



Policy Paper

Strengthening Resilience to Disinformation in Kosovo through Critical Thinking and Democracy Education



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Executive Summary

Kosovo is facing an information disorder environment in which disinformation is increasingly becoming a structural problem that undermines social well-being and democratic institutions. Current school textbooks are outdated and fail to address modern risks such as artificial intelligence (AI) and AI-generated deepfakes, social media algorithms, and crowd- or mob-driven censorship. Moreover, there is a significant gap between students' technical skills and teachers' pedagogical capacities to critically address these issues.

To address this challenge, this paper proposes a shift from passive teaching methods toward psychological inoculation. Drawing on the practices of the Baltic states, the objective is not only to teach students how to correct false information, but also to enable them to identify manipulation techniques before being exposed to them. The **Verifiko** platform developed by D4D Institute can serve as a practical tool for integrating this type of education through games, debates, and real-life case studies that can be utilized by students, parents, and teachers.

To achieve sustainable impact, the paper proposes a coordinated approach based on three pillars:

Institutionalization of the Curriculum: Media literacy education should move beyond fragmented implementation and be integrated as a compulsory subject in grades 9–12 of secondary education. Furthermore, it should be mainstreamed as a cross-curricular competency within subjects such as Albanian language, history, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

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Capacity Building: Teachers should transition from the role of lecturer to that of facilitator through intensive training on digital ethics and AI, including the designation of one lead teacher for media literacy education in each school.

Ecosystem Engagement: Establish a structured collaborative framework between state institutions, educational institutions, parents, and civil society. This should include the development of dedicated parent-oriented modules on the *shkollat.org* platform and the promotion of school-based fact-checking clubs.

By 2026, Kosovo must strive to fully align its national education system with European Digital Citizenship Standards. The ultimate objective is to cultivate a resilient generation; one equipped to resist manipulation and capable of actively contributing to a healthy and transparent public sphere. **Key Objectives:**

- **Institutionalization:** Introduction of media literacy education as a mandatory subject for grades 9–12 and as a cross-curricular competency.
- **Capacity Building:** Transforming teachers into facilitators of the learning process through training on digital ethics and AI.
- **Collaboration:** Engaging parents and civil society through the *shkollat.org* and *verifiko.info* platforms, as well as through fact-checking clubs.



Introduction

This paper was prepared as part of an initiative implemented by D4D with the **aim of raising awareness about the scope of the threat posed by disinformation and increasing knowledge on how to identify and counter it through critical thinking, democracy education, and media literacy**. The overall objective of this initiative is to enhance media transparency and critical thinking in general, and media literacy in particular. The plan to achieve this objective is through educating young people, with the involvement of families, school professionals, and the wider public, on the responsible consumption of digital content, while introducing European fact-checking standards. D4D has previously implemented various projects, such as the National Democracy Education Action Plan (NDEAP), focused on media literacy, critical thinking, and education for democratic citizenship.

The true cost of disinformation is not measured solely through false news, but through the real and long-term damage it causes to society. It stems from several key categories:

- ⇒ digital advancements, where deepfakes and visual manipulations can destroy reputations, influence elections, or incite violence;
- ⇒ the misuse of religious beliefs, where false narratives are presented as sacred in order to justify hatred, exclusion, or conflict; and
- ⇒ systematic attacks against science, which have led to widespread distrust in vaccines, placing millions of lives at risk and overburdening healthcare systems.

In all cases, disinformation erodes public trust, weakens institutions, and makes society more vulnerable to political, health, and security crises.

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D4D has developed the [Verifiko](#) platform as a free and practical tool to help young people, teachers, and parents distinguish reliable information from false information, while also learning more about critical thinking and disinformation. The platform contains modules designed for use both in classrooms and in extracurricular activities. The platform is intended to serve as an interactive tool that is continuously updated with new content, where cases of disinformation are reported by students and jointly maintained with schools, parents, and students themselves. D4D has also worked directly with teachers by presenting the platform to them and remains available to provide ongoing support. The objective is for the platform to remain openly and widely accessible, enabling teachers, students, and parents not only to use it, but also to contribute to it with examples, report cases of manipulation through the platform, and participate in its development, all under professional supervision.

