Media and Information Literacy for All: Closing the gaps

Global Analysis of the Current State of Play of Media and Information Literacy

KEY FINDINGS:

→ **Lack of systematic integration of MIL in national school curricula:** Most national education systems still lack the systematic integration of MIL in school curricula, as conceptualized by UNESCO, encompassing a broad set of competencies, including critical thinking and the ability to evaluate information.

→ **Overemphasis on digital skills:** Many countries limit MIL education to digital skills, which, while important, do not sufficiently promote critical thinking.

→ **Regional disparities in MIL competency integration in school curricula:** Stark regional differences emerge when examining how MIL competencies are integrated into education systems.

→ **MIL is mainly taught in secondary and elementary schools**, but rarely as a single, standalone subject.

→ **MIL gaining policy visibility**: An increasing number of countries are referencing MIL within broader policy frameworks, signalling growing recognition of its importance.

→ **Global opportunity for advancement:** A significant opportunity exists to scale MIL globally, as 171 out of 194 UNESCO Member States have acknowledged the importance of related competencies in national policy frameworks.

→ **Recognition is not yet matched by implementation:** While MIL enjoys broad recognition in policy, this has not yet translated into effective teaching in schools, comprehensive, sustainable policies, strategies, or dedicated funding at scale.

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Introduction

A teenager scrolling through their feed today is faced with a torrent of information: trending videos, health "hacks," AI-generated images, and breaking news updates, all blending in ways that are often difficult to decipher. Within this constant stream lie real risks: disinformation that distorts public opinions and can sway elections, viral hoaxes that fuel division, and harmful content that undermines trust and takes a toll on young people's wellbeing. People must have access to and acquire information, media, and digital competencies to be more discerning. This is where advancing Media and Information Literacy (MIL) offers unprecedented sustainable responses to build people's resilience - helping learners to critically access, analyze, use, and create information. The most far-reaching and sustainable path is for countries to integrate MIL into formal education systems at all levels and anchor it through clear national MIL policies to ensure broader and permanent access of these skills among citizens.

UNESCO has played a central role in advancing MIL as an essential element of 21st-century competencies, democratic development, freedoms, and peace for over three decades. The Organization's MIL actions are rooted in its United Nations mandate to promote freedom of expression, the right to access information, and build peace in the minds of women and men of all ages. UNESCO supports its Member States through capacity-building, policy advise, and technical cooperation in embedding MIL within both national education systems and to develop MIL policy and strategy frameworks that ensure long-term and equitable diffusion of these essential skills. This objective was reinforced by the UN Member States in the UN Pact for the Future, adopted at the 2024 Summit of the Future.

Yet, despite growing recognition of the importance of MIL, reliable global data on the status of national MIL policies and the integration of MIL into in school curricula has remained largely unavailable or opaque and difficult to analyze. While some regional and national studies have provided valuable insights, these efforts have been fragmented and inconsistent, making it difficult to assess progress at a global level. However, demand for such data has been steadily increasing - from governments, educators, researchers, and international organizations - all seeking clearer benchmarks to guide MIL policy and strategies. To address this critical knowledge gap and support evidence-based policymaking and actions, UNESCO launched global research between February and June 2025 to map the current landscape of MIL adoption and integration across its 194 Member States at the time of the research, which established a critical baseline to be built upon and used as a reference for tracking progress.

Methodology

The research examined two dimensions: (1) the integration of MIL into national education curricula, and (2) the development and adoption of MIL-related policies. At one level, countries were considered as having MIL policies if there was evidence of standalone MIL policies and strategies or substantial MIL policy statements and strategic actions were included within broader national policy frameworks such as education, digital transformation, or youth strategies. At another level, the research also took into consideration countries that have a mention of MIL in broader policy frameworks, thus recognising its importance. In connection with the integration of MIL in national education, the study considered the extent to which MIL competencies and related content are described in national curricula documents. The study also analysed whether MIL is taught as a dedicated subject or embedded across disciplines, is it mandatory or elective, and at which levels of education MIL is offered.

The findings, while instructive, have limitations. Countries often use different terminology, concepts, and approaches to describe MIL, which complicated comparative research. In some cases, policies referred to related areas such as digital literacy, ICT in education, civic education or communication skills, requiring further careful investigation to assess whether and how MIL was being addressed. The research did not assess the extent to which MIL is being taught in schools and the types of pedagogy being employed. This is a subject of future assessments.

The mapping aimed not only to capture current progress but also to identify regional patterns and disparities, highlight policy gaps, and point to opportunities for scaling up and strengthening MIL implementation worldwide. The findings were cross validated using verifiable sources, NGOs, and international partners, supplemented with input from UNESCO national and regional staff members.

For the purposes of this research, UNESCO's regional classification system was used to group countries into five geographic regions: 1) Africa, 2) the Arab States, 3) Asia and the Pacific, 4) Europe and North America, and 5) Latin America and the Caribbean. In some instances, countries belong to two regions, such as being part of Africa and the Arab States. However, to ensure consistency and avoid duplication, countries that are considered members of two regions were only counted once under their broader *regional* classification. For instance, North African countries that are also part of the Arab States were counted solely under the Africa *region*.

Description of main findings

Part 1: Global state of play of the integration of MIL in school curricula

As schooling is compulsory part of most people's lives, integrating MIL into formal education systems is the most effective way to systematically reach younger populations. This approach ensures that all learners, regardless of background, develop the competencies needed to participate critically and ethically in today's information-saturated realities. Schools provide structured, long-term, and inclusive environments that can embed these essential skills from an early age, reinforcing them progressively throughout a learner's academic journey.

