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MLI MEDIA LITERACY INDEX

The Media Literacy Index 2026

Measuring Vulnerability of Societies to Disinformation

Policy brief | **January 2026**

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Executive Summary

The Media Literacy Index (MLI), published by the Open Society Institute – Sofia since 2017, assesses the resilience of 41 European societies to the "post-truth" phenomena, including disinformation and misinformation. The 2026 edition is released in the context of a shifting landscape influenced by the rise of generative AI, increased information warfare (notably following Russia's invasion of Ukraine), and significant domestic political polarisation.

Key Findings and Rankings

The 2026 Index identifies a four-way tie for the top position, reflecting a high level of resilience in Northern and Western Europe:

- **The top performers (Cluster 1) are Denmark, Finland, Ireland, and the Netherlands.** They share the first four places in the ranking with 71 points each. Finland, the long-standing leader since 2017, moved to 2nd place by a minimal margin.
- **The bottom performers (Cluster 5) are Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania, which rank the lowest**, indicating higher vulnerability to disinformation.
- **There are geographic patterns with a persistent "East–West divide".** The cluster analysis, which unites countries with similar characteristics, shows that the top-performing cluster is dominated by Northwest European countries, while the two clusters at the bottom of the ranking primarily consist of Southeast European countries, including the Western Balkans.
- **The best performers have a robust combination of free media, high quality education and high trust among people in society**, which explains their excellent ranking. Conversely, the countries at the bottom of the ranking have low scores due to a mixture of deficits in education, media freedom or interpersonal trust.
- The report includes **a global comparison** with an "Expanded Index" of 47 countries, in which Canada and Australia join the top-performing cluster, while the USA falls in the second.

The methodology of the Index ranks countries based on several weighted predictors of media literacy:

- **Media Freedom (40%):** Derived from Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders scores.
- **Education (45%):** Primarily based on PISA scores (Reading, Science, and Math) and tertiary education enrolment.
- **Trust (10%):** Measuring interpersonal "Trust in others".
- **E-Participation (5%):** Assessing the use of ICT for political participation.

This report calls for a "common sense" approach to addressing the race to the bottom caused by unchecked disinformation as there is no silver bullet, and a combination of approaches would be necessary:

- Education along with regulation: prioritising media literacy from an early age, e.g. as practiced in Finland, which avoids the side effects associated with some forms of regulation.
- Psychological awareness: teaching citizens about psychological triggers like confirmation bias and emotional manipulation.

The best performers have a robust combination of free media, high quality education and high trust among people in society, which explains their excellent ranking. Conversely, the countries at the bottom of the ranking have low scores due to a mixture of deficits in education, media freedom or interpersonal trust.

The context

Two developments have probably influenced the disinformation context the most in the recent past with possibly fundamental consequences. First was the rise of social media and the fragmentation of traditional media in the late 2010s, which provided new tools for the spread and amplification of messages. Then came the Covid–19 epidemic, which among other things, raised existential anxieties. The lockdowns added to societal insecurity and gave rise to a new wave of narratives and conspiracy theories. The fragile sense of global solidarity from the beginning of the crisis quickly gave way to divisions and fear.

The full-scale war Russia has been waging against Ukraine since 2022 has been accompanied by an increasing massive propaganda and disinformation campaign – what military experts call cognitive warfare – as an integral part of the war effort. China's influence campaigns have intensified too in pursuit of a greater power status.

What has been notable in 2025 is the rift in the Western alliance. The United States, during President Trump's second term, has abruptly reversed its policy. This started with VP J.D. Vance's speech in Munich and continued through the US National Security Strategy and its withdrawal from the joint EU-NATO European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. What is clear is that the US and Europe – not just the EU but also the UK and others – are on a collision course as far as addressing disinformation is concerned, and at the time of writing, the two sides have not even agreed to disagree yet.

