



### **Results of Media Literacy for Democracy (MLFD) Focus Groups WPs 2-6:**

For the second phase of the MLFD project, five local focus groups were held in Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Spain in order to better understand how young citizens perceive the mis- and disinformation phenomena and how they deal with them while using traditional and new media. The age range of the participants of these focus groups ranged from 18-35, including people of various genders and backgrounds, as well as disadvantaged groups and people with disabilities. The researchers acted as speakers and facilitators alternately.

A variety of methodologies were used to facilitate communication and equip participants with knowledge about various components of misinformation and disinformation in the media. These methodologies ranged from interactive components, such as the use of group exercises, case studies, small group discussions, and group debates, as well as the use of presentations by professionals and experts to inform participants about the topics being discussed.

These local focus groups focused on a range of topics related to media literacy and mis- and disinformation; the most frequently addressed topics included:

1. The impact of disinformation on democratic systems and the erosion of trust in democratic systems as a result.
2. The importance of media literacy and education to counter misinformation, which includes developing fact-checking skills, as well as enhancing critical thinking skills.
3. The involvement of disadvantaged groups in the media literacy approaches. The role of the EU in disseminating decision-making processes concerning social media policies and the regulation of social media platforms, with specific emphasis on addressing data tracking, privacy, and the spread of misinformation.

There were a variety of challenges discussed by participants and speakers alike, which included:

1. The logistical challenge of cross-sector collaboration between institutions, media, and civil society.
2. The challenge of accessibility (especially regarding socially disadvantaged youth) in implementing media literacy programs in schools and educational initiatives.

3. The vulnerability of certain groups of communities and those who are the most targeted by disinformation campaigns and hate speech like women in all their diversity, migrants, refugees and minority groups.
4. The changing media landscape and the consequent challenge for journalists to embrace new technologies while upholding traditional values of accuracy, objectivity, and transparency.
  1. The general lack of trust in the media, institutions and often also in non-governmental organizations.
  2. The issue of adapting to technological innovations and the need for continuous changes to counter the spread of disinformation effectively.

The results of these local focus groups varied from country to country. Still, generally, all of the groups found that:

Regardless of age, gender or disability, the participants emphasized the need for more communication in the Member States about the EU policies and priorities, as well as the initiatives aimed to include citizens in the public debate of the current challenges, like green deal, the fight against disinformation and the digital era. Young people are especially susceptible to misinformation schemes, and tailored approaches should be developed to equip them with strategies on how to evaluate different media sources.

Accessible educational resources for all citizens, but with a particular emphasis on younger, older and more vulnerable citizens, is a potentially effective way to combat misinformation. Recommendations included resources to help improve fact-checking and pre-bunking skills, introductory courses for media literacy, and interactive games to interest youth populations.

The EU has a strategic role in the battle against disinformation and should equip citizens with the tools and information they need to make informed decisions about the media. In order to restore citizens' confidence in institutions, there must be more effort for transparency in policy and decision-making processes.