

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	TASC: Think tank for action on Social Change
PIC number:	949437456
Project name and acronym:	Media Literacy For Democracy — MLFD

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	WP 3		
Event name:	MLFD Focus Group - Ireland		
Type:	3-day Focus Groups		
In situ/online:	In-situ		
Location:	Dublin, Ireland		
Date(s):	15, 22, 23 March 2023		
Website(s) (if any):	https://fidu.it/language/en/media-literacy-for-democracy-cerv-programme/		
Participants			
Female:	17		
Male:	10		
Non-binary:	/		
From country 1 [Ireland]:	27		
Total number of participants:	27	From total number of countries:	1
Description			
<p>TASC conducted the Focus Groups on March 15, 22 and 23 in-situ at their offices in Dublin. The events had an educational, awareness-raising and dissemination function. They also represented an opportunity for citizens, particularly younger citizens, to exchange ideas and experiences on how fake news and mis/disinformation affect their lives. The workshops were interactive with different group discussions and activities led by a facilitator from TASC and a different young person who was working or studying in the area of media literacy or fake news. The participants were then involved in different discussions on issues and concerns that revolve around the disinformation phenomenon, addressed from different perspectives. We also wanted to discuss in each session what a potential national and EU level media literacy strategy would look like.</p> <p>Format of Focus Groups:</p> <p>Each focus group followed a similar format as outlined below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presentation of the MLFD project and aims, and the booklet created in WP1. 2. Case study on a recent widely shared fake news story from Ireland and working together in small groups on a worksheet using a diagram on 'Combating disinformation on an individual 			

- level' found in the MLFD booklet.
3. Short presentation on how young people currently get their information and news in Ireland (majority online and social media compared to other age groups). This was followed by small group work on the extent to which this contributes to the spread of misinformation, polarisation, and disengagement in politics.
 4. Presentation and activity led by a guest facilitator (see breakdown below).
 5. Group exercise on what a strategy could look like in the following areas: EU level, National Government, Education, Journalists and Corporations (i.e., social media companies).
 6. Feedback questionnaire, summary, conclusion.

Each Focus Group differed given the guest facilitator, who stimulated the debate by leading a discussion in the following topics related to their work:

- **Session 1: *Embedding media literacy in the education system.*** In this session Rose Ugoalah, a facilitator from the City of Dublin Education and Training Board outlined how media literacy education seeks to advance media literacy competencies, and it is intended to promote awareness of media influence and create an active stance towards both consuming and creating media. Discussion centred around the best ways to this, from primary school through to university level, further, adult, and informal education.
- **Session 2: *Mis/disinformation and growth of the far right in Ireland.*** In this session Philip Ryan, a current PhD research student at University College Dublin, detailed the recent growth of far-right protests in Ireland centring around low levels of social and affordable housing and increased (or perceived increased) migration. Discussion centred around the role of media literacy in tackling disinformation in this area.
- **Session 3: *Balancing media literacy responses and free speech discourse.*** In this session Dinte Braaksma an MA student in Digital Humanities in Trinity College Dublin outlined their research in the area of critical media literacy and how power structures can contribute to what is considered misinformation and fake news in different contexts. Discussion centred around how any future strategy would need to consider how it may potentially meet resistance and respond to claims of bias.

Participants:

The event was advertised on the event management platform Eventbrite and shared through social media, in the TASC monthly newsletter (1,758 contacts), and via TASC email lists (contacts including universities, community and voluntary organisations, media contacts and umbrella CSOs). In addition, contact was made with all colleges and universities in the Dublin area which had politics or media related courses.

Participants came from across Ireland. Participants included students, researchers, personnel from the charity and voluntary sector and media professionals. The 3 separate focus groups involved a total of 27 participants, 26 of which were aged between 18 and 35 (target group):

Country	of	residence:	Ireland
Average		age:	26
Female:			14
Male:			13
Working language: English			

Objectives:

Through using materials created for the MLFD Booklet, the three focus groups gave participants an overview of the key elements of dis/misinformation, as well as how to recognise, fact-check and respond to fake news. Each session was highly interactive and discussion/activity based and included an element that was youth-led and designed by a younger citizen with a particular interest in the area.

The format was designed to 1. set the context, 2. create an open space for dialogue, 3. encourage the contribution of all participants, 4. connect and respect diverse perspectives, and 5. record insights.

The small group nature of the events allowed for rich and productive discussions. This event supported the achievement of the central MLFD objective, which is to exchange ideas and best practices among citizens from different backgrounds and engage younger citizens in the public debate on disinformation in the EU.

Results:

Across our three focus groups, we found consistent themes arising from the ideas offered by our

participants on what should be done to counteract the spread of mis and dis information. Such themes included accessible education on media literacy, journalistic integrity, and regulations placed on social media and tech companies.

It was also discussed that younger people face unique challenges in media literacy stemming from a tendency to consume media in short snippets and reels on online platforms. However, it was also discussed how younger people may be more aware and alert to fake news than older adults due to a greater familiarity and critical engagement with these platforms.

Our participants agreed that the EU has a strategic role in ensuring that people are awarded all of the information needed to make correct, informed decisions. Furthermore, work needs to be done by national governments, media outlets and social media companies to maintain the pressure to reduce the spread of mis and dis information.

Participants recommended the following initiatives:

- Introductory courses for media literacy, specifically for second level education so that all people engage with media critically from a young age.
- A journalistic shift from profits (particularly price per click modal) to quality, which would potentially involve funding and grants awarded for journalism.
- A peer review system for journalism to ensure news articles produced are accurate.
- Regulation of data and tech companies, specifically in data tracking and privacy.
- Improved access to, and navigability of, databases; particularly data sets prone to manipulation for disinforming purposes.
- Change in algorithms to prioritise quality content over revenue maximisation.
- Include the reduction in the spread of fake news in the UN sustainable development goals.

The level of engagement was high throughout all workshops, shown by the large quantity of responses to different questions posed to the participants. Detailed spoken exercises involving all participants showcased a wealth of knowledge amongst participants and a high level of interest in preventing the spread of mis and dis information.

Feedback:

At the end of the event, participants were asked to fill out a paper questionnaire for the final evaluation, which also included specific questions related to the content covered in order to gather more input to be used for the international workshops.

As for the quality of both the organisation and the content of the focus group, participants rated it from “excellent” to “good”, and found the event useful to engage with different points of view and that the event was very interactive.