To effectively address the challenge of disinformation, D4D aims to bring together a broad ecosystem of stakeholders that must operate in a coordinated manner. At the center of this effort are public institutions responsible for education and policymaking, including the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST), Municipal Departments of Education (MDEs), and the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (KPI), which through its sectors for research, general education, lifelong learning, and evaluation and standards contributes to the modernization of the education system. These institutions are complemented by schools as key implementation spaces (through media clubs and parents' councils), parents themselves as actors of non-formal education, textbook publishers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) specialized in media literacy and critical thinking, as well as university journalism departments and professional media organizations that play a role in exposing and debunking false information. Only through cooperation among these actors, from policymakers and educational institutions to media and civil



society, can a sustainable and comprehensive approach against disinformation be developed.

Discussions and Guiding Questions

Prior to drafting this document, D4D engaged with various stakeholder groups whose perspectives have been incorporated into this paper. Through these open, yet structured and moderated discussions, participants including students, experts, teachers, and parents proposed a range of concrete ideas, which are presented here. The objective was to generate practical and implementable ideas for the next steps, including how such a platform can be used as a learning tool, how it can be linked to existing curricula, and how teachers can be supported in integrating this content in a sustainable manner. To date, topics such as these are only minimally addressed in schools, and initiatives of this kind have largely depended on donor support. However, the goal is to institutionalize this important subject as part of the core curriculum. Some of the prompts to stimulate discussion are listed below:

State of Play. How is the topic of disinformation and critical thinking currently addressed, if at all, in the secondary schools with which you are familiar? (Please provide concrete examples.) What are the main obstacles teachers face in addressing this topic? (Time, training, materials, institutional support.)

Use of *Verifiko* as a Learning Tool. Which *Verifiko* modules (e.g., “Types of Disinformation” or “Online Safety”) appear most suitable for upper secondary school students? How can activities be adapted for grades 10–12? How can the modules be transformed into 45–90-minute lessons that teachers can use within existing subjects?

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Curriculum and Institutional Integration. In which upper secondary school subjects would it be most natural to integrate this content (e.g. Civics/Citizenship, Informatics/ICT, Language and Literature, History, Media/Communication)? Which integration format would be preferable: as a standalone module, as a cross-curricular topic, or as an extracurricular activity?

What role can the Ministry of Education and pedagogical centers play in ensuring institutional inclusion and sustainable implementation?

Teaching Methods and Student Engagement. Which types of practical activities (debates, hands-on fact-checking exercises, multimedia projects, school newspapers, or “check-and-report” activities through Verifiko), would be most engaging for students? How can students be involved in content creation (e.g., through mock false school reports that students verify and publish with their findings)?

Sustainability and Impact Measurement. How should the success of a pilot project be measured? (E.g. example, through pre- and post-assessments on critical thinking, qualitative feedback from teachers, or the number of cases reported and verified through Verifiko.) What concrete steps should be undertaken within the next 3, 6, and 12 months to launch and scale the initiative?



Problem Diagnosis

Disinformation in Kosovo is not solely a matter of technology, and older generations may recall that propaganda was used even in periods when technology was extremely limited. A combination of weak critical thinking skills and the rapid development of AI is outpacing the institutional and societal capacities needed to respond effectively, resulting in several pronounced challenges.

In Kosovo, disinformation and the lack of critical thinking are increasingly becoming a structural educational and societal problem. Media literacy and critical thinking are addressed only in a fragmented manner within schools, primarily through existing subjects and donor-supported projects. Since 2023, media literacy has existed as an elective subject, but without sufficient support through quality materials and without systematic support for teachers. Below, we have broken down the diagnosis into several categories based on the findings:

1. Political Disinformation and Classical Propaganda. This category includes traditional propaganda narratives and political manipulation, such as the legacy of state propaganda and political polarization. Particularly among older generations, there is a widespread tendency toward the unconditional acceptance of information that aligns with preexisting beliefs. Comments on social media are often treated as facts, without verification or contextual analysis. Some journalists are constrained by self-censorship due to political pressure, organized online attacks, or anticipated crowd or mob backlash. Social polarization, whether political, generational, or otherwise, has further contributed to the lack of a critical approach toward information.

