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# Empowering Through Literacy

*Media and Information Literacy in Finland  
and its Response to Disinformation and Propaganda  
Based on Lifelong Learning*



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# Introduction

Media and information literacy (MIL) presents a significant challenge in highly digitalised and media-saturated societies such as Finland, where much social interaction—within institutions, between organisations and across society—occurs increasingly through digital media. Geopolitical tensions and conflicts further highlight the critical need for media and information literacy, as propaganda, conspiracy theories, disinformation and information controls become more prevalent (Lucas and Pomerantsev, 2016). It is essential that citizens possess the skills needed to recognise and

resist such disinformation and propaganda (Pasitselska, 2024).

For the sixth year in a row since 2017, Finland led the European Media Literacy Index 2023 (Lessenski, 2023). The Index measures the potential vulnerability to disinformation of 41 European states. Higher rankings indicate stronger resilience to disinformation. The Index employs several indicators concerning level of education, media freedom, trust in people and e-participation. The countries included in the index are also grouped into clusters based on similar characteristics across the indicators.<sup>1</sup>

## Media Literacy Index 2023 Clusters

Fig. 1



Source: Lessenski, 2023, p. 7.

<sup>1</sup> The clusters are organised hierarchically, from the highest-performing countries in the 1st cluster to the lowest-performing in the 5th. The 2nd cluster consists of strong performers, while the 3rd cluster is considered 'transitional', including countries at risk of declining further in the rankings (Lessenski, 2023) (Figure 1).

In addition, Finland has been acknowledged as a forerunner in actively supporting the media literacy of its citizens, extending well beyond the school curriculum and involving a multitude of actors and projects that are partly or fully funded by public authorities. For example, a report by the European Audiovisual Observatory (2016) identified Finland as having the highest number of media literacy stakeholders outside school curricula among the (then) 28 Member States observed.

Finland's broad approach to media and information literacy falls outside the scope of this paper. Instead, the focus is on Finland's efforts and challenges in combating disinformation and propaganda through the lens of lifelong learning, with particular attention to older people. In this paper, the terms media and information literacy and media literacy are used interchangeably to describe the skills involved in locating, accessing, evaluating and creating media content.

## Strategic orientation

Internationally, disinformation is among the strongest driving forces in recognising the significance of media and information literacy education (Pranaityte-Wergin et al., 2024). Due in particular to Russia's military actions in Ukraine, Finnish citizens' ability to recognise and resist disinformation and propaganda is now perceived more strongly than before as a component of societal resilience, as stated in the Security Strategy: 'The critical media literacy and digital skills of individuals strengthen democracy and civic participation and help identify information influence activities' (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 23). The strategy clearly acknowledges media education's role in strengthening societal resilience and commits to promoting the population's media and information literacy.

Finland's strategic orientation values *lifelong learning for all and for all ages*. This is manifested in several strategies and policies, including organisational, local, sectoral and national policies. A number of national and sectoral strategies and policies will be highlighted here. Finland's Digital Compass, a national strategic roadmap of Finland's digital transformation, acknowledges the key meaning of media and information literacy for all age groups and as a pre-condition for a trust-based, open, democratic and resilient society (Finnish Government, 2022). It also outlines topical themes such as recognising misinformation and disinformation. The Ministry of Education and Culture's (2019) Strategy 2030 and parliamentary policy approaches for reforming continuous learning (Valtioneuvosto, 2020) further accentuate the key meaning of lifelong

learning with regard to media and information literacy.

