Freedom of Expression, Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies to support peace and human rights

Thematic paper

This document, prepared by UNESCO Communication and Information Sector and the UNESCO-UNAOC Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue University Network, with special thanks for inputs to Frau-Meigs, Divina; Hope Culver, Sherri; Wilson, Carolyn and Chouit, Drissia, is part several of thematic papers developed by UNESCO to inform the Revision of the 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace.

These papers focus on topics that are not currently covered in the Recommendation but that require greater attention in the revised version in view of ensuring it addresses contemporary challenges to lasting peace.

For more information on the revision visit the dedicated website.

UNESCO – a global leader in education

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education, providing global and regional leadership to drive progress, strengthening the resilience and capacity of national systems to serve all learners. UNESCO also leads efforts to respond to contemporary global challenges through transformative learning, with special focus on gender equality and Africa across all actions.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCO's Programme on Communication and Information

UNESCO defends and promotes freedom of expression, media independence and pluralism, and the building of inclusive knowledge societies underpinned by universal access to information and the innovative use of digital technologies. Through capacity-building, policy advice, international cooperation, monitoring and foresight in these fields, UNESCO empowers key actors with a view to ensuring that fundamental freedoms are guaranteed online and offline, in line with international standards.

This is all the more relevant to ensure the ethical development and use of emerging technologies, which have a growing impact on all aspects of the world's societies. Through UNESCO's actions in communication and information, citizens are also empowered to enjoy these fundamental freedoms through the development of 21st century skills, including media and information literacy and digital competencies, and the fostering of enabling environments for media pluralism and diversity.

Freedom of Expression, Media and Information Literacy and Digital Competencies to support peace and human rights

Executive Summary

Needs/challenges

UNESCO's constitution, adopted in 1945, states that the purpose of the Organization is to

> **"contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms" ; it underscores "that the purpose of the Organization is to collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication and to that end recommend such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image" (Article I. Purposes and functions, 1.2 (a).**

In this regard, the need for a revised 1974 UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms remains strong, including from an information and communication perspective.

It is, however, important to underscore that today's communication and information landscape has changed significantly since 1974 – as has broadened UNESCO's role as a specialized agency with a mandate to promote development in this area. These changes include, but are not limited to, the proliferation of digital technologies as the dominant method by which information and knowledge is shared and knowledge is created. A broader definition of literacy takes this evolving communication and information environment into account.

In addition, the global Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the global move towards the 'digital' in all aspects of life, including learning and employment. This underscores a number of global inequalities, not limited to only the digital divide, presenting challenges to international understanding, cooperation, peace and education. The impact of digital technologies on societies is fundamentally changing the ways in which individuals' access, produce and share knowledge. However, in this context, disparities in digital competencies between and within countries remain and threaten to leave further behind those most in need of access to information and learning, particularly women and girls and different marginalized and vulnerable groups. This unprecedented situation has underscored the crucial need for skills and tools needed to navigate knowledge, and the critical role of technologies as the world looks towards the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a view to 'building back better' globally.

The revised 1974 Recommendation, thus, needs to pay special attention to issues related to a changing global information landscape in order to maximize its impact and relevance. In this regard, the following priority actions for multi-stakeholder effectiveness are recommended:

- Ensuring that any actions within the framework of the Recommendation considers the changing communication and information landscape and places safeguarding freedom of expression at the core of its approach through alignment with international standards and norms on freedom of expression, safety of journalists and universal access to information. This includes standard-setting instruments, such as UNESCO's Internet Universality/ROAM-X indicators.

- Appropriation of funds and resources for adapting the Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines (UNESCO, 2021) and the Media and Information Literate Citizens: Think Critically, Click Wisely (Second Edition of the UNESCO Model Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators and Learners, 2021).

- Creation of a Global Observatory for Media and Information Literacy to foster independent research, coordinate actions and monitor progress, and the creation of regional centres to ensure visibility and sustainability of media and information literacy programmes and initiatives.

- Appropriation of funds and resources to support the implementation of the only UNESCO normative instrument in the area of technologies and education – the 2019 UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER), key global frameworks such as the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, for teacher training in the area of the use of technologies and education; and Learning for All: guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning to support the creation of inclusive Knowledge Societies. These resources represent key global tools for ensuring inclusion of all stakeholders including those that are marginalized in the building of knowledge in the increasingly digitally connected landscape.

