of the European Commission and the activities of other regulatory bodies, the British Ofcom in particular.

***Raising awareness***

In terms of raising awareness, while establishing the basis for the projects that are to be undertaken as part of the Programme that will start in 2016, in the course of 2015, the Agency will be working on popularizing the right to reply and correction (activities aimed towards both the media and the citizens). It also intends to conduct workshops for the media on issues concerning gender stereotyping and representation, and treatment of gender minorities in their programmes.

# Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services

It should be noted again that, under the 2013 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, a number of competences of the Agency have been related to the broader concepts of media literacy. These include, but are not limited to, the following: protection of minors, pluralism of the audiovisual services and fighting media concentration.

This is evidently an addition to the specific mandate of the Agency to promote media literacy in line with Articles 2, 6 and 26 of the above-mentioned Law.

The Agency has already undertaken certain steps in the field of ML and intends to maintain a programme of initiatives for raising the awareness, facilitating participation and coordinating the activities.

The Agency plays the role of a bridge connecting citizens and the media. This position contributes to the protection of interests and to shaping the policy through its actions and insights in this field.

Its activities are ultimately intended to promote the interests of viewers and listeners.

Whenever possible, the envisaged actions and plans will be implemented within those more general and already envisaged by the Law.

# Goals set by this Programme

## General objectives of the Programme

* *To promote media literacy in the Macedonian Society;*
* *To contribute to citizens' understanding of media literacy;*
* *To improve the conditions for civic and democratic participation;*
* *To establish Macedonia internationally as a country with good ML practices, and*
* *To establish the Agency as the main coordinating centre for ML-related actions in the country and increase its visibility and recognition.*

## Specific aims of the Programme

* *Raise awareness of the media literacy concepts and values by stimulating debate and reflections;*
* *Promote media literacy by way of a number of interrelated activities including providing information and connection with previous relevant projects;*
* *Monitor the progress and trends of ML in Macedonia;*
* *Establish forms of cooperation with the relevant stakeholders by developing a network that should be accessed, inter alia, during the consultation processes;*
* *Engage and collaborate with the ministries, media, educational bodies and civil society on implementing the actions;*
* *Facilitate embracing of the idea of ML on the stakeholders’ part by demonstrating the benefits and reminding them of their (public) mission, and*
* *Encourage democratic and civic participation of the people in Macedonia by improving their understanding of media literacy.*

## Activities of the ML Programme:

## three different plans

By way of the various activities described below, the Agency can establish itself as an active participant in the transfer, exchange and sharing of ML-related information and knowledge.

Under this Programme, over the next few years, the Agency will focus on the following plans:

*1) Plan to raise awareness*

The Agency will undertake a number of core activities aimed at rendering visible the values and benefits of ML, in the way that it will be raising the awareness of ML’s importance by way of publishing products, results and news. These will be distributed via the Agency’s own dissemination platforms and through established partnerships with other organisations.

*2) Plan for coordination and consultation*

The Agency seeks to establish a two-way system of communication with the interested stakeholders. Furthermore, it intends to closely cooperate with different players in implementing the specific actions aimed at promoting media literacy, in order to ensure the widest possible visibility and a multiple effect.

*3) Plan to monitor ML trends*

It is envisaged to conduct research analysis about the level of ML among the Macedonian citizens. Furthermore, in order to adjust the planned activities to the concrete situation on the ground, it is important to assess the results achieved in the previous year, display the technological progress and adapt the new measures with the aim of establishing consistency and continuity.

# Recommended Specific Activities

The above-mentioned plans translate into specific actions, as follows:

Each year, starting from January 2016, as part of its *plan to raise awareness, t*he Agency intends to disseminate information, as follows:

* Establish an o**nline platform** dedicated to ML, using both the traditional website and the social networks to provide information, publish reports and receive feedback;
* Prepare and distribute **information material,** such as brochures and leaflets, targeting both the stakeholders and the general public;
* Organise **workshops** on specific ML-related activities to raise awareness among the relevant players and communities;
* Organise **information campaigns** on ML-related topics, aimed at the general public, using different platforms and types of materials, including both paper and audiovisual products;
* Participate in **meetings**, conferences and other events that will offer an opportunity to spread information and establish cooperation, and
* Prepare and distribute a **Newsletter** dedicated to ML.

As part of its *plan for coordination and consultation,* the Agency intends to seek cooperation and initiate dialogue with the relevant stakeholders with the aim of enhancing its own knowledge, sharing its insights, forming partnerships and disseminating results. In particular, the Agency intends to:

* Establish a **network** comprised of interested players within the relevant stakeholders (i.e. public institutions and ministries, private and public broadcasters, civil society organisations and educational bodies);
* Act as a facilitator in forming synergic partnerships and motivating the stakeholders to implement **new actions and projects** to promote ML in Macedonia;
* Maintain **open consultation** processes, exchange information, encourage consultation and feedback;

As part of its *plan to monitor ML trends,* the Agency intends to gather information about the evolving status of ML in Macedonia:

* As part of its Annual Work Programme, the Agency shall prepare an **Annual** **ML Report** to assess the activities conducted in the previous year and identify specific actions and the respective resources needed for their realization in the following year. The Report will also contribute to any future scenarios, prospects and emerging trends, to pinpoint the priorities in order to start new, concrete initiatives.
* The Agency shall conduct **research and analysis,** using different tools such as surveys, reports, statistics, meta-research and others. In addition to the specific activity aimed at determining the methodologies and at assessing the media literacy levels in Macedonia, the focus will be placed on topics and priorities as stated above. These may include and relate to the existing or future ad hoc activities concerning the following: protection of minors; ensuring access for the minority groups and people with disabilities; protection of data and privacy; access to unbiased information, and pluralism of audiovisual services.

# Expected Outputs

As part of the *Awareness-Raising Plan*

* Prepare content and launch a **website** dedicated to ML, and create **profiles on the** **social networks**;
* Publish a **brochure** explaining the concepts of media literacy, which will be distributed to media professionals and the general public;
* Organise at least one **workshop** per yearon a relevant ML-related activity with at least 20 participants;
* Prepare a plan and conduct an **information campaign** on ML-related topics;
* Participate in at least one **international conference** on ML a year;
* Prepare a **quarterly newsletter** with news about ML, to be distributed online, and
* Collaborate with the **educational sector** in terms of providing materials for the lessons in media education.

As part of its *Coordination and Consultation Plan*

* Ensure that at least **five** stakeholders take part in the **network** by signing a memorandum of cooperation;
* Ensure at least **two agreements** on implementing **ML actions** together with another stakeholder;
* Organise **brainstorming meetings** to enhance the actions and gather new ideas;
* Define **procedures** for the **consultation process** in writing.

As part of its *Plan to Monitor ML Trends*

* Prepare a stand-alone **Annual** **ML Report** to assess the activities conducted in the previous year and identify specific actions and the respective resources needed for their realization in the following year.
* **Conduct research and analysis** specifically on ML or on a related subject (justifying its correlation with ML).

1. EAVI Study, Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels, European Commission, 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Study on Assessing ML levels in Europe, prepared for the European Commission, 2010, by the European Association for Viewers’ Interests (EAVI) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EAVI ML Guide 2013, accessible on www.eavi.eu [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The AVMS Directive stipulates an obligation for the member-states to report on the ML levels, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Available at <http://www.avmu.mk/images/Istrazuvanje_na_mislenjeto_na_publikata_za_radio_i_TV_programite_2014_godina.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)