Therefore, the current context presents several main challenges, some of which are long-standing and some of which are newly emerging:

- Increased information warfare by foreign powers. The most notable example is the propaganda as part of the war of Russia against Ukraine. Information warfare has not been an afterthought, accompanying the war; it has been a core element of it.
- Rising domestic political polarisation, which is both a cause and a result of the disinformation. The role of disinformation in partisan polarisation is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Disinformation is used for political mobilisation, which in turn increases polarisation. However, as politicians or political influencers bet on disinformation as a winning tactic, in the long term, this may be a race to the bottom.
- Generative AI (text, images and video) is multiplying the new technological challenges initially posed by social media in the spread and amplification of disinformation. These technological challenges have a double role – they undermine traditional media and journalists as gatekeepers of information and then enable immensely the spread of disinformation and misinformation. At the same time, the rise and adoption of AI is inevitable, with companies such as Nvidia, which supplies the chips for the industry and has a market value of nearly 5 trillion USD – roughly the size of Germany's and Japan's GDPs – showcasing the power of technological enterprises.

How the predictors are measured: about the index methodology

The current paper contains an instrument for measuring if not media literacy itself, then predictors of media literacy with the aim to rank societies' potential for resilience in the face of the post-truth, disinformation, and misinformation (e.g. "fake news") phenomenon.

The model employs several indicators (the Methodology table) that correspond to different aspects related to media literacy and the post-truth phenomena. Level of education, freedom of the media, trust in society, and the usage of new tools of participation are the selected predictors of media literacy. As they have different importance, the indicators are included with a corresponding weight. The media freedom and education indicators carry the most weight, with reading literacy as a sub-indicator attributed the most importance in education. The trust and e-participation indicators are distributed in the remaining share. The index converts the data into standardized scores from 0 to 100 (lowest to highest) and ranks the countries from 1 to 41 (highest to lowest position).[1]

The Media Literacy Index was developed by the Open Society Institute – Sofia and initially included 35 European countries for its published editions in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021.[2] In 2022, the number of countries was expanded to 41 in Europe to allow for further comparison with minor changes in the used sources to accommodate for the additional states.[3]

1 The used methodology and sources are based on the Catch-Up Index of the Open Society Institute – Sofia; the latest available data is as of 15 June 2025. You can find a description of the methodology in the Catch-Up Index reports, available in the Documents and Links section of the website www.thecatchupindex.eu and https://osis.bg/?p=4135&lang=en . Missing data were replaced using imputation procedures as described in the report.

2 You can find the latest edition of the Media Literacy Index 2021 at https://osis.bg/?p=3750&lang=en

3 In 2021, Mr. Joe Carr, a volunteer for Media Literacy Now and a semi-retired Cisco Systems executive, modified the existing model of the Media Literacy Index in order to include and compare a larger number of countries around the world. The analysis was published by the US-based Media Literacy Now organisation.

Methodology of the Media Literacy Index

Indicators	Weight
Media Freedom indicators	
Freedom of the Press score by Freedom House	**20%**
Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders	**20%**
Education indicators	
PISA score in reading literacy (OECD)	**30%**
PISA score in scientific literacy (OECD)	**5%**
PISA score in mathematical literacy (OECD)	**5%**
Tertiary education enrolment (%) (World Bank)	**5%**
Trust	
Trust in others (World Values Survey)	**10%**
New forms of participation	
E-participation Index (UN)	**5%**

*The table shows the methodology of the Media Literacy Index with the groups of indicators, sources and their respective weight (importance). The data are converted into standardized scores (z-scores) from 100 to 0, highest to lowest.

There are several reasons why these indicators were selected:

Media freedom. Media freedom is an essential indicator. The rise of fake news amidst the severely fragmented media landscape or the outright weak and controlled media in some countries has contributed to the deterioration of public and political debates and the overall quality of the democratic process. In the model, suggested in this report, two commonly accepted indices are used – from Freedom House and from Reporters without Borders – to measure media freedom. In this respect, a certain East–West divide can be observed.

Education. Education is another essential component. For example, Finland's government considers the strong public education system as a main tool to resist information warfare against the country, and "widespread critical thinking skills among the Finnish population and a coherent government response" is thought to be a key element for resisting fake news campaigns. In general, it is believed that more educated people are more informed, think more critically and are less likely to fall into the trap of fabricated news. There are also more complex psychological mechanisms at work. A study by Jan-Willem van Prooijen has found that people with high education as a whole feel more in control of their lives and do not believe in easy solutions as much, which, paired with stronger analytical skills, makes them less likely to support conspiracy theories.[4] The included indicators for education are the PISA reading performance, and the PISA science and PISA mathematics components, with reading attributed the highest importance in this case. PISA provides a picture not only of pupils' achievements but also the overall outcomes of the educational system in a country. The indicator "tertiary education enrolment" is also included, although with less weight, as an education indicator.