Description of Key Terms

Freedom of expression: Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice." Along with its corollaries of freedom of information and press freedom, freedom of expression serves as an enabler of all other rights.

Media and information literacy: Media and information literacy is an interrelated set of competencies that help people to maximize advantages and minimize harm in the new information, digital and communication landscapes. Media and information literacy covers competencies that enable people to search, access, critically evaluate, use and contribute information and media content wisely; knowledge of one's rights online; understanding how to combat online hate speech and cyberbullying; understanding of the ethical issues surrounding the access and use of information; and engage with media and ICTs to promote equality, free expression, intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue, and peace. Capacities in these areas are indispensable for all citizens regardless of their ages or backgrounds.

Open Educational Resources (OER): Open Educational Resources (OER) are learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and redistribution by others. Open license refers to a license that respects the intellectual property rights of the copyright owner and provides permissions granting the public the rights to access, re-use, re-purpose, adapt and redistribute educational materials.

Information and communications technologies (ICT) / Digital / Technologies: These terms refer to computers, mobile phones, digital cameras, satellite navigation systems, electronic instruments and data recorders, radio, television, computer networks, satellite systems or almost anything that handles and communicates information electronically. ICT includes both the hardware (the equipment) and the software (the computer programmes in the equipment). Alternative words for ICT include 'digital' and 'technology/ technologies'.

Digital competencies: The ability to access, understand, share and create information wisely through digital technologies, including for learning and employment. This includes the ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information. It also refers to the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers, or to a person's ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment.

What has changed since 1974 in terms of freedom of expression, media and information literacy and digital competencies, and Open Educational Resources: Implications for a renewed 1974 Recommendations?

Freedom of Expression and Access to Information

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the conditions for realizing global education for peace and sustainable development. With 63% of the world's population on the internet (ITU 2021), the way that citizens access and understand information is tightly interwoven with digital infrastructure. Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, is also spurring innovation in teaching and learning processes and pedagogies. However, a global digital divide persists and remains much more pronounced in the developing countries, entrenching inequalities both within and between nations in terms of access to information and education overall.

In many ways, recent years have seen positive developments when it comes to public access to information. These have not only been enabled by digital tools, but also a growing international commitment to the importance of safeguarding access to information as a fundamental right. One sign of this trend is the increase in the number of countries with access to information laws and people's access to information. At least 22 UN Member States have adopted constitutional, statutory, and/or policy guarantees for public access to information since the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, bringing the global total to 132 (UNESCO 2022).

However, the challenges implicated in the issue of access to information in today's digital landscape should not be viewed through the lens of any single actor. Governments, the educational field, the media sector, and not least internet companies are all implicated in shaping access to information.

Indeed, many of the key challenges defining today's information landscape (which the education systems of today and tomorrow need to address) are tied to the fact that the rise of online platforms and other digital tools have altered the traditional "information contract", where citizens get the majority of their information from media outlets that have undergone some level of editorial control (Wardle & Derakhshan 2017). It has also altered the "communication contract" of how interpersonal opinions are exchanged (ibid). While rumours, conspiracy theories, or biased information are nothing new, the speed and complexity of how information travels through the digital landscape mean that such challenges take on a new scale (Uberti 2016), particularly when coupled with declining trust in traditional sources of information, such as the news mediate (Edelman 2021).

Recent years have given ample evidence of the potential harmful consequences of these dynamics: viral mis- and disinformation, hate speech, as well as online privacy infringements and surveillance. Crises related to health, climate change and election processes have all been associated with increased challenges in our information landscapes. During the COVID-19 outbreaks, mis- and disinformation spread with such rapidity and scale that a shadow "disinfodemic" (Posetti and Bontcheva 2020). The democratic risks to elections posed by mis- and disinformation have also been documented and covered by mass media and social media (Frau-Meigs 2019). The coverage of environmental issues has also increased, bringing attention to increased poverty risks, the fate of climate migrants and green-washing (Treen, Williams, O'Neill 2020). Citizens, including young people, are exposed to such content daily through online platforms – a challenge that educators need to be aware of in their daily work.