This research assessed whether and how MIL is currently reflected in national education systems across UNESCO Member States through integration into school curricula. To reflect global variations in practice, the research also distinguished between two types of content emphasis in MIL integration:

- MIL content which aligns with UNESCO's competency framework for critical, ethical, and participatory engagement with information, media and digital technology ; and
- Content that focuses on digital skills only, where educational content is exclusively offering hard technical competencies.

In addition, the research examined the format of these two types of integration, notably whether these skills are included in schools as a dedicated subject or embedded across existing disciplines (cross-curricular approach), whether it is compulsory or elective, and the levels of education at which it is introduced — from primary through tertiary.

The findings presented below offer a global snapshot of the status of MIL in education at the time of the research, highlighting important patterns and gaps.

Finding 1: Systematic integration of MIL (as conceptualized by UNESCO with critical thinking encompassed) is still absent in a majority of national education systems in the world

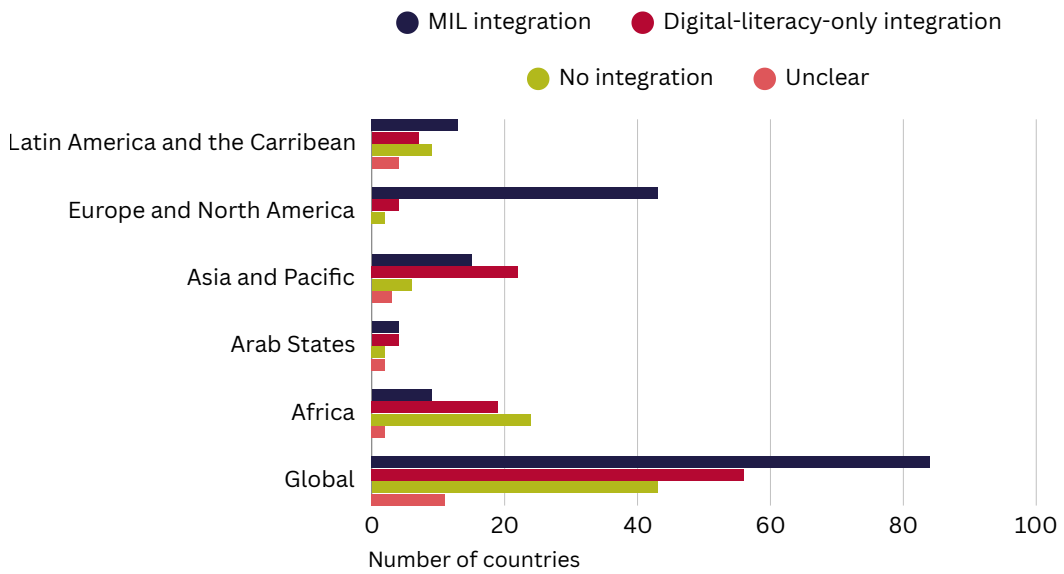
Globally, 84 out of 194 countries (43%) have integrated elements of MIL – as UNESCO describes it – into formal national education curricula. An additional 56 countries (29%) have also integrated some elements of MIL into the national curricula, yet they limit this integration to addressing digital literacy only. 43 countries (22%) have not integrated MIL at all, and insufficient data was available for 11 countries (6%) to make a proper analysis of the situation.

When examining the integration of MIL competencies into national curricula, stark regional disparities emerge. North America and Europe lead the way, with 91% of countries in these regions incorporating MIL-related learning in school curricula. In contrast, progress remains limited in other parts of the world: only 13 out of 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 15 out of 46 countries in Asia and the Pacific, have introduced elements of MIL into their national curricula. In the Arab States, roughly one-third of countries reflect some MIL content in curricula. At the other end of the spectrum, Africa faces the most significant gap, with just 9 out of 54 countries integrating aspects of MIL into national curricula. These figures highlight the urgent need for greater global commitment to equipping young people everywhere with the critical skills to navigate today's complex information landscape.

A different picture emerges when focusing on countries that limit MIL principally to digital literacy. Based on available data at the time of research, in Asia and the Pacific, nearly half the region (22 of 46 countries) demonstrated this limited approach, privileging technical skills over the critical thinking and evaluative dimensions of MIL. Africa follows a similar trend, with 19 of its 54 countries. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, 7 of 33 countries fall into this category, while in the Arab States, 4 of 12 countries do the same.

Figure 1

Status of MIL elements inclusion in school curricula by regions



What this means?

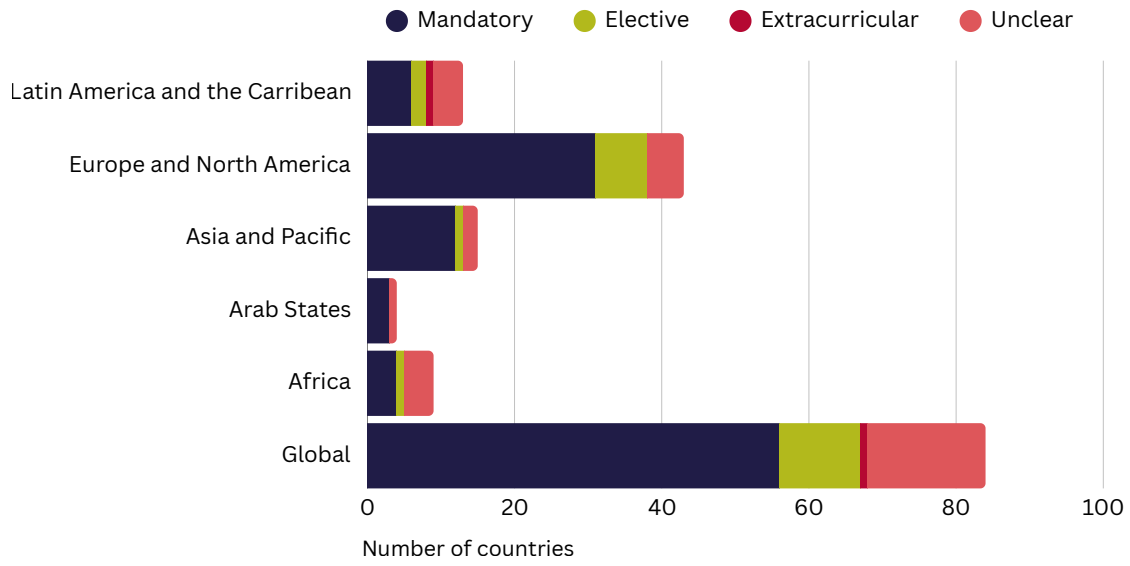
The data available at the time of research reflects a mixed global landscape where MIL inclusion in education demonstrates progress, but still far from being systematic and universal. In many regions, education systems still rely predominantly on digital literacy, focusing on hard technical skills, leaving large gaps in citizens' capacity to navigate media, assess credibility, and engage meaningfully in digital societies.