Trust in others (interpersonal trust). Trust is another important aspect. The entire post-truth phenomenon is accompanied by extremely high levels of mistrust towards institutions, mainstream media, politicians, and experts. Conspiracy theories about the functioning of the world both reflect and bring about the low level of confidence in existing institutions. The current model uses a related indicator – "Trust in others". It measures the level of trust in society and "reflects people's perception of others' reliability", according to the definition of OECD. As a rule, high level of trust is a hallmark of successful societies and a proxy for the development of civil society.

4 See "Why Education Predicts Decreased Belief in Conspiracy Theories" by Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Applied Cognitive Psychology, Appl. Cognit. Psychol. 31: 50–58 (2017). Published online 28 November 2016 in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10.1002/acp.3301, and also James N. Druckman, The Politics of Motivation, 2012.

E-participation. The "E-participation" indicator is also included to measure the use of information and communication technologies to enhance political participation, making it possible for citizens to communicate with each other, the elected officials and authorities.

The complexity of it all: a disclaimer

As in previous editions of the index, there should be a disclaimer, a word of caution. There are some aspects of the disinformation and misinformation phenomena, which are very specific and difficult to assess. As noted, the 2016 Oxford dictionary definition of post-truth puts a strong emphasis on the role of emotions – it is an adjective defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". For example, there is no simple causality between education and post-truth as there are more complex psychological mechanisms at play such as confirmation bias or prior-attitude effect. In other words, people sometimes prefer or outright seek information that confirms their own preconceived views, tend to dismiss evidence that does not coincide with their already formed opinion and disregard objective accuracy. Also, there is a whole range of details that should be taken into account when discussing disinformation, misinformation, post-truth and related phenomena. For instance, fake news is fabricated news and the deliberate presentation of falsehood as fact that may pursue political or financial gains and should not be confused with lazy journalism.

Finally, the aphorism attributed to British statistician George E.P. Box, "All models are wrong, but some are useful", is applicable to the Media Literacy Index too. It definitely has its limitations, but it might be useful and serve as a basis for debate and further research.

Rank (1-41)	Country	Score (100-0)	Clusters (1-5)
1	Denmark	71	1
2	Finland	71	1
3	Ireland	71	1
4	Netherlands	71	1
5	Norway	70	1
6	Estonia	69	1
7	Sweden	68	1
8	Switzerland	66	1
9	Germany	62	2
10	UK	62	2
11	Austria	61	2
12	Belgium	60	2
13	Czech Republic	59	2
14	Iceland	58	2
15	Lithuania	58	2
16	Latvia	57	2
17	Portugal	57	2
18	Spain	57	2
19	France	55	2
20	Poland	54	2
21	Slovenia	54	2
22	Luxembourg	52	2
23	Italy	51	2
24	Croatia	47	3
25	Slovakia	47	3
26	Montenegro	44	3
27	Hungary	43	3
28	Malta	40	3
29	Ukraine	38	4
30	Greece	37	4
31	Romania	37	4
32	Serbia	35	4
33	Cyprus	33	4
34	Bulgaria	32	4
35	Moldova	31	4
36	Turkey	30	4
37	Bosnia and Herzegovina	24	5
38	Georgia	20	5
39	Albania	19	5
40	North Macedonia	19	5
41	Kosovo	16	5

The results of the Media Literacy Index 2026

The Media Literacy Index 2026 has not one but four winners – Denmark, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands – who each have a score of 71 points on a scale of 0 to 100 (lowest to highest), followed by Norway in 5th place with 70 points. The first four countries are ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively with only a fraction of differences in the scores. Still, Finland steps back from the 1st place it has held since 2017 to 2nd place this year with a minimal difference. It is worth noting that Estonia is 6th in the index as other countries from its part of Europe are significantly lower down the ranking.