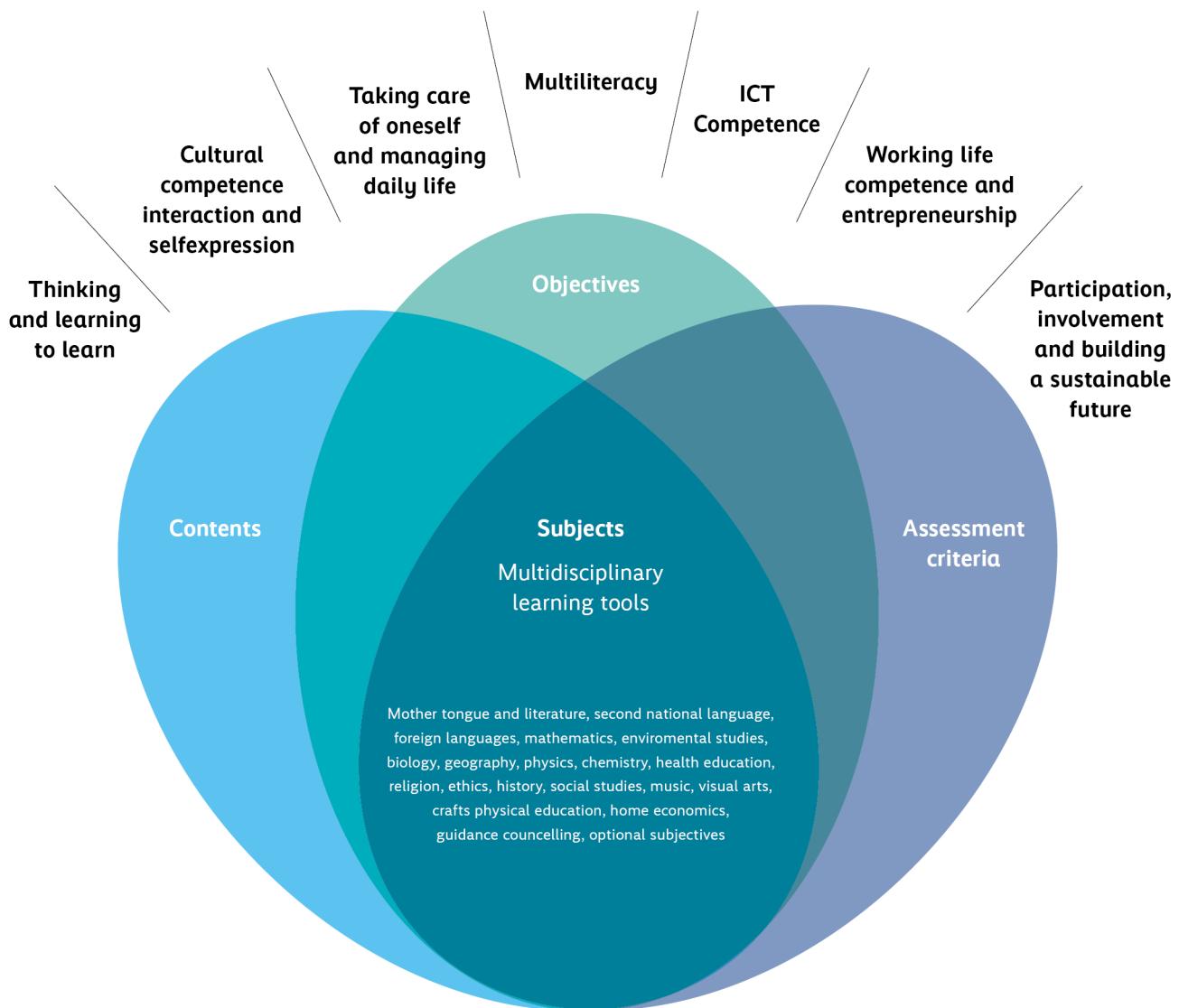
The current Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's government (Finnish Government, 2023, p. 187) highlights the role of *teacher training* in combatting mis- and disinformation by stating that the government will prevent social harm caused by disinformation through improving 'the capabilities of teachers to boost students' critical media literacy and awareness of cyber risks in order to reinforce broad social resilience'. As a strategic response to lifelong learning, the Government also recognises the importance of *liberal adult education* in increasing the population's competences.

