

How It Started, How It is Going: Media Literacy Index 2022

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How It Started, How It is Going: Media Literacy Index 2022

Highlights

- The index is assessing the potential vulnerability of 41 societies in Europe to the so-called “fake news” and related phenomena by employing media freedom, education and interpersonal trust indicators.
- This is the first index, which includes most of the countries in Europe – 41 in total - compared to the 35 countries included in the previous editions of the index.
- The countries in Northern and Western Europe have higher resilience potential to fake news with better education, free media and higher trust between people.
- The countries in Southeast and Eastern Europe are generally most vulnerable to the negative effects of fake news and post-truth, with controlled media, deficiencies in education and lower trust in society.
- Media freedom is a key prerequisite for tackling the “fake news” problems, including in the context of safeguarding democracy.
- Education remains an essential component in addressing the “fake news” problems with targeted media literacy training as for youth and adults alike.
- As education and awareness raising remain long-term solutions, regulatory measures are necessary too in the short-term to address erosion of democracy and geopolitical challenges too.

The context of the new index

Sorting out terminology and approaches

In 2017, when the Media Literacy Index was created “fake news” and “post-truth” were just starting to become a major concern on the public agenda. Fast forward to 2022, there are already a number of studies, instruments and policy approaches helping to better deal with the problem.

But the challenges have grown too with successive waves of events over the years. The attention to the fake news spiked after the 2016 US presidential elections. Then the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 brought with it an “infodemic”. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine made clear the “infowars” have been an active operation alongside an actual, cruel war. All these events turbo-charged disinformation and the threats emanating from it.

In these years, experts and decision-makers sought to identify the terminology, probable causes and effects of the phenomena. The European Union¹ came up with its own definitions of disinformation and misinformation, where “Disinformation is false or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain, and which may cause public harm.

¹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/online-disinformation>

Misinformation is false or misleading content shared without harmful intent though the effects can be still harmful.”

Although “fake news” has been recently shunned as it thought to be too misused – not less by those peddling fake news too – it remains a good umbrella term to describe the plethora of manifestations and problems associated with it and thus is used in this report. Furthermore, the term ‘post-truth’ is still useful, as selected as the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year in 2016 – an adjective defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. It adds a necessary psychological component in explanations that may be often useful.

One important aspect that has been more or less broadly agreed upon is about the aim of disinformation. Disinformation is thought to be not so much aimed at convincing the public at a certain viewpoint, but more often than not at sowing confusion, distrust among people and institutions and increasing polarization in society and it was soon noted that the effects on democratic system of disinformation have been detrimental.

But in dealing with fake news there is inherent tension - especially valid for liberal democracies– the need to restrict disinformation and misinformation with the necessity of upholding free speech. E.g. it included an aspect of the paradox of tolerance, how to defend tolerant society from the intolerant, whereby unlimited tolerance would lead to disappearance of tolerance. At the same time, what it is not understood or understood and misused is that, in Europe especially, there are already limits to free speech introduced by hate speech regulations at least.

Deliberating possible solutions

Just several years ago, the solutions probably seemed a little bit easier. In 2018, the Media Literacy Report was entitled “Common Sense Wanted” as common sense and common decency are probably the natural remedies to fake news and the behaviour related to it. However, this is not apparently how things work. Furthermore, the Media Literacy Index Reports advocated “education before regulation” as education would provide “vaccination” at least against the worst effects of fake news. Regulation, while necessary, has its drawbacks.

The deliberations on the approach were cut short – much like the proverbial Gordian Knot – by none other than the European Union when it decided to ban the broadcast of several Russian TV stations in February 2022. The reasons for this were that “The Russian Federation has engaged in a systematic, international campaign of disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts in order to enhance its strategy of destabilisation of its neighbouring countries, the EU and its member states. In particular, disinformation and information manipulation has repeatedly and consistently targeted European political parties, especially during the election periods, civil society and Russian gender and ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and the functioning of democratic institutions in the EU and its member states.”²

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/02/eu-imposes-sanctions-on-state-owned-outlets-rt-russia-today-and-sputnik-s-broadcasting-in-the-eu/>

There are two important aspects to be mentioned. First, this was not a blind ban on all Russian media, but on selected ones. The move was even criticized for its limited usefulness as it left untouched a number of media outlets that continued broadcasting. Second, the EU sustained its own rights and freedoms, specifying that “In line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights, these measures will not prevent those media outlets and their staff from carrying out activities in the EU other than broadcasting, e.g. research and interviews.”.

Risks for erosion of democracy

The danger of fake news and related phenomena for democracy are hard to underestimate. There are already high-profile debates on the erosion of democracy³ and the European Union has linked fighting disinformation and its European Democracy Action Plan of 2020 and other policies such as the Digital Services Act. It says⁴: “The Action Plan proposes improving the existing EU's toolbox for countering foreign interference, including new instruments that allow imposing costs on perpetrators. The Commission will steer efforts to overhaul the Code of Practice on Disinformation into a co-regulatory framework of obligations and accountability of online platforms, in line with the upcoming Digital Services Act.”

Now it seems that the social and online media have long outgrown the period of enthusiasm, when they were seen as tools for reinvigorating democracy – the roughly 2008 – 2013 period was filled with references to Twitter Revolutions⁵ or citizen journalism⁶. Nowadays, it is mostly about the dangers of social and online media for the democratic process. The far-reaching example is the so-called digital authoritarianism as in the 2018 Freedom House report “Disinformation and propaganda disseminated online have poisoned the public sphere. The unbridled collection of personal data has broken down traditional notions of privacy. And a cohort of countries is moving toward digital authoritarianism....”⁷.