Finding 2: MIL is mainly taught in secondary and elementary schools, but rarely as a subject of its own

Based on available data at the time of research, out of the 84 countries that have formally included aspects of MIL into in school curricula, the majority (56 countries) intends for it to be a mandatory component of education, 11 elective, and 1 an extracurricular activity. In 16 countries, insufficient data was available to make a proper analysis of the situation. The data present relatively consistent patterns across all regions, suggesting no extreme disparities in how MIL is positioned.

Figure 2

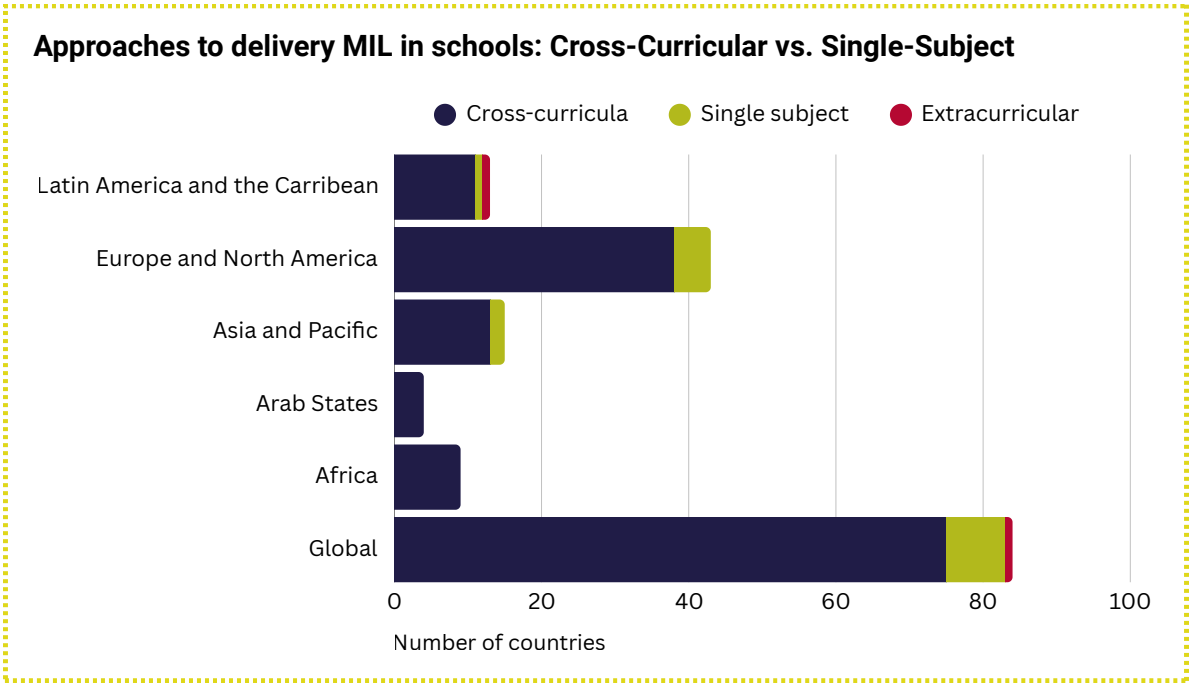
Approaches to deliver MIL in school curricula: Mandatory, Elective, or Extracurricular



What stands out even more is the widespread consensus on the cross-curricular approach: 75 countries with elements of MIL competencies in school curricula design it for delivery through multiple subjects rather than as a standalone course. This approach points to a shared understanding of its interdisciplinary relevance, which has its advantages and disadvantages. While including MIL across multiple subjects can help learners to appreciate its application to various aspects of social life, it risks MIL getting lost and marginalized. It also makes it harder to monitor, measure and sustain MIL impact in the long term. Furthermore, monitoring and assessing MIL-specific outcomes remains essential to ensure that young people truly develop the critical competencies intended. UNESCO recommends a blended or mixed approach of both standalone and multiple subject integration when integrating MIL into education systems and translating this into schools/classrooms. This is underscored in the UNESCO second edition of UNESCO Model MIL Curricula for Educator and Learners, Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely.