The vision for Finnish teachers' education, Teacher Training 2050 (Finnish Teacher Training Forum, 2025) echoes the Government Programme in accentuating the role of *education, teacher training and teachers* in solving complex global changes, such as digitalisation and security changes in Europe. The vision highlights that teacher training is *research-based*, focuses on the teaching of *all age groups*, and forms a *continuum* that supports teachers' continuous learning and development throughout their careers.

Regarding the role of media and information literacy in Finnish *teacher training curricula*, studies indicate considerable variation between universities, and that the contents of media and information literacy in the pre-service teacher training programmes and curricula are limited (see Pranaityte-Wergin et al., 2024). Regarding Finnish teacher training programmes focused on *adult education*, there has

## Transversal competencies in the national core curriculum for primary and lower secondary (basic) education

Fig. 2



Source: Finnish National Agency for Education, <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-primary-and-lower-secondary-basic-education>

been no systematic research on how well promoting adults' and older people's media and information literacy is enshrined in the curricula. However, a study published in 2022 (Vuojärvi et al., 2022) concluded that adult teacher training programmes lack an explicit focus on promoting media and information literacy among older people, and instead, focus on promoting teacher students' competencies in using digital media. An exception to this is the pioneering curriculum development work done at the University of Lapland, where work on older people's media and information literacy has been integrated into the teacher training curriculum focused on adult education (see Purtalo-Nieminen et al., 2021).

Finland's top position in international MIL rankings has typically been credited to its strong education system, which has included media education since the 1950s, and has integrated media and information literacy into the core curricula at different educational levels (see for example, Pranaityte-Wergin et al., 2024). The *national core curricula* prepared by the Finnish National Agency for Education, and the local curricula designed on that basis have a central role in determining how media and information literacy is taught during formal education, from early childhood education and care to general upper secondary education. The curricula are administrative steering documents, but they also contain the objectives and core contents of teaching for all subjects (Rasi et al., 2019a). Lifelong learn-

ing is manifested in the core curricula in terms of their *future-focused* and *competence-based* character. Another strong focus is *cross-curricular, transversal competencies*, with the aim that students can apply these competencies outside school and throughout their life. Media and information literacy is integrated as a cross-curricular competence in every core curriculum implemented during the past ten years, not separately, as one competence among others, but instead as part of several transversal competencies, such as 'Multiliteracy' and 'ICT competence', which are always taught and assessed as part of every subject (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2025) (Figure 2).

The Finnish Framework for Digital Competence was issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education and the National Audiovisual Institute in 2022 to support teachers in implementing the national core curricula's contents regarding digital competence, media literacy and programming competence. Key drivers of the development of the framework were research-based insights about teachers' difficulties in understanding what is meant by multiliteracy and how to promote it in their daily teaching practices (Rasi et al., 2019a). The framework offers more detailed guidance than the core curricula on effective pedagogical practices for fostering media literacy and outlines the skills students are expected to demonstrate at various grade levels. For example, a good level of media literacy in grades 3-6 means that 'the pupil knows that media content has different purposes, such as entertaining, influencing, selling and conveying information. The pupil can give some examples of these' (Finnish National Agency for Education & the National Audiovisual Institute, 2022).

One significant indicator of Finland's strategic orientation towards media and information literacy is its *nation-*

*al media education policy*, titled 'Media literacy in Finland. National media education policy' (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019). The policy was drafted by the National Audiovisual Institute's (KAVI) Department for Media Education and Audiovisual Media (MEKU) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019. Finland was among the first European countries to have a governmental authority dedicated to promoting media and information literacy, and to publish a media literacy policy (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2025a). The policy outlines media and information literacy as an element of civic competence, and states that 'everyone's opportunities for the versatile use of media and improvement of media literacies are enhanced' (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019, p. 14). It recognises the importance of lifelong learning and all age groups, as well as people living in sparsely populated areas, with special needs and in vulnerable positions as the target groups of MIL education. To better respond to the changes in the national security environment and digital media technologies, as well as the opportunities of all to improve their media and information literacy, the policy is presently under evaluation (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2025a). The revised version will provide up-to-date descriptions of the strengths, values and principles of media education in Finland, while also highlighting areas for improvement.