Indeed, social and online media has exacerbated immensely the creation and spread of disinformation compared to the situation before them. But at the same time they should not be discounted out of hand. This is a narrow viewpoint disregarding the contexts where media are largely controlled and media freedom is low. Then social and online media remains an opportunity for free information and debate.

³ Such as the Disinformation and the Erosion of Democracy by the Atlantic and the University of Chicago <https://www.theatlantic.com/live/disinformation-democracy-uchicago-conference-2022/>

⁴ European Commission, European Democracy Action Plan: making EU democracies stronger, 3 December 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250

⁵ Blake Hounshell, The Revolution Will Be Tweeted <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/20/the-revolution-will-be-tweeted/>

⁶ Jay Rosen (July 14, 2008). "A Most Useful Definition of Citizen Journalism". PressThink. Retrieved May 21, 2012.

⁷ Adrian Shahbaz, The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism, Freedom House 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>

Global concerns and European opinion on media and misinformation⁸

The Media Literacy Index has been designed in 2017 to include 35 European countries. This year the index has been expanded with additional countries making the total number to 41 in Europe to allow for further comparisons. The expanded index in 2022 includes the EU member states, the EU candidate and potential candidate countries, prospective candidates, the countries in closer relations with the EU such as the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland as well as the UK, a former EU member state. In this new setting, it is interesting to add to the wider context with some findings of a new study about misinformation as a serious concern of the public too. A recent global study of 142 countries “Who is afraid of fake news? Modelling risk perceptions of misinformation in 142 countries”.⁹ The study investigated internet user perceptions of the risks associated with being exposed to misinformation. There are several interesting findings that were worth quoting here as they may concern the findings of the Media Literacy Index too. First, the study found out that “people living in countries with liberal democratic governments are more likely to worry about misinformation than people in countries without or with limited democratic institutions.” The authors offer the explanation that misinformation has been a hotly debated topic in liberal democracies

Second, it was found out that concern for misinformation was higher among people with higher education levels. The authors assume that in this case younger and therefore more educated people with higher digital skills, have higher concern of misinformation.

Third, there were geographical patterns and in relation to media freedom: “The data we used shows surprisingly low levels of concern about misinformation in some regions, such as parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, where the freedom of the press is in part curtailed.”

Fourth, the authors of the study say “that risk perception often doesn’t reflect the actual risk of encountering misinformation”, especially “in as parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, where the freedom of the press is in part curtailed” – i.e. the public in these settings is not overwhelmingly concerned – or aware - about misinformation, despite the abundance of the phenomena in this setting.

In addition, a new European study - News & Media Survey 2022¹⁰ of the European Parliament, covering the EU member states, provides insights into the media consumption in large part of the continent as well as issues related to disinformation. The survey found out that one traditional media remains the most used and trusted sources of information as TV remains the most commonly used media channel. 75% of respondents replied that TV was one of their most used media to access news in the past seven days – TV is the most commonly used media channel in most Member States. The shares for used by online news platforms are 43% of the respondents and radio - 39%. The print press remains a source of 21% of respondents. Social media platforms and blogs are mentioned by 26% of respondents.

⁸ Knuutila, A., Neudert, L.-M., Howard, P. N. (2022). Who is afraid of fake news? Modeling risk perceptions of misinformation in 142 countries. *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-97>

⁹ Knuutila, A., Neudert, L.-M., Howard, P. N. (2022). Who is afraid of fake news? Modeling risk perceptions of misinformation in 142 countries. *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-97>

¹⁰ Link to the data <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2832>

In terms of trust in media sources, 49% of respondents select public TV and radio stations (incl. their online presence) as a news source they trust, while private TV and radio stations are mentioned by 27%. The written press (incl. their online presence) is a trusted media source for 39% of respondents.

It is very telling that there are considerable differences between countries in terms of trust:

- In Finland, 73% of respondents trust public TV and radio stations, while this is true only for 22% of respondents in Hungary and 23% in Poland.
- In Luxembourg, 63% of respondents trust the written press, but only 18% of those in Bulgaria and Poland trust the written press.

There are also difference in perceived exposure to disinformation and fake news. Respondents in Bulgaria have the highest rate of those who have been exposed to it in the past seven days - 29% say "very often" and 26% say "often" - and respondents in the Netherlands are the least likely to say so - 3% say "very often" and 9% say "often".

Furthermore, the study says that education plays a role as confidence in distinguishing between real news and fake news increased with level of education.

How the predictors are measured: about the index methodology

The current paper contains an instrument for measuring if not media literacy itself, but predictors of media literacy with the aim to rank societies in their potential for resilience in the face of the post-truth phenomenon. The model employs several indicators (the table below) that correspond to different aspects related to media literacy and the post-truth phenomena. Level of education, state of the media, trust in society and the usage of new tools of participation seem to be the predictors of media literacy. As they have different importance, the indicators are included with a corresponding weight. The media freedom and education indicators carry most weight, with reading literacy attributed relatively most importance in education. Trust and e-participation indicators are attributed the remaining share. The index converts the data into standardized scores from 0 to 100 (lowest to highest) and ranks the countries from 1 to 41 (highest to lowest position).¹¹

The Media Literacy Index was developed by the Open Society Institute – Sofia to include 35 European countries and had editions in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2021¹². This year, the number of countries was expanded to 41 countries in Europe to allow for further comparison with minor changes in the used sources to accommodate for the additional countries.¹³

¹¹ The used methodology and sources are based on the Catch-Up Index of the Open Society Institute - Sofia; the latest available data is as of 31 May 2022. You can find description of the methodology in the report "Where Are They Now? Findings of the European Catch-Up Index 2021", available in the Documents and Links section of the website www.thecatchupindex.eu and <https://osis.bg/?p=4135&lang=en>. Missing data were replaced using imputation procedures as described in the report.