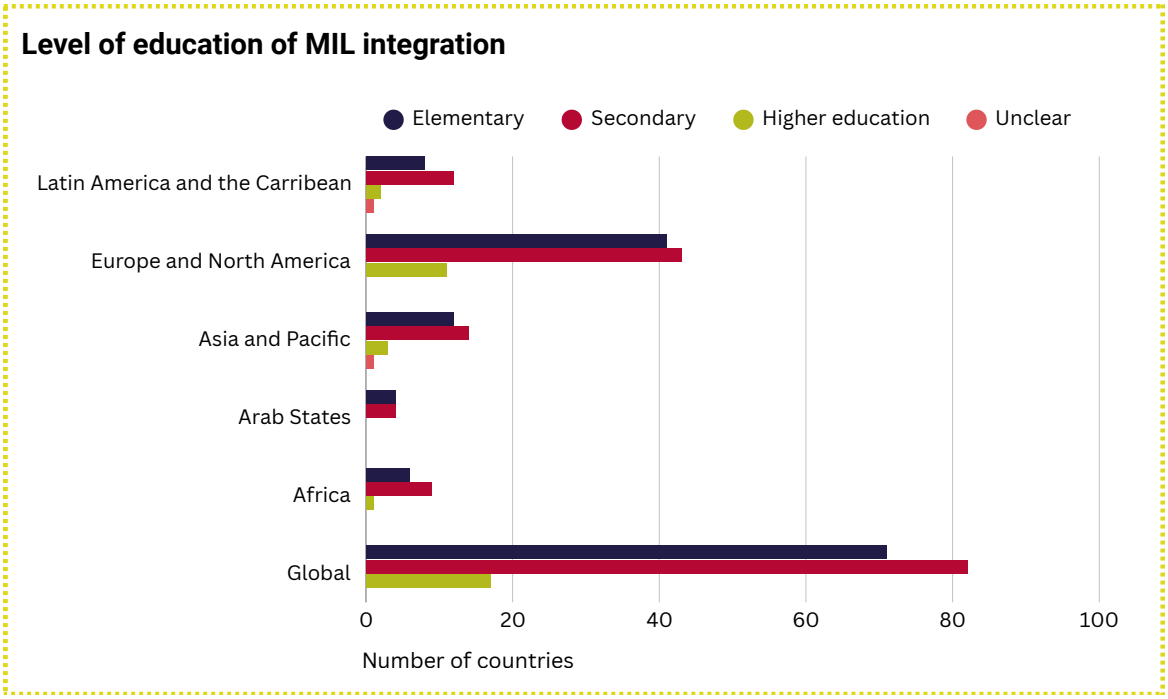
When embedded across disciplines and subjects, schools integrate it most commonly across civic education, language and literature, and social studies. Only a small number (8 countries) design MIL courses as a separate subject (or integrate it into a single subject), and just one country treats it solely as extracurricular – based on available data.

Figure 3



In the countries where aspects of MIL have been included in formal school curricula, the majority have introduced it at the secondary education level (82), followed by a strong number at the primary education level (71), and a notably limited presence in higher education (17). These numbers overlap because some countries include MIL at two or three levels of education. While there are clear regional disparities in whether MIL is included into school systems (see Finding 1 of this section), there is a global consensus around the cross-curricular and mandatory nature of MIL.

Figure 4



What this means?

The inclusion of MIL at the secondary level suggests a strong consensus that adolescence is a pivotal time for building critical media and information competencies. This period coincides with increased autonomy in digital media use and the formation of civic and social identities of youth, making it an opportune moment for structured engagement with media ethics and content analysis, among others. Similarly, the presence at the primary education level also highlights recognition that children's exposure to online information ecosystems begins early, and foundational MIL skills can — and should — be nurtured from a young age.

In contrast, only 17 countries demonstrated MIL integration in higher education, revealing a major gap that could reflect the perception that MIL is a skill set to be taught earlier, or it might indicate institutional barriers in updating university curricula. Regardless, this omission undermines the potential for a lifelong learning approach to MIL and weakens the development of advanced and discipline-specific MIL capacities.

Finding 3: Almost a third of countries in the world limit MIL education to hard technical digital-skills-only, which fall short of fostering critical thinking

Among the 56 countries that have integrated only hard technical digital skills in formal education, the approach tends to be narrower and more compartmentalized. In contrast to the countries that treat MIL as a comprehensive, cross-cutting educational objective (see Finding 2), digital-skills-only approaches are far more likely to be housed within a single ICT or technology-related subject, with less emphasis on cross-curricular integration or making the content mandatory.

Figure 5

Approaches for delivery of primary hard digital-skills in school curricula: Mandatory or Elective