However, the education sector is far from the only one implicated in addressing these challenges. Internet companies are at the heart of today's information landscape, but their policies and practices regarding content moderation, algorithmic design, and other crucial mechanisms that determine what information reaches which user often remain opaque (Puddephatt 2021). Global calls for greater transparency of internet companies have become central part of the debate on the role of online platforms in shaping global access to information. As part of ongoing multi-stakeholder consultations on the topic, UNESCO has developed a set of 26 high-level principles serving to guide internet companies, policymakers, and other actors to enhance transparency and accountability (ibid).

Addressing the supply side of information is also crucial. Supporting quality journalism is a prerequisite for ensuring that everyone has access to independent, trustworthy information. However, as UNESCO's 2021/2022 edition of the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development warns, the media sector worldwide is in crisis. Not only have traditional business models been eroded by a shift in advertising revenue toward internet companies, but threats against journalism and press freedom crackdowns have also proliferated in recent years. At least 57 laws and regulations across 44 countries have been adopted or amended since 2016 that contain overly vague language or disproportionate punishments that threaten online freedom of expression and press freedom (UNESCO 2022).

The revised 1974 Recommendation, therefore, must take into account these mounting challenges that define how citizens today navigate the information landscape. What is encouraging is that these challenges have also been accompanied by a significant level of mobilization and commitment to tackle issues like mis- and disinformation and hate speech, safeguarding independent media, transparency of internet companies, and human rights in the online sphere.

There has been an evident rise of international norms on the importance of free, independent and pluralist media, particularly in the interests of achieving progress in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Notable among these is the Windhoek +30 Declaration on Information as a Public Good. This Declaration underlines the importance of supporting the financial sustainability of the media, along with supporting transparency of tech companies and media and information literacy.

Further, raising awareness among governments, law enforcement actors, and the judiciary on the importance of making sure that national legislations are in line with international human rights standards on freedom of expression (notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) is another step to support these efforts. As an example, UNESCO's Judges' Initiative has since 2013 raised the capacities of over 23,000 judicial actors on international and regional standards on freedom of expression, access to information and the safety of journalists.

Standard-setting when it comes to access to information on the internet is another avenue for action. UNESCO's Internet Universality Indicators provide a set of 303 indicators that aim to assess the state of Internet development at the national level according to the ROAM principles of human Rights, Openness, Accessibility, and Multi-stakeholder participation.

In addition to addressing the "supply side" of information through supporting independent media and enhancing transparency of internet companies, other measures more focused on education also need to be leveraged in order to address contemporary challenges in our communication and information landscape. These include leveraging Open Educational Resources, strengthening digital capacities, and promoting media and information literacy, outlined in further detail below.

Below are international instruments on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information that should inform the revision of the 1974 Recommendation.

- [UN Human Rights Council Resolution 38/7 on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/RES/38/7)](#)

- [UN Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/47/L.22)](#)

- [European Parliament Resolution on Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union (P8_TA(2018)0204)](#)

- [UN General Assembly Resolution 75/101-A on Information in the service of humanity (A/RES/75/101 A)](#)

- [Finlandia Declaration](#)

- [Jakarta Declaration](#)

- [The Windhoek+30 Declaration](#)

Media and Information Literacy

For over 40 years, starting before the Grunwald Declaration on Media Education was issued in 1982, UNESCO has been leading media and information literacy development globally. Media and Information literacy has focused on many information, media and digital opportunities and challenges. Actions have been undertaken across two broad areas of interventions, media and information literacy competencies in classrooms and project-based initiatives outside the classroom. Media and information literacy has supported online opportunities, especially concerning young people's creativity as well as digital citizenship, and has fostered adult online freedoms (UNESCO 2013, 2021).