¹² You can find the latest edition Media Literacy Index 2021 at <https://osis.bg/?p=3750&lang=en>

¹³ In 2021, Mr. Joe Carr, a volunteer for Media Literacy Now and a semi-retired Cisco Systems executive, modified the existing model of the Media Literacy Index in order to include and compare a larger number of countries around the world. The analysis was published by the US-based Media Literacy Now organization has published an analysis.

Methodology of the Media Literacy Index	
Indicators	Weight
Media Freedom indicators	
Freedom of the Press score by Freedom House	20%
Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders	20%
Education indicators	
PISA score in reading literacy (OECD)	30%
PISA score in scientific literacy (OECD)	5%
PISA score mathematical literacy (OECD)	5%
Tertiary Education enrolment (%) (World Bank)	5%
Trust	
Trust in others (World Values Survey)	10%
New forms of participation	
E-participation Index (UN)	5%
<i>Table 1. The table shows the methodology of the media literacy index with the groups of indicators, sources and their respective weight (importance). The data are converted into standardized scores (z-scores) from 100 to 0, highest to lowest.</i>	

There are several reasons why these indicators were selected:

Media freedom. Media freedom is an essential indicator. The rise of fake news amidst the severely fragmented media landscape or outright weak and controlled media in some countries has accompanied the deterioration of the public and political debates and the overall quality of the democratic process. In the model, suggested in this brief, two commonly accepted indices are used – of Freedom House and of Reporters without Borders - to measure media freedom. In this respect, a certain East-West divide can be observed in the debates.

Education. Education is another essential component. For example, Finland’s government considers the strong public education system as a main tool to resist information warfare against the country and “widespread critical thinking skills among the Finnish population and a coherent government response” is thought to be a key element for resisting fake news campaigns. In general, it is thought that more educated people are more informed, more critically thinking and less likely to fall into the trap of a fabricated news. But there is also a more complex psychological mechanism at work. A study by Jan-Willem van Prooijen on conspiracy theories have found that more educated people feel more in control of their lives, do not believe so much in easy solutions and have more analytical skills.¹⁴ The

¹⁴ See “Why Education Predicts Decreased Belief in Conspiracy Theories” by Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Applied Cognitive Psychology, Appl. Cognit. Psychol. 31: 50–58 (2017). Published online 28 November 2016 in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10.1002/acp.3301, and also James N. Druckman, The Politics of Motivation, 2012.

included indicators for educations are PISA reading performance, PISA science and PISA mathematics components with reading attributed the highest importance in this case. PISA provides picture not only of pupils' achievements, but also the overall outcomes of the educational system in a country. The indicator "tertiary education enrolment" is also included, although with smaller weight, as education indicator.

Trust in people (interpersonal trust). Trust is another important aspect. The entire post-truth phenomenon is accompanied by extremely high levels of mistrust towards institutions, mainstream media, politicians, experts. Conspiracy theories about the functioning of the world both reflect and bring about low level of confidence in existing institutions. The current model uses a related indicator - "Trust in People". It measures the level of trust in society and "reflects people's perception of others' reliability", according to the definition of OECD. As a rule, high level of trust is a hallmark of successful societies and a proxy for the development of civil society.

E-participation. In addition, "E-participation" indicator is also included to measure the use of information and communication technologies to enhance political participation, making possible for citizens to communicate with each other, the elected officials and authorities.

The complexity of it all: a disclaimer

As in previous edition of the index, there should be a disclaimer, a word of caution. There are some aspects of the disinformation and misinformation phenomena, which are very specific and difficult to assess. As noted, the 2016 Oxford dictionary definition of post-truth puts a strong emphasis on the role of emotions – it is an adjective defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". For example, there is no simple causality between education and post-truth as there are more complex psychological mechanisms at play such as confirmation bias or prior-attitude effect. In other words, people sometimes prefer or outright seek information that confirms their own preconceived views, tend to dismiss evidence which does not coincide with their already formed opinion and disregard objective accuracy. Also, there is a whole range of details that should be taken into account when discussing disinformation, misinformation, post-truth and related phenomena. For example, fake news is fabricated news and deliberate presentation of falsehood as fact that may pursue political or financial gains and should not be confused with lazy journalism.

The new Media Literacy Index 2022: the results

Media Literacy Index 2022			
Rank (1-35)	Country	Score (100-0)	Cluster
1	Finland	76	1
2	Norway	74	
3	Denmark	73	
4	Estonia	72	
5	Ireland	71	
6	Sweden	71	
7	Switzerland	68	
8	Netherlands	66	
9	Germany	62	2
10	Iceland	62	
11	UK	62	
12	Austria	61	
13	Belgium	61	
14	Portugal	61	
15	Spain	59	
16	France	58	
17	Lithuania	58	
18	Czech Republic	57	
19	Poland	56	
20	Slovenia	56	
21	Latvia	54	
22	Luxembourg	54	
23	Italy	50	3
24	Slovakia	49	
25	Croatia	47	
26	Malta	44	
27	Hungary	42	
28	Cyprus	41	
29	Ukraine	39	4
30	Greece	38	
31	Romania	36	
32	Serbia	35	
33	Bulgaria	33	
34	Moldova	32	
35	Montenegro	32	
36	Turkey	31	
37	Albania	25	
38	BiH	24	
39	Kosovo	23	
40	North Macedonia	23	
41	Georgia	20	

Finland with 76 points is first in the ranking in the new Media Literacy Index 2022 out of 41 countries in total. It is followed by Norway with 74 points and 2nd place, Denmark with 73 points on 3rd place, Estonia with 72 points and 4th place, Ireland and the Sweden with similar scores of 71 points each on 5th and 6th place respectively, where the differences are minimal after the decimal point. The ranking is done on a scale from 1 to 41, highest to lowest and the scores are 0-100, lowest to highest score.