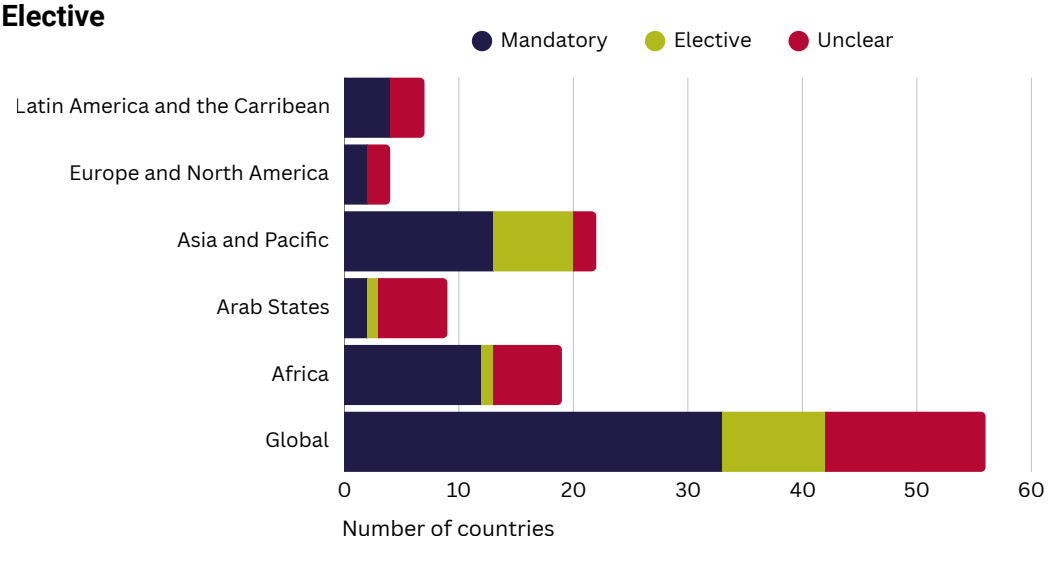
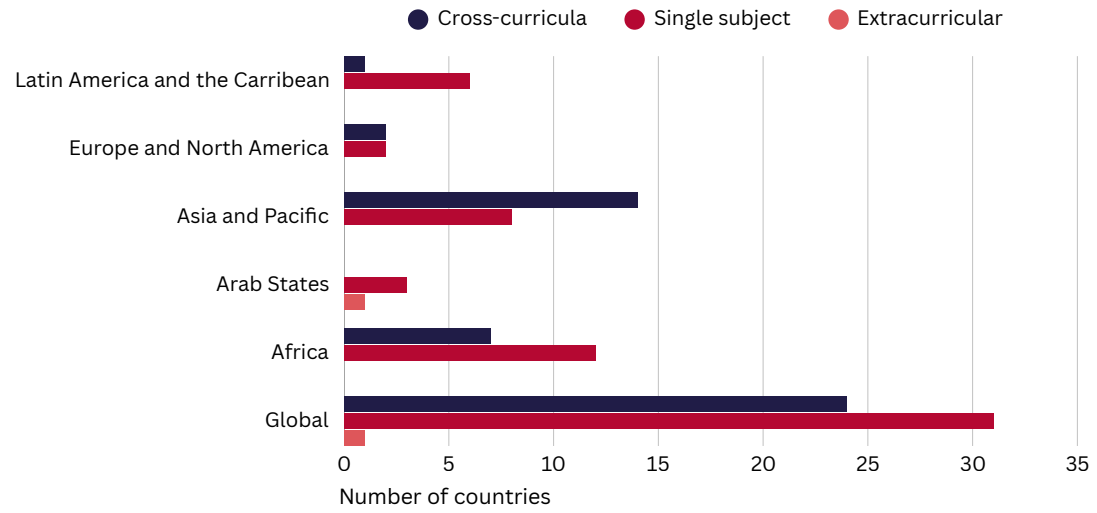


Figure 6

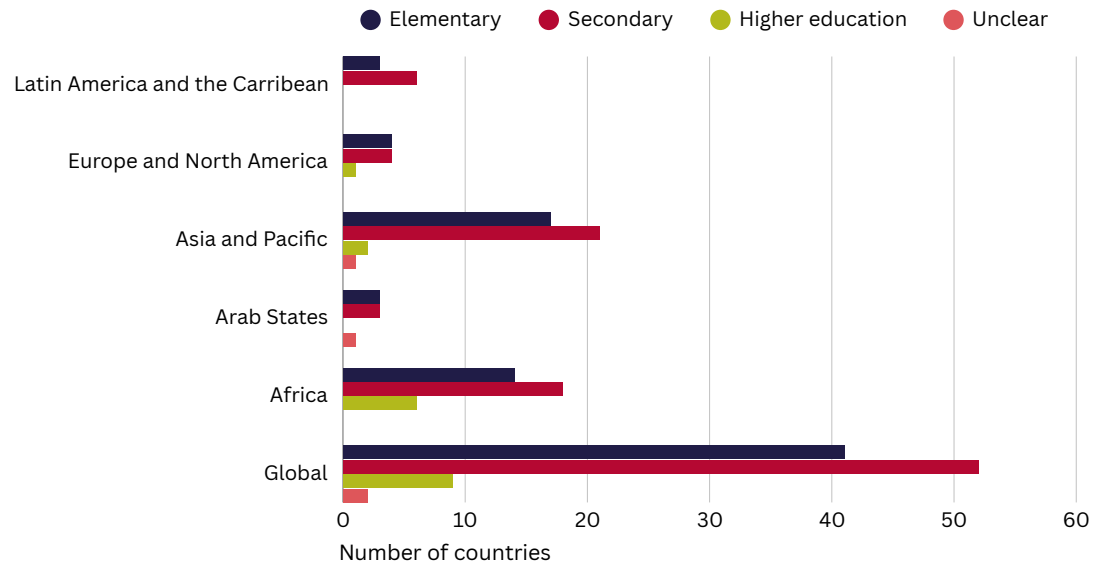
Approaches for the delivery of primarily hard digital-skills in school curricula: Cross-Curricular vs. Single-Subject Approaches



Digital skills (primary hard technical skills) are most frequently taught at the secondary level, with fewer countries including them in elementary education and very limited integration at the university level.

Figure 4

Level of education of digital-skills-only integration



What this means?

This pattern suggests that when MIL is narrowed to technical competencies, it is far less understood as foundational knowledge applicable across subjects and disciplines, especially when compared to how MIL is treated in countries that integrate more key elements of MIL into in school curricula: 67% of the countries that teach MIL in schools have made it mandatory and nearly 90% use a cross-curricular approach. By contrast, only 59% of the countries that limit integration to digital skills have made it a mandatory component of education and 43% apply a cross-curricular approach, while the majority restrict it to a single ICT-related subject.

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Thereby, students may learn to use technology but not necessarily to understand it or the implications of media systems, algorithmic bias, or information credibility. The limit of this approach emphasizes that hard technical digital literacy alone is not sufficient in an AI-driven world. Because AI is distinct from other technologies and directly affects human agency, influencing the decisions and actions of people who use it, UNESCO, including in its "AI Competency Framework for Teachers," stresses the need for critical thinking, ethical awareness, and the ability to assess and intervene in how these systems function.