However, despite the global progress made in this area since 1974 much more needs to be done. This is especially so because recent years have also seen a rise in major challenges in our information landscape, as outlined above. More recently, media and information literacy plays a vital role in addressing such complex challenges that involve the production, consumption and amplification of information for the public interest. To the "disinfodemic" observed during COVID-19, media and information literacy served as a tool to foster the use of critical thinking and alerting to the political instrumentalization of health issues (Rocha et al 2021). Prebunking and debunking strategies have also been developed as a rapid response to the political disinformation challenges (Tully et al 2020). Eco-media has emerged to deal with representations of climate change and alert to the environmental hazards of ICTs, from pollution and overuse of rare earths to computer waste (Lopez 2020). In all cases, using the latest interdisciplinary research, media and information literacy has

alerted to the role of media and mass media in shaping and modifying people's emotions, perceptions, biases and attitudes (Green et al 2020).

Media and information literacy has proved its effectiveness in successfully fighting mis- and disinformation and promoting critical and creative uses of media and digital technologies. Academic literature shows that competencies such as the selection, evaluation and verification of information can increase people's abilities to fight disinformation (Nygren et al 2021). Furthermore, research has observed correlations between acquired critical media and information literacy competencies and the capacity of people with previous training to perform better and be better protected in the face of the disinfodemic (Guldin et al 2021). Research also confirms that the successful impact of media and information literacy interventions increases with programs reinforced through multiple sessions (Scheibenzuber et al 2021), pointing at the fact that media and information literacy is not a quick fix and needs support in human and economic resources to be fully effective.

Media and information literacy provides citizens with the competencies to distinguish between true and false information, enabling them to make informed decisions in all aspects of their daily lives and thus contributing to the strengthening of democracy (Gallagher and Maghid 2017). Scientific research has shown that most of individuals' information comes from the media and social networks, and that it has become impossible to rely solely on traditional methods of education and guidance without relying on modern media mechanisms. Media and information literacy is a necessary discipline that ensures a modern education that complements the traditional education system in line with the progress of new technologies and information abundance (Al Wasl University Magazine, number 58, UAE).

Such rapid changes have modified the perimeter, scope and urgent need to expand media and information literacy for all, compared to its early Grunwald days. UNESCO has defined it as an interrelated set of competencies that help people to maximize advantages and minimize harm in the new information, digital and communication landscapes. Media and information literacy covers competencies that enable people to search, access, critically evaluate, use and contribute information and media content wisely; knowledge of one's rights online; understanding how to combat online hate speech and cyberbullying; understanding of the ethical issues surrounding the access and use of information; and engage with media and ICTs to promote equality, free expression, intercultural dialogue and interreligious dialogue, and peace. Capacities in these areas are indispensable for all citizens regardless of their ages or backgrounds (UNESCO 2021). Training in MIL is therefore a lifelong learning process that needs to start from an early age but involves as well continuous learning from experiences (Mihailidis et al 2019).

The growing research in media and information literacy has given birth to emerging fields of specialization and several thriving theories, according to the regions where media and information literacy is developing, from multiliteracies in Nordic countries to edu-communication in the Latin American region (Frau-Meigs et al 2020; Hoeschman et al 2021). They have opened up new additional areas of interest in algo-literacy and data literacy (Frau-Meigs 2022). They tend to represent media and information literacy as a full body of research and a field per se, that can enhance 21st century competences and empower users and citizens alike (Jolls & Johnsen 2018; Carlsson 2019). They are accompanied by a growing expertise in training and teaching in many regions, with full curricula being offered in classrooms.

Governments and education authorities have implemented mechanisms to develop national media and information literacy public policies and initiatives so as to mitigate the risks and magnify the opportunities afforded by mass and social media (UNESCO 2013, 2021; European Audiovisual Observatory 2016). In the past 10 years, countries around the world have increasingly recognized the urgency to promote media and information literacy for all. The European Union, for instance,

launched a five-year initiative to promote projects dealing with "Media Education for all" (2016-2021). It also promoted the creation of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) to fight disinformation, promote fact-checking and foster media and information literacy. This renewed interest was sparked by the challenges to verify trustworthy information from false and misleading content, but it also provides opportunities to enable people to benefit more from the new information and digital landscape, fostering their creativity and their well-being while alerting them to their rights and responsibilities.

On March 25, 2021, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed Global Media and Information Literacy Week on the United Nations international calendar, calling on countries around the world to "develop and implement policies, action plans and strategies related to the promotion of media and information literacy, and to increase awareness, capacity for prevention and resilience to disinformation and misinformation [...]". Many international agreements have been developed in recent years, since the Grunwald Declaration of 1982 that officially drew international attention to these competences that are urgently needed by all.