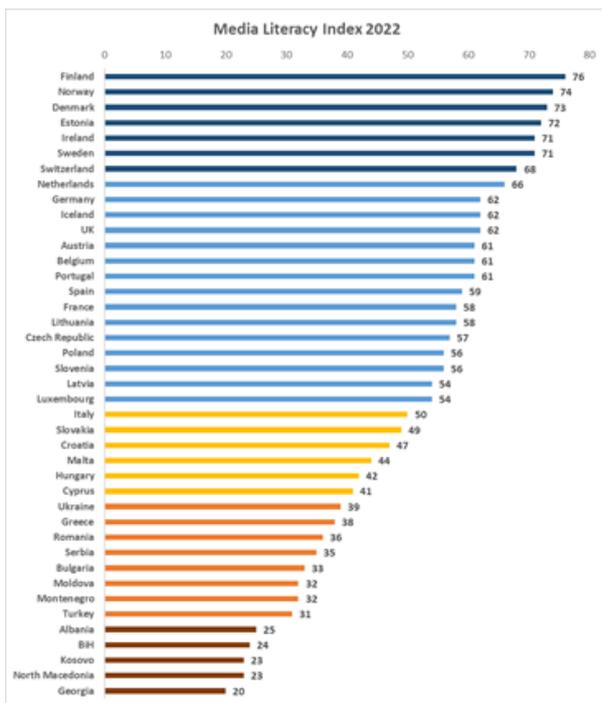
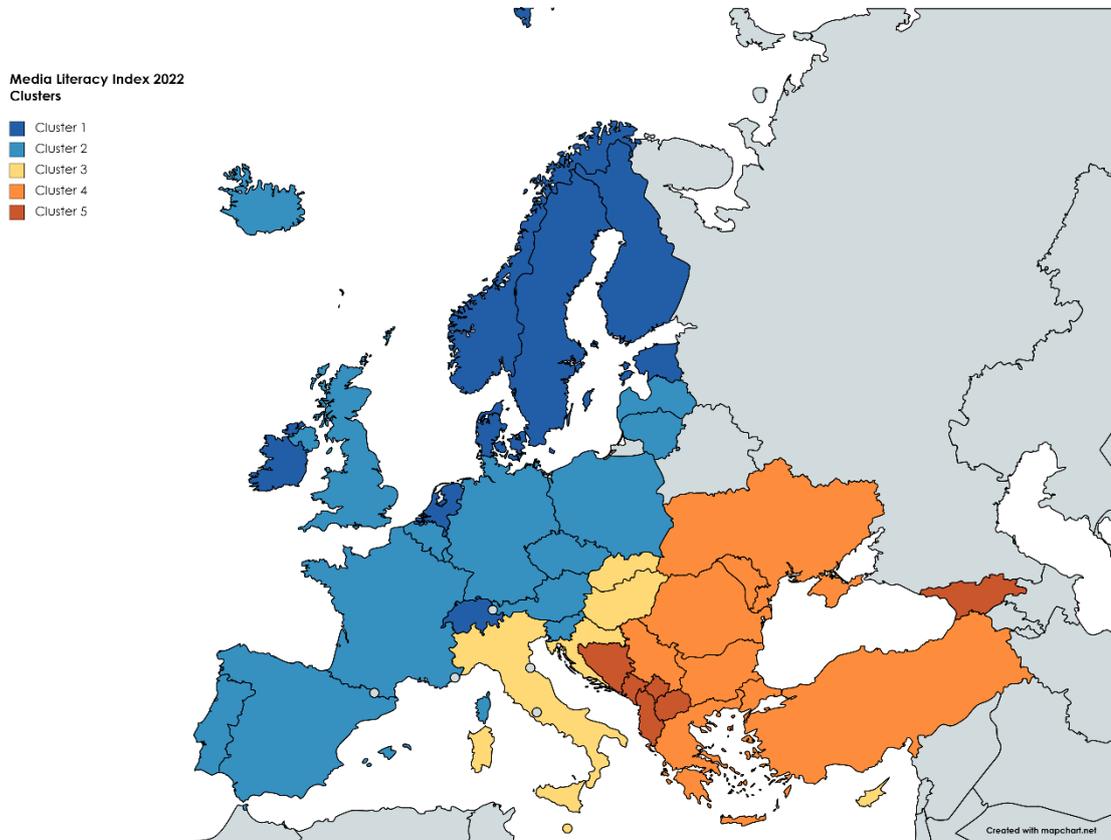
At the bottom of the ranking, Georgia with 20 points occupies the last 41st place, preceded by North Macedonia and Kosovo with similar scores of 23 points on 40th place and 39th place respectively.

The countries in the index are also divided into clusters using a cluster analysis, which groups countries with identical characteristics along the indicators of the Media Literacy Index. The clusters are hierarchical – from the best performing countries in the 1st cluster, to the poorly performing ones in the last 5th cluster. The 2nd cluster is composed of well-performing countries, while the 3rd cluster is “transitional” with countries at the risk of slipping further down the ranking. The fourth cluster is of already problematic countries, but still not those with the poorest performance.

When these clusters are put on the map, there is the following pattern. The best performing countries in the 1st cluster are located in Northern and Western Europe, with the all Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Ireland. The 2nd cluster includes much of Western and Central Europe. The 3rd cluster includes countries in Southern (Italy, Malta, Cyprus) and Central Europe, Central (Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary). The 4th cluster includes the “expanded” Balkan countries from BiH, Romania and Bulgaria to Turkey and Moldova as well as Ukraine and Moldova. The last 5th cluster

includes four Balkan and the one South Caucasus country – Georgia – included in the index.