The data concerning the level of education at which digital-skills-only are integrated mirrors the broader pattern seen in the integration of MIL in schools: a strong emphasis on secondary schooling, more limited early exposure in primary education, and minimal continuation into university-level curricula.

Part 2: The global state of play of MIL policies

Policy development is a foundational pillar for sustainable and system-wide integration of MIL. National MIL policies serve to articulate strategic priorities, mobilize resources, coordinate multi-sectoral engagement, and institutionalize MIL in both formal and informal learning systems. The existence of national MIL policy frameworks, whether as stand-alone policies or substantially integrated into broader strategies, signals governmental recognition of MIL's role in promoting digital resilience, democratic participation, and informed citizenship.

The research assessed the presence or absence of national MIL policy and strategies, but did not evaluate the depth, quality, or degree of implementation of such policies. As such, the findings provide a foundational mapping of policy commitment rather than a measure of operationalization. Additionally, correlations between the presence of MIL-related policies and formal curricular integration (see Part 1) were also explored to better understand how policy frameworks translate into implementation in classrooms.

Below presented are the key findings that reveal important variations across regions and highlight both progress and significant policy gaps that continue to impede the full realization globally of MIL as a public good.

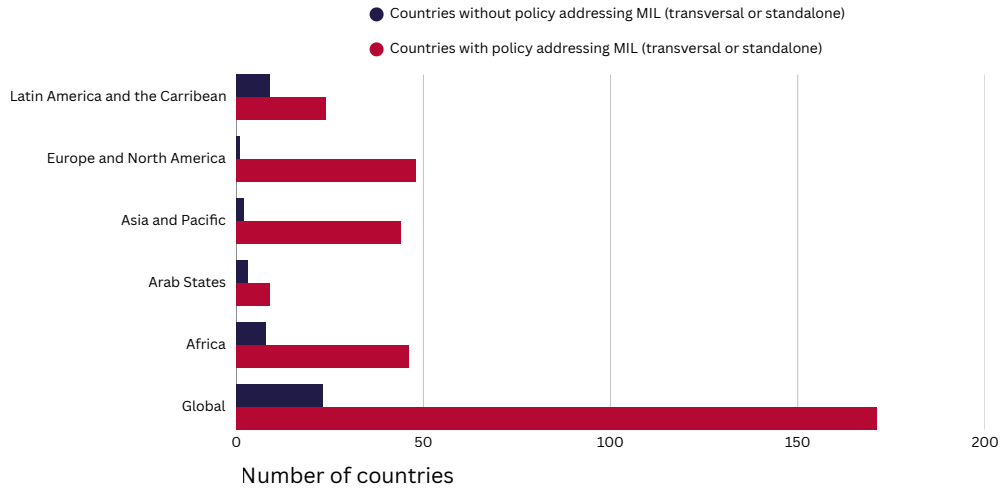
Finding 1: MIL gains global recognition of its importance with mention in broader policy frameworks, but regional gaps persist

A majority of UNESCO Member States — 171 out of 194 — have acknowledged the importance of MIL or MIL related competencies within national policy frameworks, either through dedicated standalone policies or through the mention of MIL into broader strategies related to education, digital transformation, and development. Only 17 countries have developed substantive standalone far reaching MIL policies. A few countries employed both policy approaches. However, this global attention is promising and a step in the right direction, it is yet to be translated into sustainable strategies and funding at the national, regional and global levels. It is worth noting that 23 countries still make no reference to MIL in any national policy document.

Data highlight significant regional disparities, especially when viewed relative to the number of countries in each region: in Latin America and the Caribbean 9 out of 33 countries in the region (27%), in Arab States 3 out of 12 countries (25%), and in Africa 8 out of 54 countries (15%) lack mention of MIL in policy frameworks, while 2 out of 46 countries in Asia and the Pacific (4%), and only 1 out of 49 countries in Europe and North America (2%).

Figure 8

Global status of mentions of MIL in broader policy frameworks



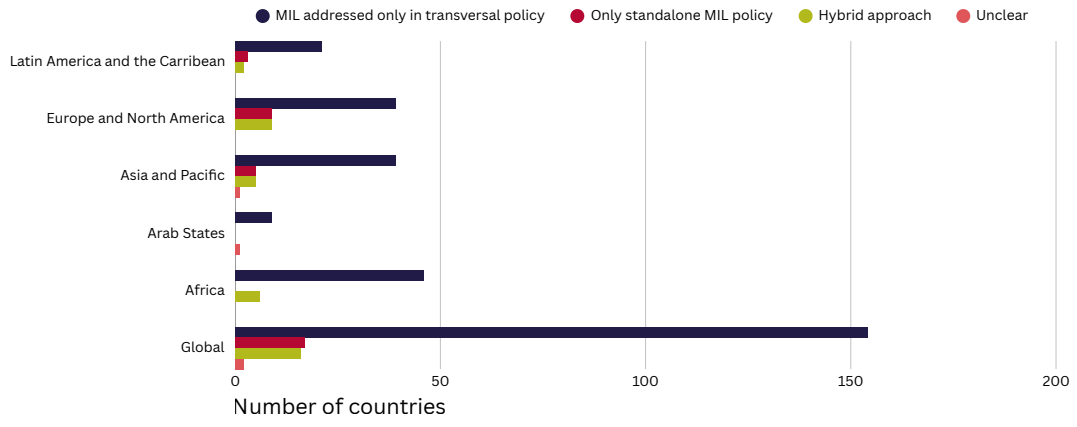
A closer look at how countries across different regions recognizing MIL in policy reveals significant inter-regional disparities in approach and institutional prioritization. The countries in Africa and the Arab States have no stand-alone MIL policy, while Europe and North America account for more than half of the world's stand-alone MIL policies (9 out of 17). Only 11.4% of countries in Asia and the Pacific and 13.0% in Latin America and the Caribbean have stand-alone MIL policies, indicating that while some national efforts are emerging, the majority of countries in these regions have yet to formalize MIL as a distinct policy priority.