These agreements include:

- Prague Declaration "Towards an Information Literate Society" (2003)

- Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning – Beacons of the Information Society (2005)

- Paris Agenda or 12 Recommendations for Media Education (2007)

- Fez Declaration on Media and Information Literacy (2011)

- Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy (2012)

- Paris Declaration on Media and Information Literacy in the Digital Era (2014)

- Riga Recommendations on Media and Information Literacy in a Shifting Media and Information Landscape (2016)

- Khanty-Mansiysk Declaration "Media and Information Literacy for Building a Culture of Open Government" (2016)

- Youth Open Letter to Heads of International Development Organizations and States to Act on Media and Information Literacy

- Open Letter to Heads of International Development Organizations and States to Act on Media and Information Literacy

- UNESCO MIL Alliance Global Framework on MIL

- Seoul Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone (2020)

These processes have culminated in several major global decisions since 2019, including:

- UNESCO General Conference Resolution on Global Media and Information Literacy Week (2019)

- United Nations General Assembly Resolution on Global Media and Information Literacy Week (A/RES/75/267) (2021)

Looking ahead, the challenge is to ensure and support the worldwide development of media and information literacy policies and programmes at the national level. While government and educational institutions remain the key stakeholder groups in promoting media and information literacy for all, new actors such as digital communications companies, media organizations, and youth organizations are placing more interest in advancing this multi-stakeholder agenda.

Open Educational Resources (OER)

The use of Open Educational Resources (OER) introduces significant opportunities for more cost-effective creation, access, use, adaptation, redistribution, curation, and quality assurance of those materials, including, but not limited to translation, adaptation to different learning and cultural contexts, development of gender-sensitive materials, and the creation of alternative and accessible formats of materials for learners with special educational needs.

To support the achievement of the potential of OER, in 2019, UNESCO Member States unanimously adopted the UNESCO Recommendation on OER at the 40th UNESCO General Conference. The OER Recommendation is the only normative instrument of UNESCO in the field of technologies in education. It provides to Members States recommendations on the use of OER at national, regional and global levels, with a focus on international cooperation for inclusive knowledge sharing and creation.

This normative instrument identifies actions in five strategic areas to ensure that the power of OER could be harnessed to support quality learning and knowledge sharing. These areas of action are:

i. building stakeholder capacity to create, access, reuse, adapt and redistribute OER;
ii. developing supportive policies;
iii. promoting inclusive and equitable quality OER;
iv. fostering the creation of sustainability models for OER; and
v. facilitating international cooperation

These strategic areas address the leverages for ensuring that the full potential of OER is harnessed to support the creation of participatory, diverse and inclusive Knowledge Societies.

Furthermore, as promoted in this normative instrument, regional and global collaboration and advocacy in the creation, access, use, adaptation, redistribution and evaluation of OER can enable governments to optimise their own investments in educational content creation, as well as IT infrastructure and curation, in ways that will enable them to meet their defined national educational policy priorities more cost-effectively and sustainably.

Information and communication technologies (ICT) and the related digital competency development of stakeholders provide great potential for effective, equitable and inclusive access to OER and their use, adaptation and redistribution. ICTs can open possibilities for OER to be accessible anytime and anywhere for everyone including individuals with disabilities and individuals coming from marginalized or disadvantaged groups. ICTs can help meet the needs of individual learners and effectively promote gender equality and incentivize innovate pedagogical, didactical and methodological approaches. The related digital competencies can ensure that a wide range of stakeholders, which include the educational community, as well as libraries, publishers, civil society organizations are part of an inclusive eco-system that allows for the sharing and co-creation of knowledge.

Some recent international instruments on the above-mentioned topic that a revised 1974 Recommendation may want to consult include:

- UNESCO Open Educational Resources Recommendation (2019)
- UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers

Building Digital Competencies

While digital technologies can ensure equitable and inclusive access to information and knowledge, limitations remain for stakeholders to create, access, adapt, re-use and redistribute knowledge in a sustainable manner. These stem from challenges regarding accessibility of information, capacities to create and re-use openly licensed information, affordability, transparency of information in terms of peer review, privacy concerns, as well as sustainability-related issues. Digital skills and competencies are increasingly important to enable citizens to actively participate in the digital transformation in support of sustainable development, to benefit from lifelong learning and employability opportunities, as well as to respond to global challenges.