The last highlight of Finland's strategic *lifelong learning response to disinformation and propaganda presented here* is the Ministry of Education and Culture's recent appointment of a working group to prepare the *Finnish vision for liberal education 2035* (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2025b). The Ministry states that, because of the new competence needs created by digitalisation and demographic ageing, liberal education needs to be strengthened.

# Actors and coordination

The multitude of actors involved in media and information literacy education in Finland has been acknowledged both internationally (for example, the European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016) and nationally (for example, the National Audiovisual Institute, 2025; Rasi-Heikkinen, 2022). Here, key actors are highlighted that promote citizens' abilities to resist disinformation from the perspective of *lifelong learning* and among *older citizens*.

## Governmental authorities

As part of the Finnish Government, the Ministry of Education and Culture is the key public authority that supports the promotion of media and information literacy by allocating resources, providing information guidance and developing legislation applicable to its administrative branch (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019). The Ministry promotes media and information literacy within its various policy areas, such as cultural policy, youth work and youth policy, as well as educational policy, for example, through subsidies allocated to national MIL projects focusing on areas such as library development (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019). As public libraries play a prominent role in learning and in the everyday lives of people of all ages in Finland, the Ministry's role in promoting lifelong learning here is significant.

Besides the Ministry of Education and Culture, the promotion of media and information literacy is the responsibility of several other ministries and authorities, such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Finnish National Agency for Education. It relies on *cross-sectoral collaboration* (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019). For example, the Ministry of the Interior, based on cross-sectoral cooperation, prepared the national risk assessment, which acknowledges activities aimed at spreading hostile information, such as disseminating disinformation, as a risk that threatens democracy and social equality (Ministry of Interior, 2023).

The National Audiovisual Institute (KAVI), established in 2012, is a subordinate agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture and functions as the only government authority in Finland with a statutory duty to promote media education, performing its activities through the Department for Media Education and Audiovisual Programmes (MEKU). The agency is responsible for the promotion and coordination of media education at a national level, while also actively participating in international collaboration (Salomaa and Palsa, 2019; National Audiovisual Institute, 2025). One of KAVI's key activities is to coordinate and draft, in collab-

oration with the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish national media education policy.

The Finnish National Agency for Education plays a key role in shaping education and training in Finland. Its responsibilities include setting the core curricula for basic and upper secondary education, as well as for early childhood education and care, and establishing the frameworks for vocational and competence-based qualifications. Consequently, the agency holds a central position in guiding lifelong MIL education.

## Educational and research institutions

Besides providing *basic and secondary education* for children and young people, educational institutions in Finland provide education intended for adults of all ages, too (see Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency for Education, 2025). For example, in the case of upper secondary education, besides general upper secondary schools for young people, there are corresponding schools for adults over 18 years of age. Thus, the core curricula concerning media and information literacy also applies to part of the adult population in Finland.

The Finnish *higher education system* comprises universities and universities of applied sciences (see the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education, 2025). In Finland, MIL education is considered to be a *research-based practice*, as stated by the National Audiovisual Institute (2025): 'Research provides tools for understanding media literacy, related phenomena and for its development.' Thus, *universities and research organisations* are acknowledged as key actors in MIL education. Universities promote citizens' media and information literacy through teacher training. In addition, three Finnish universities continuously conduct research and offer teaching in MIL education: the University of Lapland, Tampere University and the University of Helsinki, while other universities' efforts are smaller in scope (National Audiovisual Institute, 2025; Rasi-Heikkinen, 2022). From the perspective of lifelong learning in media and information literacy, the University of Lapland is a key actor with a professorship in media education, and in education with a focus on lifelong learning. The University has pioneered teaching and research on senior citizens' MIL education (for example, Rasi et al., 2019b), while also conducting several research and development projects focused on the topic. Finnish universities also promote citizens' media and information literacy by offering studies open to everyone, regardless of education and age. Furthermore, many universities offer Universi-

ties of the Third Age (U3A) programmes, which include topics and courses related to media and information literacy.

