

Seoul Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone: A Defence against Disinfodemics

Preamble

Recognizing the overwhelming opportunities that new information flows, the exponential growth of digital technologies, and the explosion of media and communication services can bring to the lives of people all over the world, while also acknowledging the attendant challenges;

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the life-threatening impact of the flood of disinformation in today's world - the 'disinfodemic';

Emphasizing that media and information literacy (MIL) is a core competency for addressing the disinfodemic, and that MIL also contributes to access to information, freedom of expression, protection of privacy, prevention of violent extremism, promotion of digital security and combating hate speech and inequality;

Recognising as well that MIL promotes diversity, particularly as it relates to the ability of marginalised people to create and disseminate content which expresses their world view;

Underscoring the importance of MIL in contributing to the achievement of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Target 10 (Access to Information) of SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, SDG 4 on Quality Education for All, and SDG 5 on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls, SDG 8 on decent jobs and economic growth, and SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities;

Recognizing that 2020 is the first celebration of Global Media and Information Literacy Week since the Week was officially proclaimed in November 2019 at the 40th General Conference of UNESCO and welcoming the launch of the UNESCO MIL Alliance 2.0;

Recognizing UNESCO's effort to promote a Global MIL Cities Framework to stimulate creative learning about MIL in city spaces and the involvement of non-traditional actors in promoting MIL;

Noting the relevance to MIL to UNESCO's work to develop an instrument on the ethics of Artificial Intelligence (AI) which is increasingly a factor in regard to digital communications, economic and social development, and social interaction;

Reaffirming the spirit of the development of MIL as set out in previous Declarations such as the Grunwald Declaration (1982), the Prague Declaration Towards an Information Literate Society (2003), the Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning (2005), the Fez Declaration on MIL (2011), the Moscow Declaration on MIL (2012), the Paris Declaration on MIL in the Digital Age (2014), and the Riga Recommendations on Media and Information Literacy in a Shifting Media and Information Landscape (2016), Youth Declaration on Media and Information Literacy (2016), Khanty-Mansiysk Declaration "Media and Information Literacy for Building a Culture of Open Government" (2016), and the UNESCO Global Framework for MIL Cities (2018);

Therefore:

We, the participants at the 2020 Global Media and Information Literacy Week Feature Conference and Youth Agenda Forum, declare our renewed support to MIL;

We understand that MIL on its own is not a cure for all problems, including the pandemic, but insist that MIL be further recognized and valued throughout educational, social and economic systems and that it be applied as part of a more proactive approach in order to build a sustainable and inclusive society;

We stress that enhancing media and information literacy for all, which addresses critical thinking, provides a sustainable approach to strengthen people's critical thinking and their power of discernment about how they engage with information and communication technologies – especially in times of crisis.

We urge therefore that “Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone” should be advanced in the age of digital connectivity.

In this connection, we commit to:

1. Promoting MIL within wider efforts to tackle divides such as in access to information and quality education, which have been notably widened by the pandemic, to assure no one is left behind;
2. Attracting more participation in MIL and MIL policy from Internet communications companies, academia, NGOs, international and regional organizations, communications regulators, media, civil society, youth and communities;
3. Advocating for intensified MIL initiatives to tackle the disinfodemic, climate change, etc., while also urging respect for freedom of expression and access to information which are not only human rights but also part of the solution to disinformation;
4. Building MIL considerations into ethical frameworks within institutions and companies, so as to ensure transparent, inclusive and safe development of technologies such as AI;
5. Advocate for MIL initiatives to tackle technological determinism.

Our call to action:

We further call upon governments, from national to city level, to:

1. Commit to advancing “Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone” through policy and resource allocation across all relevant areas, including education, health, elections, child protection, climate, and gender equality, governance and regulation to mention some examples;
2. Assign resources to integrate MIL actions in their national COVID-19 response strategies, and to build citizens' resilience to disinformation in view of possible future crises;
3. Support the development of national and international MIL policies, curricula and programmes that will ensure lifelong learning for every generation in the digital age;
4. Support upskilling and training of current and potential MIL educators, inside and outside of the formal education system;
5. Place groups at risk of marginalization, including women and girls, in a position of priority, in developing MIL policies and in ensuring that these groups are also beneficiaries of MIL empowerment efforts;
6. Increase the involvement of youth and civil society as active players in MIL policy making to ensure their voices are heard;
7. Transform cities into UNESCO MIL Cities which empower residents with competencies about communication and information;
8. Collaborate with scientists and the academic networks actively to ensure MIL actions and policies in the government, national, and the local levels; integrate reliable, relevant, and timely information resources into implementation of MIL related actions;
9. Enhance cooperation between different government ministries, voter education bodies, city authorities, educational institutions, communications regulators, media institutions, libraries, youth information services and research institutions in order to promote greater awareness and recognition of MIL.
10. Advance MIL as a key tool for modern regulation, media and technology governance, library development, and technological design.

We invite civil society, media, youth, academic institutions and researchers to:

1. Join networks relevant to MIL, such as the UNESCO MIL Alliance, the MIL and Intercultural Dialogue University Network, and networks of UNESCO Chairs/UNITWINS, to share their expertise and insights and to evaluate the impact of MIL programmes;
2. Plan and implement collaborative actions at national, regional, and global levels to respond to the COVID-19 disinfodemic and prepare for other future disinfodemics;
3. Contribute to the consultation process for the update of the UNESCO MIL Curriculum for Teachers; including syllabi for lifelong learning educators and for educators outside of formal education (such as librarians);
4. Engage more with national and international governance and policy concerning MIL;
5. Encourage MIL frameworks that address multicultural and multilingual communication, preservation of linguistic rights, and the breaking down of barriers to communication with vulnerable and marginalized groups;
6. Encourage multidisciplinary research on how MIL can contribute to psychological and social health, such as through emotional literacy and other competencies;
7. Observe and participate in MIL networks and the discussions to learn the efforts and outcomes in the various fields out of the legacy media perspectives. MIL actions concern the value of media and information as much as the professionals in the journalism fields do;

We call on the private sector, including Internet communications companies, to:

1. Play an accountable role, through institutionalized multistakeholder systems, as part of the social endeavor to tackle disinformation and to build communities that are media and information literate;
2. Allocate resources to integrate MIL into user services and standard operating procedures, and boost the role of MIL as a defence against the COVID-19 disinfodemic;
3. Increase resource support to MIL policy-making, institutional capacity enhancement and training of actors such as teachers, civil society and health workers;
4. Promote MIL among young people, including initiatives by youth to spread MIL;
5. Develop specific programs to support scientific and academic research system concerning MIL;
6. Support human rights to freedom of expression, access to information and privacy, by promoting MIL as part of the duty of the business sector to respect rights;
7. Foster MIL social innovation using AI and other new technologies, with participation of vulnerable groups in these initiatives.

We request UNESCO, in cooperation with other UN Agencies, to:

1. Maintain its role as a leading international organization and policy influencer in the field of media and information literacy, and to ensure sufficient support for this work in order to realize further potential;
2. Continue to integrate MIL in other thematic interventions of the UNESCO COVID-19 response;
3. Mobilise various stakeholders, including the private sector, to participate in efforts to tackle disinformation and to ensure that MIL is included in efforts to close the digital divides, including divides in digital skills;
4. Maintain a focus on inclusion of disadvantaged groups in MIL engagements, and to continue to foster gender equality in relation to MIL;
5. Work towards more active MIL collaboration within UN agencies;
6. Support the official declaration of Global Media and Information Week by the United Nations;
7. Amplify efforts to declare MIL for All an urgent priority.