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**Executive
Summary**

The Role of
Libraries in
Media Literacy

Executive Summary

In an increasingly polarised media environment, rife with disinformation and polluted by hate speech, this report aims to offer insight into the concept of media literacy. It explores the development of the term itself up to its current definition, identifies the initiatives led by supranational institutions to promote media literacy, and reflects on the role libraries may play in this field.

The first section is devoted to presenting how the understanding of media literacy has evolved, particularly through UNESCO declarations. It then outlines the key elements that make disinformation a critical issue in contemporary society, one that has raised significant concern among supranational institutions. This section concludes with a description of the broader media and information literacy ecosystem.

The second section focuses on the potential role and contribution of libraries to this phenomenon, considering their function as services aimed at promoting knowledge.

The challenge is immense, due to the growing scale and influence of disinformation in today's society. There is no shortage of examples. The task is vast, but awareness of the issue has increased, and steps are being taken to address it. Libraries can play an essential role in empowering citizens to think critically and independently.

The need for society to understand communication phenomena through media and information literacy (MIL) has been raised for over forty years. This is not a new phenomenon. However, due to the qualitative shift brought about by the formation of a radically different and complex media ecosystem, its importance is now central. This is evidenced by the initiatives and reports from institutions such as the United Nations, UNESCO and the European Union. It is therefore a crucial matter, linked to fundamental rights and with a direct impact on key global issues.

Disinformation is concerning as a symptom of fragmented societies. The UN's stark reports reflect this growing concern. Substantial efforts are being made to counter this harmful and dangerous trend. In this sense, the concept of media and information literacy has evolved. It has shifted from being seen as the ability to learn a new language, to the capacity to navigate a hostile media environment. From simply adopting a new medium to consume information, it now involves the ability to filter, assess, and use accurate information.

The Enlightenment motto *Sapere aude* is especially relevant today. "Dare to think and think with discernment" captures the purpose of MIL in contemporary society. At the beginning and the end of this motto lies freedom of expression and opinion, and the right to seek, receive, and impart information.

Numerous guides, policies, programmes and resources exist to promote MIL. There are clear principles that should guide action. Supranational institutions are working intensively on this issue, engaging with the media, shaping digital policy, and supporting educational and professional competencies.

Libraries, through the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), have been actively involved in the conceptual and regulatory development around MIL. They are in fact a fundamental part of this process and are seen as part of the solution to the disinformation problem. They do so because they are gateways to knowledge - accessible, nearby, and secure. Reliable. Accessible. They have the reach to serve communities where other public services may not. Their mission is to provide equal access to culture, education, and information. This is the foundation on which their contribution to MIL should be built.

In order to coordinate and structure action in this area, the proposal for a European Pact for Media Literacy is seen as necessary. The scale of the disinformation challenge, the complexity of the media ecosystem, and the need for coordinated action demand it. Work is underway at both macro and micro levels. On the macro level, we see directives, principles, alliances and regulations. On the micro level, there are MIL projects, networks, grants, and content. A Pact would help unify these efforts and could focus on the following:

— Creating a shared learning space for MIL. Given the range of initiatives already underway (observatories, competency frameworks, resources), having a shared space would facilitate cooperation.
— Developing and implementing programmes. This would include access to existing support, the promotion of new training programmes for professionals, and guidance on how to roll them out. Innovation could play a crucial role in this field.
— Sharing and connecting with other stakeholders. The breadth of the ecosystem and diversity of actors already involved in MIL is clear. Libraries are among them. Organising meetings and forums for cross-sector stakeholders, and creating directories of available resources, would be an initial step towards collaborative projects.

The following core components could serve as guidelines for developing a Media Literacy Pact:

1. **A coherent policy framework for MIL**. It is essential to emphasise that MIL is a necessary tool to guarantee fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, and the right to access and share information. The UN Secretary-General reports provide vital arguments in this regard.

2. **A framework for coordinating action**. In recent years, there has been a surge in MIL initiatives at all levels. A Pact would mean agreement and commitment. It would foster consensus and help map out the diverse actors and activities involved.

3. **A qualitatively new ecosystem**. MIL engages a range of public and private stakeholders from various sectors that make up the current media and technology landscape. The pace of change, constant evolution, and regulatory complexity require in-depth knowledge to develop tools that enable people to navigate this ecosystem effectively. Education systems and libraries are well-positioned public services to take on this role. Literacy is inherent to their mission as gateways to knowledge.

4. **Programmes and projects**. A Pact could bring visibility to the existing MIL programmes and projects. There are already a growing number of initiatives, some involving libraries. Understanding their objectives and results can help lay the foundations for the Pact.

5. **Resources**. A policy requires budgets. Given the growing recognition of MIL as a priority tool to combat disinformation, funding is being made available for such projects. For libraries to participate on equal terms with other actors, they too require adequate resources.

6. **Training and competencies**. The European Union has invested significantly in developing MIL-related competencies, as have professional library associations. It is crucial to support and scale up this work so that the knowledge reaches those responsible for delivering these services.

7. **Actions**. Combating disinformation and promoting media literacy requires an action plan. Such a plan should define specific activities, assign responsibilities, set objectives, and include mechanisms for evaluation. It should act as a roadmap for MIL initiatives.

8. **Sharing**. As already mentioned, a wide range of actors are involved in developing MIL. A Pact must be built on the willingness to share information and resources. Public institutions can foster this approach by encouraging joint projects between companies and public services from different sectors, as is already happening.

9. **Innovation**. Technological development brings with it innovation. Any effective response to the challenges posed by these media must be innovative by nature.

10. **Governance**. The more complex the ecosystem, the greater the need for governance mechanisms. There are already guidelines and frameworks at global and European levels aimed at regulating platforms and digital services. A Pact on MIL must establish its own governance framework.

In conclusion, the proposed Pact would support the development of a clear and structured policy for media and information literacy, integrating four key aspects: reaching consensus; responding to emerging challenges; mobilising resources; and developing a clear action plan.