*Liberal adult education institutions* support lifelong learning by providing non-formal education for all residents in Finland in adult education centres, folk high schools, learning centres, sports training centres, and summer universities. By international comparison, liberal adult education in Finland enjoys high participation rates, and courses relevant for media and information literacy include courses on digital skills (Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency for Education, 2025).

## Civil society organisations

Civil society organisations provide training, guidance, and open access learning materials to support media and information literacy for people of all ages. Some nongovernmental organisations (NGO) focus on the MIL education of children and young people and target professionals working with them, as well as parents. These NGOs include, for example, the Finnish Society on Media Education, the Media Education Centre Metka, Save the Children Finland and the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. Senior citizens' NGOs that support seniors' media and information literacy include nationwide organisations such as the Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older Adults, the Finnish Pensioners Federation, the National Seniors Union and the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation. In addition, regional and local organisations promote older people's media and

information literacy. As older people are mostly outside formal education and working life, the role of civil society organisations is significant.

## Fact-checking organisations

Fact-checking organisations in Europe and beyond have taken the initiative to provide training or to collaborate in the provision of training for citizens of all ages (Rasi-Heikkilä and Luksua, 2023). A key Finnish organisation is Faktabaari, a fact-checking and digital information literacy service, which has received international recognition (see Faktabaari, n.d.). It contributes to lifelong learning in relation to media and information literacy by addressing teachers and citizens of all ages, and by publishing open access learning materials on fact-checking and digital information literacy.

## Public libraries and public service media company YLE

Finland has a long tradition of promoting media and information literacy in libraries (National Audiovisual Institute, 2025). The role of public libraries is to promote equal access to learning and culture, and opportunities for lifelong learning and active citizenship. In addition, the Finnish public service media company YLE provides open access training and learning materials for using and critically assessing digital services and information.

# Challenges and limitations

While Finland invests heavily in strengthening its population's resilience to disinformation, policymakers, researchers and MIL experts have highlighted several challenges concerning lifelong MIL education, especially for adults and older people. This focus on inclusion—'education for all'—reflects the core principles of the Finnish education system. Media and information literacy stakeholders in Finland (such as Kanerva and Oksanen-Särelä, 2021; Ombudsman for Older People, 2022; Rasi et al., 2021; Rasi-Heikkilä

en, 2022, 2025; Renfors and Suoranta, 2025; Salomaa, 2023; Salomaa and Palsa, 2019) have identified the following key challenges:

- The scope of MIL education for adults and older people should be expanded.
- MIL education must be made more inclusive and adapted to better serve traditionally underserved groups, such

as the oldest citizens (85+), seniors with lower incomes or health conditions, older adults in rural areas, migrants and Sámi elders. The Sámi are an indigenous people living in an area called Sápmi, which stretches across four countries, namely Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Russian Federation (the Kola Peninsula).

- The public sector should assume greater responsibility for delivering MIL education to adults of different ages.
- Funding mechanisms and opportunities available for children's and youth MIL education should be extended to support MIL initiatives for adults and older people.

- Programmes aimed at enhancing media and information literacy among adults and older people should be further advanced, including improvements in teaching approaches and content areas such as AI literacy, robot literacy and critical understanding of media.
- More research is needed on media and information literacy and MIL education among adults and older populations.
- MIL education should be more deeply integrated into teacher training and training programmes, as well as into early childhood education and care.