The geographical patterns show East-West and North-South divides with the Balkan countries and the Caucasus trailing behind.



Different factors contribute in different manner to the ranking of the countries in the new Media Literacy Index (MLI) as shown in the next tables. The following tables present the scores of groups of indicators (media freedom, education, trust in people and e-participation) as sum of the standardized scores (100-0) multiplied by their weight as explained in the methodology notes.

Media Freedom Score and Ranking Compared to Media Literacy Index 2022 Ranking and Clusters					
Media Freedom Rank (1-41)	Media Freedom Score (100-0)	Country	MLI Rank (1-41)	MLI Score (100-0)	MLI Cluster (1-5)
1	32	Norway	2	74	1
2	30	Denmark	3	73	1
3	30	Sweden	6	71	1
4	30	Finland	1	76	1
5	29	Estonia	4	72	1
6	28	Ireland	5	71	1
7	28	Portugal	14	61	2
8	27	Switzerland	7	68	1
9	27	Iceland	10	62	2
10	26	Belgium	13	61	2
11	26	Netherlands	8	66	1
12	26	Lithuania	17	58	2
13	26	Luxembourg	22	54	2
14	26	Germany	9	62	2
15	25	Czech Republic	18	57	2
16	23	UK	11	62	2
17	23	Austria	12	61	2
18	23	Latvia	21	54	2
19	23	France	16	58	2
20	23	Slovakia	24	49	3
21	22	Spain	15	59	2
22	20	Slovenia	20	56	2
23	19	Cyprus	28	41	3
24	18	Italy	23	50	3
25	18	Malta	26	44	3
26	17	Poland	19	56	2
27	17	Croatia	25	47	3
28	17	Romania	31	36	4
29	15	Montenegro	35	32	4
30	14	Moldova	34	32	4
31	14	Kosovo	39	23	5
32	13	Bulgaria	33	33	4
33	13	BiH	38	24	5
34	12	Hungary	27	42	3
35	12	Serbia	32	35	4
36	11	Greece	30	38	4
37	11	Georgia	41	20	5
38	10	North Macedon	40	23	5
39	10	Albania	37	25	5
40	9	Ukraine	29	39	4
41	0	Turkey	36	31	4

When only the Media Freedom score is taken into account (the score is a sum of the scores of the two indicators used in the index multiplied by their weight). Norway rises to the top at 1st place of the media freedom ranking compared to its 2nd place in the overall ranking of the Media Literacy Index (MLI). Turkey slips to the bottom of the ranking at 41st place compared to the 36th place in the MLI 2022.

Education Score and Ranking Compared to Media Literacy Index 2022 Ranking and Clusters					
Education Rank (1-41)	Education Score (100-0)	Country	MLI Rank (1-41)	MLI Score (100-0)	MLI Cluster (1-5)
1	34	Estonia	4	72	1
2	34	Finland	1	76	1
3	32	Ireland	5	71	1
4	31	Poland	19	56	2
5	30	Sweden	6	71	1
6	30	Denmark	3	73	1
7	30	Switzerland	7	68	1
8	29	UK	11	62	2
9	29	Norway	2	74	1
10	29	Slovenia	20	56	2
11	29	Germany	9	62	2
12	28	Belgium	13	61	2
13	28	Spain	15	59	2
14	28	Netherlands	8	66	1
15	27	France	16	58	2
16	27	Portugal	14	61	2
17	27	Czech Republic	18	57	2
18	27	Austria	12	61	2
19	26	Latvia	21	54	2
20	25	Iceland	10	62	2
21	25	Lithuania	17	58	2
22	24	Italy	23	50	3
23	24	Turkey	36	31	4
24	24	Croatia	25	47	3
25	24	Hungary	27	42	3
26	23	Greece	30	38	4
27	23	Ukraine	29	39	4
28	21	Luxembourg	22	54	2
29	20	Slovakia	24	49	3
30	19	Malta	26	44	3
31	17	Serbia	32	35	4
32	16	Cyprus	28	41	3
33	14	Romania	31	36	4
34	14	Bulgaria	33	33	4
35	13	Moldova	34	32	4
36	13	Montenegro	35	32	4
37	11	Albania	37	25	5
38	8	BiH	38	24	5
39	7	North Macedon	40	23	5
40	6	Georgia	41	20	5
41	3	Kosovo	39	23	5

The education ranking (sum of the respective education indicators scores multiplied by their weight) has Estonia and Finland on 1st and 2nd place with identical scores of 34 points, followed by Ireland (3rd place) and Poland (4th place). The last countries in the ranking are North Macedonia (39th place), Georgia (40th place) and Kosovo (41st place).

Trust in People Score and Ranking Compared to Media Literacy Index 2022 Ranking and Clusters					
Trust In People Rank (1-41)	Trust in People Score (100-0)	Country	MLI Rank (1-41)	MLI Score (100-0)	MLI Cluster (1-5)
1	9.3	Denmark	3	73	1
2	9.2	Norway	2	74	1
3	8.8	Finland	1	76	1
4	8.2	Ireland	5	71	1
5	8.2	Sweden	6	71	1
6	8.2	Iceland	10	62	2
7	7.7	Switzerland	7	68	1
8	7.6	Netherlands	8	66	1
9	6.9	Austria	12	61	2
10	6.1	Germany	9	62	2
11	6	Spain	15	59	2
12	5.9	UK	11	62	2
13	5.3	Estonia	4	72	1
14	5.3	Belgium	13	61	2
15	5.3	Luxembourg	22	54	2
16	5.1	Lithuania	17	58	2
17	4.8	Ukraine	29	39	4
18	4.6	Italy	23	50	3
19	4.6	Malta	26	44	3
20	4.6	Hungary	27	42	3
21	4.5	France	16	58	2
22	4.4	Slovenia	20	56	2
23	4.3	Poland	19	56	2
24	4.1	Latvia	21	54	2
25	4.1	Slovakia	24	49	3
26	4.1	Montenegro	35	32	4
27	4	Czech Republic	18	57	2
28	3.6	Portugal	14	61	2
29	3.6	Bulgaria	33	33	4
30	3.5	Serbia	32	35	4
31	3.4	Kosovo	39	23	5
32	3.4	North Macedonia	40	23	5
33	3.3	Croatia	25	47	3
34	3.3	Turkey	36	31	4
35	3.1	Romania	31	36	4
36	3.1	Moldova	34	32	4
37	2.9	BiH	38	24	5
38	2.8	Georgia	41	20	5
39	2.7	Greece	30	38	4
40	2.6	Cyprus	28	41	3
41	2.2	Albania	37	25	5