2. Digital Disinformation and AI. Smartphones are used extensively, primarily for social media consumption, where children are exposed to content without filters and without adequate data

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protection safeguards. Visual manipulation and AI-generated content, including deepfakes, are making it increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from fabrication. Students are using AI tools for school assignments without understanding how these systems function, their limitations, or the ethical rules governing their use (e.g., submitting identical assignments generated through ChatGPT). More broadly, there is a complete lack of guidance regarding the ethical use of AI, both for students and for teachers.

3. Lack of Critical Thinking in Media Consumption. Anti-vaccination and anti-science narratives continue to circulate, fueled by social media platforms and authoritative public figures. The inability to distinguish scientific fact from personal opinion, a problem that may also affect teachers, carries significant social costs, including millions of unvaccinated people globally, overburdened healthcare systems, and loss of life. Many teachers still struggle to distinguish fact from opinion, making the integration of this field into the education system even more essential. The digital component of the current curriculum contains very few activities related to media literacy education. Even in school textbooks, media-related topics are presented only in general terms, rather than through detailed or practical approaches. The lack of independent critical thinking also creates space for forms of crowd- or mob-driven censorship, where individuals fear expressing their opinions due to fear of collective judgment.

4. Outdated School Textbooks and Curricular Gaps. The current state of school textbooks, particularly in the subject of Civic Education, presents a serious challenge due to outdated materials that fail to keep pace with developments in technology and social media. Chapters addressing media topics across different educational levels are often written by authors who are not specialists in media studies, resulting in content that is no longer current or relevant. This problem is not isolated to Kosovo but has global dimensions; actually, two of the world's leading



media literacy textbooks fail to adequately explain the current technological environment, with their latest editions published in 2021 and 2023. Even specialized publications, such as those produced by Albas, fail to address essential issues, including the fact that approximately 50% of media content today originates from the field of public relations. Although some school subjects touch upon elements of media literacy, they do not address the core issue, because they fail to clearly explain how to verify news or critically analyze information. Furthermore, these textbooks ignore highly influential platforms such as TikTok and fail to address the trivialization and low-quality content circulating on them, leaving students unprepared for the realities of the digital environment.

5. Misuse of Religious Beliefs and Identity-Based Narratives.

Religious beliefs are sometimes used to legitimize false, exclusionary, or polarizing narratives. This reduces critical thinking due to the moral authority attributed to such narratives. At the same time, in societies such as ours, many outdated beliefs and practices continue to circulate as accepted knowledge despite having no empirical basis. As a result, many individuals spread unverified information by relying on phrases such as “someone told me” or “I saw it somewhere,” meaning that unverified information spreads rapidly.

6. The Pedagogical Gap and the Lack of Media Literacy Education.

Another key issue raised is the misunderstanding of media literacy education, which is often incorrectly reduced solely to the fields of media and journalism. In reality, media literacy encompasses a much broader spectrum, including the identification of disinformation, assessment of cyber risks, and recognition of secure digital platforms. One of the main obstacles in this regard remains the teaching workforce itself. The lack of understanding among teachers regarding the importance and substance of this field is considered a serious deficiency within the

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education system. The fact that many educators still struggle to distinguish fact from opinion indicates that classroom instruction is often carried out only formally, without addressing the core of the problem. Many teachers do not know how to distinguish fact from opinion and do not fully understand the concept of media literacy. Lessons are often completed in a purely formal manner, without meaningful engagement with the substance of the topic. As a result, there is a substantial mismatch between the technical abilities of students, as digital natives, and the traditional teaching methods used by educators.

7. The Reading Crisis and Shortened Attention Spans. Children read significantly less than before and face serious problems with reading comprehension. The dominance of short-form videos, ranging from 30 seconds to 3 minutes, has reduced the capacity for sustained focus and analytical thinking. The brain remains relatively passive during video consumption, whereas reading activates critical thinking processes. Dependence on scrolling behavior and the logic of digital marketing has fragmented attention spans even among older generations. Parents themselves often lack basic knowledge regarding AI and digital platforms; despite the significant influence they have on the education of their children.