## Best practices

To conclude this paper, this section highlights some best practices used in Finland to promote lifelong learning in media and information literacy, with an emphasis on older people and other marginalised communities. First, a number of actors have identified *teamwork* as best practice in Finnish MIL education (for example, Kanerva and Oksanen-Särelä, 2021; Salomaa and Palsa, 2019). Teamwork is involved, for example, in how Finland's national media education policy is developed within the framework of broad-based cross-sectoral collaboration (see Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2025b; Salomaa and Palsa, 2019, pp. 60–61), and also in how the national core curricula are prepared.

Second, the *integration of MIL education into the Finnish core curricula and the Finnish Framework for Digital Competence* can be recognised as best practice, offering a strong and wide-reaching foundation for promoting lifelong learning in media and information literacy among Finnish citizens.

Third, best practices also include the availability of a wide range of *open-access digital and printed media and information literacy resources and publications*. These materials, which address topics such as disinformation and related issues, are designed for both MIL professionals – such as teachers – and the general public. Examples include ma-

terials curated and/or produced by the National Audiovisual Institute (<https://kavi.fi/mediakasvatus/julkaisut-ja-materiaalit/>), the Finnish public service media company YLE (Digitreenit – [yle.fi](https://yle.fi)), and the fact-checking and digital information literacy service Faktabaari (<https://faktabaari.fi/edu/oppimateriaalit/>). Other good examples of open access learning materials promoting media and information literacy include the Finnish Society on Media Education's learning materials on disinformation, fake news and culture sensitive MIL education (<https://mediakasvatus.fi/materiaalit/>) and the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation's Media Guide for adults (<https://www.mediaguide.fi/en/>).

Fourth, a range of *campaigns and initiatives* also serve as best practices in Finland's lifelong learning efforts to combat disinformation and propaganda. Notable examples include the annual Media Literacy Week, coordinated by the National Audiovisual Institute (<https://mediataitoviiikko.fi/in-english/>) and the Day and Week of Older People, organised by the Finnish Association for the Welfare of Older Adults, which often features activities aimed at enhancing digital skills and literacy (<https://vtkl.fi/tapahtumat/vanhustenviikko/>). Another example is Senior Surf, a peer-to-peer digital support initiative led by the

same association (<https://seniorsurf.fi/english/>). Among its diverse activities and resources is a collection of open access online materials (instructions, guides, videos) on media and information literacy intended for older citizens and people working with them (<https://seniorsurf.fi/digiopastajat/materiaalipankki/mediataidot>).

Finally, because MIL education in Finland is grounded in research-based practice, best practices also encompass ongoing research projects. Currently, there are two major multidisciplinary projects focused on different stages of the lifelong learning continuum. The CRITICAL project,

funded by the Strategic Research Council, explores multiliteracy and media literacy among students aged 10–17 (<https://educritical.fi/en/>), while MediaRoboLit 65+, funded by the Research Council of Finland, examines the nature, scope and practices of media and robot literacy among people aged 65 and over in Finland. This project is inclusive of the oldest age groups, residents in remote areas, older Sámi individuals and seniors with illnesses or disabilities (<https://research.ulapland.fi/fi/projects/yli-65-vuotiaiden-media-ja-robottilukutaidot>).

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## About the author

**Dr Päivi Rasi-Heikkinen** is Professor of Education at the University of Lapland, Finland. Her work focuses on media and information literacy, lifelong learning and digital inclusion, particularly among older adults. She has led and contributed to several national and international research projects on media education and seniors' digital competence.

## Empowering Through Literacy

The paper explores Finland's lifelong learning-based approach to media and information literacy (MIL) as a response to disinformation and propaganda. It highlights Finland's top ranking in the European Media Literacy Index and its strong policy framework integrating media and information literacy throughout education and society. Key actors include ministries, the National Audiovisual Institute, adult education organisations, universities, NGOs and libraries. Despite broad collaboration, challenges remain in reaching adults and older people. The study identifies inclusive education, research-based practice and cross-sector teamwork as Finland's best practices for fostering societal resilience.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

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