In reverse order, the countries that are at the bottom of the ranking are Kosovo (41st place with 16 points), North Macedonia and Albania (40th and 39th place with an identical score of 19 points), Georgia (38th place with 20 points) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (37th place with 24 points).

The cluster analysis adds to the perspective of the Media Literacy Index rankings. The clusters are composed of countries with similar characteristics, so tendencies can be observed in groups.

The best performers are within the first cluster, which consists of eight countries out of the 41: Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Estonia, Sweden and Switzerland. The second cluster contains very good performers and is double the size of the first cluster. There are fifteen countries in total, occupying places 9 to 23 respectively: Germany, the UK, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia, Portugal, Spain, France, Poland, Slovenia, Luxembourg and Italy.

The third and fourth clusters are "transitional" as the countries have either the potential to improve or move down in the rankings. The third cluster is composed of a small number of five countries – Croatia and Slovakia with 47 points each, Montenegro (44 points), Hungary (43 points) and Malta (40 points), occupying places 24 to 28.

The fourth cluster is composed of eight countries – Ukraine (29th place with 38 points), Greece (30th place with 37 points), Romania (31st place with 37 points), Serbia (32nd place with 35 points), Cyprus (33rd place with 33 points), Bulgaria (34th position with 32 points), Moldova (35th place with 31 points) and Turkey (36th place with 30 points).

What distinguishes the top-ranking countries from the rest is that they have the most media freedom, compared to the others, high quality education and the highest levels of trust among their citizens. Estonia could be noted here as punching above its weight, with top marks in education as well as in media freedom, surpassing other countries in the group. The countries lower down the ranking are pulled back by a combination of factors, reflected in the index indicators. For example, the second cluster countries are still very good performers, despite not on par with the rest. A comparison between Germany and the UK (9th and 10th in the ranking) shows that Germany pulls slightly ahead with better media freedom, while the UK has a slight advantage in education. The countries at the bottom of the ranking fall behind as they have serious restrictions in media freedom, significant deficits in education and the level of trust within society is much lower than the rest. Still, some factors affect the overall positions variably,

The results of the Media Literacy Index 2026

e.g. while Turkey has decent education scores, its levels of media freedom are the lowest; while Albania and North Macedonia have more media freedom, their education scores hold them back.

The map of index clusters in 2026 shows geographic patterns. The best performing countries are in Northwestern Europe in the first cluster, including Estonia. They are followed by the second cluster of still very good performers in Western and Central Europe, including the Baltic countries of Latvia and Lithuania. The third cluster consists of Central European and Southeastern countries, including Greece. The fourth and fifth clusters are composed of the rest of the Southeast European countries, including the Western Balkans and Turkey as well as Ukraine (fourth cluster) and Georgia (fifth cluster).

The clusters, as located on the map, show two other aspects of the index results. The last, fifth cluster is composed of countries, which are the most vulnerable to disinformation, according to the index. However, they are also more vulnerable as they are outside of the EU (although they are EU candidates), which would add another institutional framework of stability to ward off the negative effects of disinformation and misinformation. These countries are also the most exposed to great powers' competition, with Russia and China trying to accumulate influence in the region directly neighbouring the EU. As visualised on the map, the fourth and fifth clusters include countries, which are both among the least resilient and also some of the geographically closest to the war in Ukraine and therefore experiencing increased levels of disinformation from Russian cognitive warfare.

The results of the Media Literacy Index 2026

Ranking and overall score of countries in the **five clusters** in 2026

The map of index clusters in 2026 shows geographic patterns. The best performing countries are in Northwestern Europe in the first cluster, including Estonia.

1

1. Denmark 71 p.
2. Finland 71 p.
3. Ireland 71 p.
4. Netherlands 71 p.
5. Norway 70 p.
6. Estonia 69 p.
7. Sweden 68 p.
8. Switzerland 66 p.

2

9. Germany 62 p.
10. UK 62 p.
11. Austria 61 p.
12. Belgium 60 p.
13. Czech Republic 59 p.
14. Iceland 58 p.
15. Lithuania 58 p.
16. Latvia 57 p.
17. Portugal 57 p.
18. Spain 57 p.
19. France 55 p.
20. Poland 54 p.
21. Slovenia 54 p.
22. Luxembourg 52 p.
23. Italy 51 p.