The trust in people ranking shows Denmark (1st), Norway (2nd), Finland (3rd), Ireland (4th) and Sweden (5th) on the top of the ranking. Albania (41st) is the last in the ranking, with Cyprus (40th), Greece (39th) and Georgia (38th).

E-Participation Score and Ranking Compared to Media Literacy Index 2022 Ranking and Clusters					
E-Participation Rank (1-41)	E-Participation Score (100-0)	Country	MLI Rank (1-41)	MLI Score (100-0)	MLI Cluster (1-5)
1	4	Estonia	4	72	1
2	4	UK	11	62	2
3	4	Austria	12	61	2
4	4	Denmark	3	73	1
5	4	Netherlands	8	66	1
6	4	Poland	19	56	2
7	4	Finland	1	76	1
8	4	Cyprus	28	41	3
9	3	Norway	2	74	1
10	3	Switzerland	7	68	1
11	3	France	16	58	2
12	3	Croatia	25	47	3
13	3	Bulgaria	33	33	4
14	3	Turkey	36	31	4
15	3	Ireland	5	71	1
16	3	Slovenia	20	56	2
17	3	Spain	15	59	2
18	3	Albania	37	25	5
19	3	Kosovo	39	23	5
20	3	Malta	26	44	3
21	3	North Macedonia	40	23	5
22	3	Sweden	6	71	1
23	3	Portugal	14	61	2
24	3	Italy	23	50	3
25	3	Serbia	32	35	4
26	2	Ukraine	29	39	4
27	2	Romania	31	36	4
28	2	Greece	30	38	4
29	2	Iceland	10	62	2
30	2	Moldova	34	32	4
31	2	Germany	9	62	2
32	2	Lithuania	17	58	2
33	2	Czech Republic	18	57	2
34	2	Luxembourg	22	54	2
35	2	Slovakia	24	49	3
36	1	Hungary	27	42	3
37	1	Belgium	13	61	2
38	1	Georgia	41	20	5
39	1	BiH	38	24	5
40	0	Latvia	21	54	2
41	0	Montenegro	35	32	4

The ranking in E-Participation has several European countries with identical scores of 4 points (with minimal differences after the decimal point) - Estonia on 1st place, UK on 2nd place and Austria on 3rd place, followed by Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland and Cyprus (4th to 8th place).

Wrapping up: addressing a problem in the short and long-term

The Media Literacy Index results show there is a concentration of countries in the Southeast and East of Europe, which are potentially more vulnerable to fake news. For those of the countries, which are willing to deal with the situation, there should be special attention as they are lacking in several aspects monitored by the Media Literacy Index – quality of education, media freedom, low interpersonal trust or combination of problems in these areas.

As noted already, the Media Literacy Index has advocated for “education before regulation”. But as recent events and practice show, education is the necessary, but long road. Regulation, including of social media and bans proved necessary, while safeguarding rights and free speech to the extent possible. Governments and entities such as the European Union started to pay attention and offering measures such as codes of conduct, technological solutions and last but not least paying attention to threats to democracy and geopolitical challenges associated with disinformation. Otherwise, the “paradox of tolerance” comes forward, when the rules of liberal democracy are being used to undermine it.

Also, as the recent Eurobarometer study shows, the higher the level of education the more easily misinformation is identified. But this includes – as increasing functional education in general as well as specialized education – that is media literacy education. Education and training is usually associated with pupils and young people and this is what decision-makers and organizations do first. However, observations and studies have already noticed the need and demand for media and digital literacy education among adults and the elderly, including educating the educators.

One important note on media and the distinction between traditional and social media. There is a lot of attention – and rightly so – on social media as they proved to be game-changer with regard to fake news and disinformation. The speed, ease and access of spreading of information is unprecedented in human history. Autocratic regimes learned to play the game better than citizens and “digital authoritarianism” is on the rise. At the same time, the social and new media should not be viewed as the culprit only as there are places where they offer free access and information.

Traditional media should not be side-lined too. As the quoted study on media and misinformation in the EU show, these media still play a considerable role. I.e. under normal circumstances these are providing reliable, fact-checked information and educating the public. Probably one of aspects of an East-West divide is that in the well-functioning liberal democracies, traditional media are more or less taken for granted and the challenge is seen in social media. But in other countries, where media freedom is low, many traditional media are part of the ecosystem of fake news and disinformation. To make matter worse, in such countries controlled media are a symptom of larger set of democracy deficits or state capture. In contrast to better functioning liberal democracies, who may or may not have a media problem, in these countries check and balance mechanisms do not work properly such as rule of law, media ethics or discrimination committees, exacerbating the fake news problem.

There is link between the health of a democracy, disinformation and misinformation, and it is going to stay. Addressing “fake news” - used as an umbrella term here- will need a combination of public policies and citizen action for the foreseeable future.