UNESCO is responding to these challenges by supporting on facilitating knowledge sharing, enabling policy dialogue and capacity building in the area of digital competencies through the implementation of recognized global UNESCO frameworks, namely the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, which focuses on teacher training in the area of the use of technologies and education; as well as Learning for All: guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning to support the creation of inclusive Knowledge Societies.

These two frameworks provide tools for the development of digital competencies to access learning mediated by technologies for each of the target groups, responding to the challenges of ensuring that stakeholders, including those that are marginalized, have access to the digital competencies and tools necessary to fully participate and support the inclusive knowledge creation.

Strengthening the digital competencies of teachers has emerged as one of most important and urgent challenges, due to the rapid technological development, the exposure of teachers' related competency gaps during the pandemic and the increasing use of OER-based resources to meet the online learning and teaching challenges.

UNESCO provides an innovative approach to the contextualization of the ICT CFT using OER in a multi-stakeholder approach, thus combining a theoretical framework with concrete results. It aims to facilitate Member States in contextualizing the ICT CFT to meet national and institutional needs through three actions: firstly, aligning the Framework's components to national objectives related to ICT in education; secondly, developing teacher training materials based on an OER approach; and finally, implementing teacher training programmes, based on these materials.

The publication 'Learning for All: Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Disabilities in Open and Distance Learning' provides an overview for governments, educational institutions, educators and curriculum developers. Developers, as well as quality assurance and recognition bodies, in developing ODL platforms, processes, courses, exams and more to address the needs of all users.

These guidelines take a contemporary standpoint on the increasingly technology-based approaches used to deliver education to persons with disabilities. In this regard, it recognizes the value of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as one of the most sustainable methods for overcoming the educational barriers faced by persons with disabilities; it also highlights and illustrates the facets of an ODL-

facilitated education system using Open Educational Resources (OERs); Free and Open Source Software (FOSS); and Open Access (OA). These guidelines provide an overview for governments, institutions, instructors and instructional designers, along with quality assurance and qualifications recognition bodies, when developing ODL platforms, processes, courses, examination and other with a view to incorporating the needs of all users. The guidelines have been structured in such a way that makes it easy for concerned stakeholders to navigate and assess the degree of capacity building to which they must commit to, based on the contextual selection of relevant criteria.

Some recent international instruments on the above-mentioned topic that a revised 1974 Recommendation may want to consult include:

- UNESCO Open Educational Resources Recommendation (2019)
- UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers
- Learning for All: guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning

Key Points

- Access to information laws have increased worldwide, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of safeguarding information as a global public good;

- There has been an evident rise of international norms on the importance of free, independent and pluralist media to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including peace and human rights;

- Global freedom of expression and access to information, despite major progress since 1974, has suffered recent setbacks. These are mostly related to the supply side of information;

- Online harms (including mis- and disinformation and hate speech) is threatening the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (including SDGs 4 and 16) in connection with education for peace, international understanding and education for fundamental freedoms;

- Digital platforms have emerged as central to how we are informed, learn about ourselves, the world around us, and how we communicate. This is occurring in the face of major deficit of platform transparency and accountability as well as a global crisis for independent media in terms of press freedom crackdowns and financial viability;

- Media and information literacy constitutes a basic human right related to lifelong learning and imperative to effective participation in today's information society – a key to social, cultural and economic development of nations and communities in the 21st century;

- Media and information literacy initiatives are urging governments and relevant institutions to develop media and information literacy policies and frameworks, ensuring youth-centered approaches;

- Media and information literacy has been integrated into several institutions and establishments, such as educational associations, libraries, archives and museums and many others in the promotion of the culture of media and information literacy;

- Technological progress has enabled the training of professionals and journalists working in the field of media and information literacy to evolve;

- Countering disinformation through media and information literacy competencies and tools is urgent for safeguarding democracy and development in general;