Experiences in Kosovo to Date and the Challenges of Institutionalization and Scaling

In Kosovo, several **good models and notable initiatives are already contributing to the fight against disinformation** and the strengthening of media literacy for the broader public. **Krypometri** is an independent fact-checking platform within **Kallxo.com** that explains why certain Facebook content constitutes disinformation or lacks proper context, helping users understand the reasoning behind content labeling. **Hibrid.info** is a platform that systematically works on factchecking, critical analysis of content, reporting on misinformation, media and digital literacy training, and capacity building for journalists and citizens, with the aim of reducing the impact of misleading content on the public. In addition to these actors, the **OSCE Mission in Kosovo** has also published reports and **guidance materials on media and information literacy** as part of broader efforts to strengthen media resilience and critical analysis skills within society. Earlier initiatives, such as **Kosovision** implemented by Kosovo Education Center (KEC), promoted democratic values through activities designed for fifth-grade students. These initiatives cooperate directly or indirectly with schools, civil society organizations, and media outlets in order to raise public awareness, equip citizens with tools to distinguish reliable information from manipulative content, and strengthen analytical capacities against disinformation. The **media literacy platform developed by Democracy Plus (D+)** offers interactive courses and a **Disinformation Vulnerability Index** that analyzes the most vulnerable points within society in relation to false information. The **Media Smart – Youth Vlog Against False Information** project, implemented by **The Balkan Forum and other partners**, has trained young people to produce creative content

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that combats disinformation and promotes critical thinking among the wider public.

These examples demonstrate that **concrete interventions** already exist in practice, ranging from practical trainings and digital platforms to courses and multimedia projects. However, **they also reveal persistent challenges**, including the lack of sustainable curriculum integration, insufficient local practical materials, and unequal support for different groups of students.

The Kosovo Curriculum Framework provides space for the formal inclusion of learning competencies, including digital competencies and media literacy, and several interventions have already begun in this direction. Civic Education contains a relatively strong chapter on media literacy, while in early education practical approaches to digitalization have been piloted in order to promote critical thinking through the use of digital tools both inside and outside the classroom. There are elective subjects dedicated to media literacy, several teacher and educator trainings have been developed, practical guides have been prepared, and the Ministry of Education has expressed willingness to further advance the integration of technology in line with international good practices.

Nevertheless, these efforts have remained limited in impact for several structural reasons. Teacher trainings are not sustainable and often do not go beyond formal licensing requirements. Textbooks and educational materials are either lacking or insufficiently attractive and up to date. The capacities of teachers and students to identify disinformation, particularly AI-generated content, remain weak. These problems are further compounded by the lack of parental involvement, ambiguities surrounding the role of educators, and difficulties in integrating media literacy as



a cross-curricular competency, particularly within pre-university education.

In summary, the primary challenge remains the absence of a more institutional and long-term approach capable of generating substantial impact within the formal school system. Although formal foundations exist, the lack of clear planning, practical materials, and systematic support explains why interventions to date have not produced the desired effect.

From European Standards to the Practices of the Baltic States

According to European Union standards, more than 80% of future jobs will require advanced digital competencies. In this context, media literacy can no longer remain an optional subject. These competencies are now among the essential skills required for the future labor market, as well as for national security and societal resilience. The Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), serve as global references in this field due to their long-standing experience in confronting systematic external disinformation.

Estonia has integrated digital literacy as a mandatory competency and is ranked as the most resilient country against disinformation in Europe. Since 2024, this field has been recognized as one of the country's eight mandatory national competencies. **Lithuania** has adopted a "Whole-of-Society" approach by creating a StratCom community in which NGOs, journalists, and educators collaborate in the real-time production of educational materials. **Latvia** has focused on the inclusion of minority communities, particularly Russian-speaking youth,

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through Skills Labs aimed at strengthening social cohesion. **Finland** has incorporated media literacy as a systematic component of the national curriculum, while **Norway**, through programs implemented by the European Wergeland Centre (EWC), promotes digital citizenship as a pillar of democracy.

During implementation in these countries, several important lessons were learned from the challenges they encountered. Teachers often perceive media literacy as an “additional burden” rather than as an essential requirement. At the same time, AI-generated content, including deepfakes, evolves more rapidly than school textbooks can be updated, making it necessary to rely on interactive online tools that can be continuously expanded and updated.

Main Objective

The problem of disinformation in Kosovo is not merely a matter of technology or content, but rather a combination of: (a) the lack of critical thinking, (b) insufficient media literacy education, (c) the crisis of reading and concentration, (d) political and identity-based polarization, and (e) rapid technological developments that are outpacing institutional capacities. This diagnosis demonstrates the need for media literacy and critical thinking to be treated as essential life competencies, integrated sustainably into the education system, initially as a strengthened elective subject and subsequently as a mandatory subject.