Appendix I: Indicators, Scores and Overall Ranking in Media Literacy Index 2022

Media Literacy Index 2022: Indicators, Scores and Overall Ranking										
Indicator/ Ranking	Freedom of the Press core by Freedom House	Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders	PISA score in reading literacy	PISA score in scientific literacy	PISA score in mathematical literacy	Tertiary Education enrolment	Trust in People	E- participation	Overall Score 2022	Cluster
Rank (1-41)	Country	(0-100)	(0-100)	(0-100)	(0-100)	(0-100)	(0-100)	(0-100)	(0-100)	(1 to 5)
1	Finland	72	76	76	68	77	70	88	73	1
2	Norway	77	83	66	65	61	60	92	65	1
3	Denmark	72	79	67	69	63	59	93	75	1
4	Estonia	67	76	77	76	82	52	53	81	1
5	Ireland	65	76	75	64	64	53	82	56	1
6	Sweden	73	76	69	65	66	55	82	50	1
7	Switzerland	71	66	69	72	64	41	77	65	1
8	Netherlands	73	58	59	74	68	64	76	75	1
9	Germany	63	65	65	64	68	51	61	38	2
10	Iceland	69	66	54	61	53	55	82	42	2
11	UK	57	59	68	65	69	44	59	77	2
12	Austria	60	56	58	64	61	63	69	77	2
13	Belgium	72	60	63	68	66	57	53	21	2
14	Portugal	66	74	62	60	62	46	36	50	2
15	Spain	53	56	64	54	57	70	60	54	2
16	France	56	59	63	61	63	46	45	65	2
17	Lithuania	62	69	55	54	57	50	51	36	2
18	Czech Republic	62	62	61	64	65	44	40	34	2
19	Poland	46	37	72	72	72	47	43	75	2
20	Slovenia	59	42	64	69	70	55	44	56	2
21	Latvia	56	60	56	57	60	71	41	9	2
22	Luxembourg	70	61	52	55	54	0	53	30	2
23	Italy	50	42	55	57	50	44	46	50	3
24	Slovakia	56	59	46	57	48	25	41	30	3
25	Croatia	38	45	56	45	52	46	33	63	3
26	Malta	59	30	41	50	44	43	46	52	3
27	Hungary	34	27	55	54	56	31	46	25	3
28	Cyprus	59	38	29	39	35	65	26	73	3
29	Ukraine	24	21	50	40	50	60	48	48	4
30	Greece	34	20	45	39	42	100	27	44	4
31	Romania	41	42	31	28	28	30	31	48	4
32	Serbia	28	30	37	37	35	46	35	50	4
33	Bulgaria	37	26	27	31	27	51	36	63	4
34	Moldova	20	51	29	23	29	36	31	40	4
35	Montenegro	34	39	28	28	23	34	41	3	4
36	Turkey	0	0	50	40	50	91	33	63	4
37	Albania	26	22	20	31	24	36	22	54	5
38	BiH	26	37	19	15	14	17	29	13	5
39	Kosovo	29	40	0	0	0	53	34	54	5
40	North Macedonia	10	42	14	9	21	22	34	52	5
41	Georgia	27	27	8	11	6	45	28	19	5

*The table presents indicators, scores and ranking of the Media Literacy Index 2022 in scores from 0 - 100 (lowest to highest). The ranking is done by the overall Media Literacy Score as explained in the index methodology in this report. The data was converted into standardized z-scores and missing data was imputed following the methodology described in the Catch-Up Index reports, available in the documents and links section of the website www.thecatchupindex.eu and <https://osis.bg/?p=4135&lang=en>. The latest available data was used as of 31 May 2022.

Appendix II: Sources and Data of Media Literacy Index 2022

Media Literacy Index 2022: Sources and Data								
Country/Indicator	Freedom of the Press score by Freedom House	Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders	PISA score in reading literacy (OECD)	PISA score mathematical literacy (OECD)	PISA score in scientific literacy (OECD)	Tertiary Education enrolment (World Bank, UN)	Trust in People (World Values Survey)	E-participation (UN)
	On a scale from 0 to 100 (best to worst)	On a scale from 100 to 0 (best to worst)	The higher the score the better; 500 is very good and below 300 is a very poor result	The higher the better, 500 is very good and below 300 is a very poor result	The higher the better; 500 is very good and below 300 is a very poor result	In percentages (higher is better)	On a scale from 10 to 0 (highest to lowest)	On a scale from 1 to 0 (highest to lowest)
Weight of the indicator	20%	20%	30%	5%	5%	5%	10%	5%
Albania	51	56.41	405	437	417	57.8131409	2.8	0.8452
Austria	22	76.74	484	499	490	86.4755325	49.8	0.9762
Belgium	12	78.86	493	508	499	80.1381683	33.9	0.6548
BiH	51	65.64	403	406	398	37.9199791	9.6	0.6071
Bulgaria	42	59.12	420	436	424	73.3791733	17.1	0.8929
Croatia	41	70.42	479	464	472	67.7217484	13.6	0.8929
Cyprus	23	65.97	424	448	439	88.4853287	6.6	0.9524
Czech Republic	21	80.54	490	499	497	65.5869827	21.1	0.7262
Denmark	12	90.27	501	509	493	81.8397598	73.9	0.9643
Estonia	16	88.83	523	523	530	74.231987	33.9	1
Finland	12	88.42	520	507	522	92.9550095	68.4	0.9524
France	26	78.53	493	495	493	68.3579025	26.3	0.9048
Georgia	50	59.3	380	398	383	66.6892166	9	0.6429
Germany	20	82.04	498	500	503	73.5210571	41.6	0.75
Greece	44	55.52	457	451	452	148.530884	8.4	0.7857
Hungary	44	59.8	476	481	481	52.4446487	27.2	0.6786
Iceland	15	82.69	474	495	475	77.5888367	62.3	0.7738
Ireland	18	88.3	518	500	496	75.1799393	62.8	0.8571
Italy	31	68.16	476	487	468	66.0515976	26.6	0.8214
Kosovo	48	67	353	366	365	75.698822	15.1	0.8452
Latvia	26	79.17	479	486	487	94.8645325	22.2	0.5833
Lithuania	21	84.14	476	481	482	72.0089722	31.7	0.7381
Luxembourg	14	79.81	470	483	477	18.4300003	33.9	0.7024
Malta	23	61.55	448	472	457	64.8729095	27.2	0.8333
Moldova	56	73.47	424	421	428	57.9757805	12.1	0.7619
Montenegro	44	66.54	421	430	415	55.5265388	21.7	0.5476
Netherlands	11	77.93	485	519	503	87.097847	57	0.9643
North Macedonia	64	68.44	393	394	413	43.1165009	15.1	0.8333
Norway	8	92.65	499	501	490	83.23069	72.1	0.9048
Poland	34	65.64	512	516	511	69.1840286	24.1	0.9643
Portugal	17	87.07	492	492	492	67.9307022	16.9	0.8214
Romania	38	68.46	428	430	426	51.3538208	12.1	0.8095
Serbia	49	61.51	439	448	440	68.1431122	16.3	0.8214
Slovakia	26	78.37	458	486	464	46.4290199	21.4	0.7024
Slovenia	23	68.54	495	509	507	77.8827667	25.3	0.8571
Spain	28	76.71	496	481	483	92.8823471	41	0.8452
Sweden	11	88.84	506	502	499	77.3291092	62.8	0.8214
Switzerland	13	82.72	505	515	495	63.3080597	57.1	0.9048
Turkey	76	41.25	466	454	468	115.042061	14	0.8929
UK	25	78.71	504	502	505	65.7733612	40.2	0.9762
Ukraine	53	55.76	466	453	469	82.6711807	28.4	0.8095