- Both public and private sectors (including social media platforms) should promote media and information literacy, thus also facilitating digital inclusion and assisting in the fight against mis- and disinformation;

- Open Educational Resources (OER) offer a significant opportunity for addressing inequalities in education especially as it pertains to digital transformations, as well as for ensuring that educational resources adapt to contemporary challenges;

- These dynamics can be addressed by education, notably by investing in digital competency development including supporting necessary skills for OER, and supporting media and information literacy;

- Digital technologies have advanced exponentially and has irreversibly transformed our global information landscape, with approximately 63% of the world population on the internet. However, a significant digital divide persists and entrenches global inequalities in access to information;

- The impact of digital technologies on societies, particularly further to the Covid-19 pandemic, is fundamentally changing the ways in which individuals' access, produce and share knowledge. In this context, disparities in digital competencies between and within countries remain and threaten to leave further behind those most in need of access to information and learning, particularly women and girls and different marginalized and vulnerable groups. This unprecedented situation has underscored the crucial need for skills and tools needed to navigate knowledge in this increasingly 'digital' information landscape;

- Digital technologies, including open educational resources and artificial intelligence, are spurring innovation in teaching and learning processes and pedagogies;

- Such technological tools must be accompanied by strengthening digital competencies to enable citizens to participate in digitized societies. Targeting educators in this regard is particularly important for positive change within the education sector;

- UNESCO and other actors in this space should continue to broaden the definition of literacy as tangible skills (such as reading, writing and computation) to include different types of text or subject matter vis oral, media, technological, art, and artifacts, reflecting our current communication and information landscape;

- Literacy should be defined and perceived as means to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich and fast-changing world for personal, social, occupational and educational goals;

- Digital skills and competencies are increasingly important to enable citizens to actively participate in the digital transformation in support of sustainable development, to benefit from lifelong learning and employability opportunities, as well as to respond to global challenges;

- Information and communication technologies (ICT) / technologies / digital resources and the related digital competency development of stakeholders provide great potential for effective, equitable and inclusive access to knowledge for all stakeholders, including those from disadvantaged and marginalized groups. ICTs can help meet the needs of individual learners and effectively promote gender equality and incentivize innovative pedagogical, didactical and methodological approaches.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In this technical note, we call on the revised recommendation to cover the following aims:

- A renewed emphasis on promoting international standards and norms on freedom of expression, safety of journalists and universal access to information;

- A deeper application of the concept of Internet Universality and its ROAM (Rights-based, Openness, Accessible and Multi-stakeholder) principles;

- Promoting media and information literacy for all to empower women and men of all ages to think critically about how they engage with information, media and technology;

- Promoting media and information literacy for everyone and by everyone to empower women and men of all ages to think critically and creatively about how they engage with information, media and technology;

- Adapting and using of the Global Standards for Media and Information Literacy Curricula Development Guidelines, leading to the development of national media and information literacy policies on training inside and outside classrooms;

- Adapting and using of the new resource Media and Information Literate Citizens: Thinking Critically, Clicking Wisely (Second Edition of the UNESCO Model Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educator and Leaners) [UNESCO 2013, 2021], leading to the development of national media and information literacy policies for training inside and outside classrooms;

- Fostering capacity-building on media and information literacy from primary to tertiary education, by appropriate teacher-training and effective teacher career development;

- Reporting regularly on the progress of media and information literacy so as to ensure visibility and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects, not just "sensible practices";

- Creating a Global Observatory for media and information literacy to foster independent research, coordinate actions and monitor progress, and the creation of regional centres to ensure visibility and sustainability of media and information literacy programs and initiatives;

- Including media and information literacy researchers and practitioners in the advocacy work with government and the technology and media industries to develop policies that serve the well-being and mental health of users while fostering online and offline freedoms;

- Promoting Open Educational Resources and fostering the implementation of the only UNESCO instrument in technologies and education: the 2019 UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources;

- Ensuring the contextualization of the two UNESCO global instruments to support digital capacity development for teachers and persons with disabilities: the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers and the Guidelines on the Inclusion of Learners with Disabilities in Open and Distance Learning.

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4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Sustainable Development Goals