At the same time, the relatively high percentage of countries in Africa and the Arab States that have included or mention MIL into other national policies - 85% in Africa (46 out of 54) and 75% in the Arab States (9 out of 12) - suggests that political will exists and that governments are engaging with MIL through established sectors such as education, digital transformation, media development, or culture.

Latin America and the Caribbean present a mixed picture. While active in mentioning MIL I broader policy frameworks, it also reflects within-region gaps in policy commitment - evidenced by the presence of both stand-alone policies and a relatively high number of countries with no reference to MIL at all (see Finding 1).

Figure 9

Global status of approaches for addressing MIL in policy frameworks



What this means?

When inspected alongside countries with standalone MIL policies, as in Figure 9, the inter-regional disparities in developing national MIL policy or approaches to framing MIL through other broader policy frameworks are significant and carry implications for how MIL is conceptualized, coordinated, and scaled across different parts of the world. These differences may reflect broader structural factors, including differences in understandings of MIL's relevance, competing national priorities, institutional capacity, regional cooperation dynamics, and access to policy resources.

Most countries mention MIL in broader national frameworks. Some countries go deeper in describing key MIL policy actions. However, the effectiveness of this approach needs to be evaluated and depends largely on the governance mechanisms in place. Without clear coordination and dedicated structures for accountability, MIL implementation risks becoming underfunded, fragmented, or inconsistently applied across sectors. For example, different ministries, agencies, or local actors may pursue MIL initiatives without shared priorities or alignment mechanisms, causing some sectors, such as education, to advance more rapidly than others, like youth programs or media initiatives, and vice versa.

Finding 2: MIL stand-alone policies are rare, which can limit impact

Out of 171 countries that mention MIL in policy, only 17 of them have a dedicated, standalone MIL policy. Of these, 16 have taken a hybrid approach, combining both stand-alone MIL policies and MIL integration within transversal policies, while 1 addresses MIL solely through a stand-alone policy. The vast majority (154 countries) rely only on mentioning MIL in broader or sectoral policy frameworks (See Figure 10).

Approaches of countries addressing MIL in policy

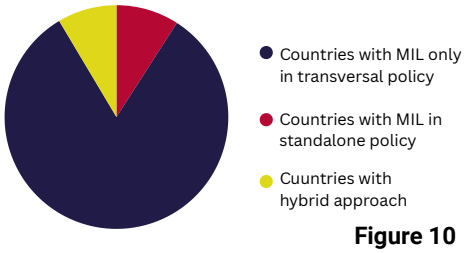


Figure 10

MIL in national education policies

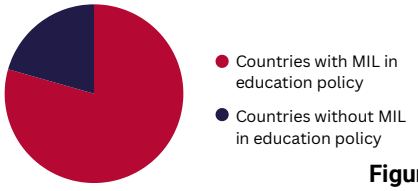


Figure 11

MIL in national digital policies

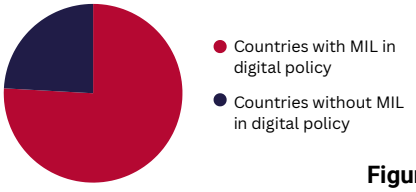


Figure 12

Most of the 170 countries that mention MIL or related competencies through transversal policy approaches (including 16 that take a hybrid approach) do so by embedding MIL into national digital policy or education frameworks. Specifically, 135 countries reference MIL in educational policy, while 129 include it in digital policy frameworks (See Figures 11-12). These domains often overlap, with many countries including MIL in both sectors. In a handful of cases, MIL is also referenced in other policy areas, such as development, youth, electoral, or security policies.

While most countries recognize MIL in national policy frameworks, it does not always translate into meaningful integration of MIL in school curricula. Countries with standalone or hybrid MIL policies are more likely to embed comprehensive MIL competencies into schools: 70% of the 17 countries with standalone or hybrid policies have integrated MIL into formal education, pointing to the fact that the most reliable way to support MIL integration into schools is through a standalone MIL policy.

Integration of MIL in school curricula of countries addressing it only through a standalone policy

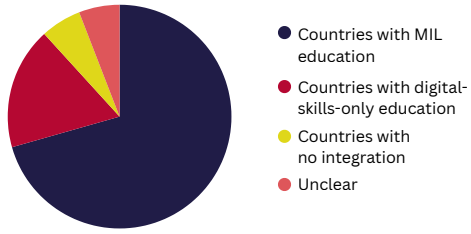


Figure 13

Integration of MIL in school curricula of countries, addressing it through a hybrid approach

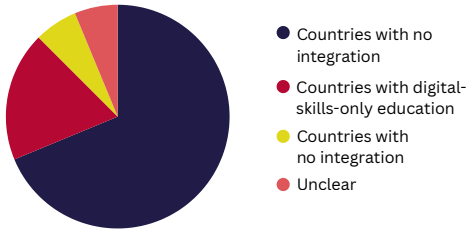


Figure 14

In contrast, among the 154 countries relying solely on transversal policy references, over a third (33.8%) limit implementation to hard technical digital skills, and nearly a fifth (17.5%) have not translated policy into any form of school programming. Only 44.2% have meaningfully embedded MIL into curricula. Thereby, even when MIL is addressed through a transversal policy, including education, this acknowledgement does not always translate into meaningful MIL integration in schools.