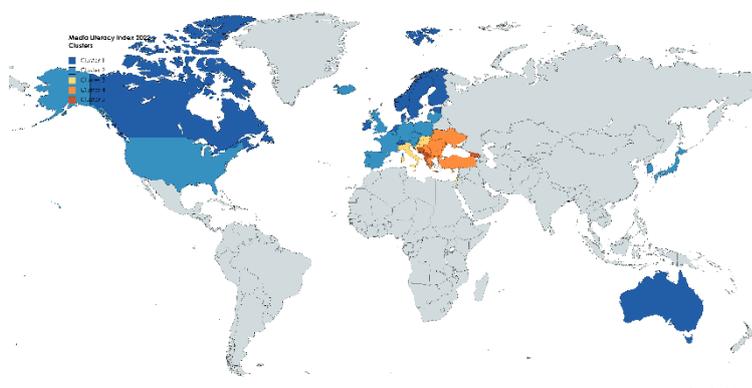
*The table presents the raw data and sources used for the Media Literacy Index 2022 with the latest data as of 31 May 2022. Missing data was imputed using the procedures described in the Catch-Up Index reports, available here <https://osis.bg/?p=4135&lang=en>

Annex III: Expanded Media Literacy Index 2022

Expanded Media Literacy Index (MLI) 2022			
Country	Expanded MLI 2022 Scores	Expanded MLI 2022 Ranking	Extended MLI 2022 Clusters
Finland	75	1	1
Norway	73	2	1
Denmark	73	3	1
Estonia	71	4	1
Ireland	70	5	1
Sweden	70	6	1
Canada	68	7	1
Switzerland	67	8	1
Netherlands	65	9	1
Australia	63	10	1
Germany	61	11	2
Iceland	61	12	2
UK	61	13	2
Belgium	61	14	2
Austria	60	15	2
Portugal	60	16	2
South Korea	60	17	2
USA	60	18	2
Spain	58	19	2
France	57	20	2
Czech Republic	57	21	2
Lithuania	56	22	2
Japan	56	23	2
Poland	55	24	2
Slovenia	55	25	2
Latvia	53	26	2
Luxembourg	53	27	2
Italy	48	28	3
Slovakia	48	29	3
Croatia	46	30	3
Malta	43	31	3
Israel	41	32	3
Hungary	40	33	3
Cyprus	40	34	3
Ukraine	37	35	4
Greece	37	36	4
Romania	34	37	4
Serbia	33	38	4
Bulgaria	31	39	4
Moldova	31	40	4
Montenegro	30	41	4
Turkey	29	42	4
Albania	23	43	5
BiH	23	44	5
Kosovo	22	45	5
North Macedonia	22	46	5
Georgia	18	47	5

The expanded Media Literacy Index 2022 includes six additional countries outside of Europe – Australia, Canada, Japan, Israel, South Korea and USA – to the European countries included in the regular 2022 index. The countries selected for the expanded index are democracies. It was deemed that including in the index of autocratic or totalitarian regimes with extremely low or non-existent media freedom would not make sense as the information in such regimes would be almost fully controlled and manipulated and “fake news”, “disinformation” or “misinformation” within these countries would mean something completely different.

The results of the expanded Media Literacy Index 2022 show that most of the additional countries perform very well in the ranking. Canada (7th place out of 47 countries with 68 points out of 100 total) and Australia (10th place with 63 points) are the best performers of the additional group. Both Canada and Australia joined the 1st cluster of best performers, mostly North European countries. South Korea (17th place) and the USA (18th place) have identical scores of 60 points and Japan is on 23rd place with 56 points. All three countries – South Korea, USA and Japans are in the 2nd cluster with mostly Western and Central European countries. Israel is on 32nd place with 41 points and in the 3rd cluster with South and Central European countries.



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About this report

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