Lessons should be drawn from the challenges and achievements of other countries, while national approaches should incorporate developments related to **AI** and the standards of the **Council of Europe Convention 108+**. Teachers should transition from the role of absolute authority to that of facilitator, encouraging debate and critical thinking. The objective is to equip students with the



ability to distinguish fact from opinion, understand the consequences of social media use, and safely navigate television, radio, and the Internet. To achieve this objective, interactive platforms are needed that engage students, parents, and educators in a shared learning process.

Institutionalizing Media Literacy and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking and media literacy should be integrated comprehensively throughout the entire education cycle, from preschool to university level. Beyond the technical aspects, the focus should be placed on digital psychological inoculation. Rather than correcting falsehoods after they have already spread (debunking), students should be equipped with the necessary tools to identify in advance (prebunking) techniques of emotional manipulation and false dilemmas. To effectively engage the “TikTok generation,” communication must occur on the same frequency and through approaches that resonate with them, while also involving parents in understanding both the risks and opportunities associated with AI.

1. Review of School Textbooks. As a first step, it is proposed to lead a joint process for the development of training programs dedicated to critical thinking within literacy education. It is essential to conduct a clear assessment of how media literacy is currently being implemented, whether as an elective subject or as an interdisciplinary component, while evaluating it against the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. The current process of reviewing school textbooks presents an opportunity to assess and integrate media-

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related content into relevant subjects, ensuring that materials do not remain purely theoretical, but are practically implemented by teachers. Consultations could then be developed between pedagogical centers and MEST to integrate the solution initially as a pilot activity that could later be expanded on a broader scale.

2. Curriculum Integration and a Mandatory Subject. The objective is to ensure that media literacy does not remain an isolated activity, but becomes a feature embedded throughout the entire education system. One possible model is the **hybrid** approach: The integration of critical thinking into existing subjects (e.g., analysis of clickbait in Language and Literature; source verification in History; and online safety in ICT). The second, and potentially more effective, model is the introduction of a **dedicated mandatory subject**. From grades 9 through 12, such a subject would enable in-depth treatment of topics that cannot be adequately covered elsewhere. Leaving this field solely to individual choice, as an elective subject, does not guarantee the level of protection students need in the digital era. Several models could be piloted across different schools using ready-made modules from Verifiko. A pilot based on the Baltic Mediathon model could also be launched.

3. Digital Infrastructure and Interactive Materials. Recognizing the reality in Kosovo, where access to technology differs between urban and rural areas, a combination of physical textbooks and online modules is necessary. One possible objective would be to create the first subject taught without a traditional textbook, using instead an application (“app”) capable of functioning offline and accessible even through basic smartphones. This app, or its web-based version, could utilize Verifiko modules and potentially be integrated into the shkollat.org platform. Verifiko could further guide teachers toward additional resources, including games, audiobooks, and supplementary educational materials.



4. Capacity Building: Teacher Training Teachers should transition from the role of traditional lecturers to facilitators, a role that requires methodological skills more than subject-matter specialization alone. This requires **teacher training** on algorithms, media ethics, and AI. Where large-scale training is not immediately feasible, one designated teacher in each school could serve as a focal point. Training teachers to integrate techniques that encourage students to solve real-life cases of disinformation would help close the gap between students' technical abilities and teachers' pedagogical knowledge.

5. A Supportive Ecosystem Involving Schools, Parents, and the Community. Media literacy education should extend beyond the classroom through a comprehensive ecosystem that includes **clubs**, such as debate clubs and fact-checking clubs that could operate voluntarily with additional grant support. It should also include **parent education** through the creation of informational spaces addressing risks on TikTok and family online safety, as well as **civic participation initiatives**, such as the use of digital platforms for school voting or student parliaments, demonstrating how accurate information directly affects collective decision-making.

Ultimately, all pilot projects would be evaluated in order to make informed decisions regarding which experiences should be institutionalized as part of the permanent curriculum, and which mechanisms should ensure their continuous updating in line with technological and societal developments. Following the pilot phase, the curriculum could mandate that 10% of social science instructional hours be dedicated to “Digital Democracy Laboratories” by 2027.



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