Integration of MIL in countries referencing it only as a part of a transversal policy

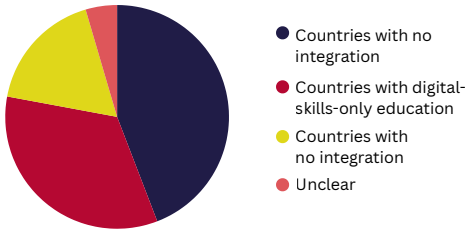


Figure 15

What this means?

The research shows that the approach taken to address MIL in policy frameworks strongly influences its integration into school curricula. Countries with standalone or hybrid MIL policies are more likely to achieve holistic adoption, including digital competencies, critical thinking, media analysis, civic engagement, and ethical content creation. In contrast, countries where MIL is integrated only through transversal policies tend to implement it in narrower terms, often focusing on technical ICT skills. The positioning of MIL within intersecting policy areas, which are, as seen, most commonly education and digital development, limits its scope to ICT-related components, focusing more on technical digital skills rather than on critical engagement with information and media systems.

Stand-alone MIL policies should not exist in isolation; they need to be aligned with the national, regional and international development priorities and contextualized in broader policy frameworks. For instance, MIL-related objectives should relate to specific sectors such as education, youth, media, or digital development, to ensure coherence and greater impact.

Finding 3: Key stakeholders involved in the integration of MIL both in policy and education

Across the 194 UNESCO Member States at the time of the research, a diverse range of stakeholders have contributed to national-level efforts to integrate MIL into policies and educational systems. Government institutions are involved in most countries. This is positive especially when combined with the broader stakeholder landscape that reflects a multi-actor ecosystem. Levels of participation vary among civil society, international organizations, educational institutions, and the private sector.

Stakeholders involved in MIL integration in policy and education

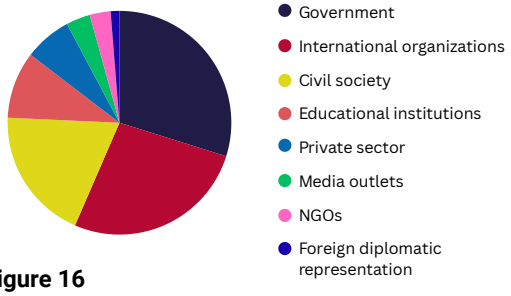


Figure 16

What this means?

Government involvement is observed in nearly every country, with 188 out of 194 countries reporting participation of state institutions in shaping MIL policies or implementing educational initiatives Governments' involvement in national MIL policies and strategies articulation and MIL integration education systems is a positive development and trend. This can be far reaching, especially when complemented with multi-stakeholders involvement and linked to national curriculum design and regulatory frameworks.

International organizations are the next most prominent contributors, active in 168 countries. Their strong presence reflects the global nature of MIL advocacy and the role of multilateral institutions—such as UNESCO—in supporting technical assistance, policy development, and cross-border knowledge exchange.

Civil society actors are also widely engaged, reported in 121 countries, highlighting the growing role of non-state actors in promoting MIL at the national level. The participation of educational institutions is recorded in only 61 countries, suggesting a gap between MIL policymaking and the institutions best placed to implement it within classrooms. This could reflect either a lack of coordination or limited mandates for educational institutions in national-level MIL development.

Private sector engagement appears in 43 countries, showing some level of partnership but still relatively limited compared to civil society and international actors. Engagement from other stakeholders, including media (22 countries), NGOs (19 countries), foreign diplomatic representations (8 countries), and research centers (5 countries) is far more limited overall.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➔ **Differences in policy approaches for MIL** can be addressed through improving broader structural factors, such as shared understandings of MIL's relevance, alignment with national priorities, institutional capacity, regional cooperation dynamics, and access to policy resources.

➔ **The most reliable way to support MIL integration into schools** is through a standalone MIL policy.

➔ **Stand-alone MIL policies should not exist in isolation;** they need to be aligned with national, regional and international development priorities as contextualized in broader policy frameworks. For instance, MIL-related objectives should relate to specific sectors such as education, youth, media, or digital development, to ensure coherence and greater impact.

➔ **The inclusion of MIL at the secondary education** level suggests a strong consensus that adolescence is a pivotal time for building critical media and information competencies.

➔ **Similarly, the presence at the primary level** also highlights recognition that children's exposure to online information ecosystems begins early, and foundational MIL skills can — and should — be nurtured from a young age.

➔ **UNESCO recommends a blended or mixed approach** of both standalone and multiple subject integration when integrating MIL into education systems and translating this into schools/classrooms.

➔ **See more recommendations** for national MIL policy and strategy development and MIL curricula development in the Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines and Media and Information Literacy Policy and Strategy Guidelines.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of digital environments, now amplified by generative AI and emerging technologies, are reshaping how people access, interpret, and share information. Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is more important than ever, yet its integration into education remains uneven. Critical thinking skills are often sidelined in many education systems, with the focus placed primarily on hard technical digital skills. This narrow approach leaves learners unprepared for increasingly complex media landscapes and limits the full development of MIL competencies.

These gaps reflect deeper structural and policy issues. Countries with dedicated or hybrid MIL policies show stronger integration in schools, while those relying solely on broader frameworks often limit MIL to technical competencies. Regional disparities and differences in institutional capacity suggest that recognition of MIL's importance is not enough: translating policy into practical classroom application remains a significant challenge.

Meeting these challenges will require deliberate strategies that connect policy, curricula, and practice. Collaboration between governments, schools, civil society, and international partners is crucial to ensure MIL reaches learners comprehensively. How education systems respond now will shape whether young people are able to critically navigate information, evaluate credibility, and engage effectively in the rapidly evolving digital environment. Continual research and monitoring are needed as stakeholders accelerate **MIL for all – closing the gaps.**

About this brief

This brief is produced by the UNESCO Unit for Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies, with the editorial coordination of Monika Martinovic, consultant of the Unit.

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