3

24. Croatia 47 p.
25. Slovakia 47 p.
26. Montenegro 44 p.
27. Hungary 43 p.
28. Malta 40 p.

4

29. Ukraine 38 p.
30. Greece 37 p.
31. Romania 37 p.
32. Serbia 35 p.
33. Cyprus 33 p.
34. Bulgaria 32 p.
35. Moldova 31 p.
36. Turkey 30 p.

5

37. Bosnia and Herzegovina 24 p.
38. Georgia 20 p.
39. Albania 19 p.
40. North Macedonia 19 p.
41. Kosovo 16 p.

Changes between the index 2026 and index 2023

There are three numbers in the index that provide the "coordinates" of the countries in the index: score on a scale of 0 to 100 (lowest to highest), ranking from 1 to 41 (highest to lowest place) and clusters, which are 1 to 5 (best to worst performers).

When these numbers are compared for different years, the changes can be outlined.

In the first cluster, the Netherlands is the country which improves its performance, as it moves from cluster 2 to cluster 1 from 2023 to the new index with advancements in the ranking – by 4 positions – and in the score – by 7 points.

In the second cluster, it is Italy which improves by moving one cluster up in comparison to 2023, with one position up and four points more.

In the third cluster, Montenegro moves one cluster up compared to 2023 with a significant jump in the ranking and the scores. It remains to be seen if this can be sustained in the future, or it was a one-time improvement.

In the fourth cluster, Ukraine does not change very much, but the results this year put it in a lower performing cluster compared to 2023.

In the fifth cluster, there is no change over the years of the countries between clusters. Georgia manages to improve a little, while North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo deteriorate slightly in terms of ranking.

Changes in the Media Literacy Index 2026 vs 2023

Country	Ranking 2026	Score 2026	Cluster 2026	Ranking 2023	Score 2023	Cluster 2023	Change in Rank	Change in Score	Change in Cluster
Denmark	**1**	71	1	**2**	73	1	1	-2	0
Finland	**2**	71	1	**1**	74	1	-1	-3	0
Ireland	**3**	71	1	**6**	70	1	3	1	0
Netherlands	**4**	71	1	**8**	64	2	4	7	1
Norway	**5**	70	1	**3**	72	1	-2	-2	0
Estonia	**6**	69	1	**4**	71	1	-2	-2	0
Sweden	**7**	68	1	**5**	71	1	-2	-3	0
Switzerland	**8**	66	1	**7**	67	1	-1	-1	0
Germany	**9**	62	2	**11**	61	2	2	1	0
UK	**10**	62	2	**13**	60	2	3	2	0
Austria	**11**	61	2	**14**	59	2	3	2	0
Belgium	**12**	60	2	**10**	61	2	-2	-1	0
Czech Republic	**13**	59	2	**15**	58	2	2	1	0
Iceland	**14**	58	2	**9**	62	2	-5	-4	0
Lithuania	**15**	58	2	**20**	54	2	5	4	0
Latvia	**16**	57	2	**18**	55	2	2	2	0
Portugal	**17**	57	2	**12**	60	2	-5	-3	0
Spain	**18**	57	2	**16**	58	2	-2	-1	0
France	**19**	55	2	**17**	57	2	-2	-2	0
Poland	**20**	54	2	**22**	53	2	2	1	0
Slovenia	**21**	54	2	**19**	55	2	-2	-1	0
Luxembourg	**22**	52	2	**21**	53	2	-1	-1	0
Italy	**23**	51	2	**24**	47	3	1	4	1
Croatia	**24**	47	3	**25**	45	3	1	2	0
Slovakia	**25**	47	3	**23**	48	3	-2	-1	0
Montenegro	**26**	44	3	**33**	32	4	7	12	1
Hungary	**27**	43	3	**27**	41	3	0	2	0
Malta	**28**	40	3	**26**	45	3	-2	-5	0
Ukraine	**29**	38	4	**30**	38	3	1	0	-1
Greece	**30**	37	4	**29**	38	3	-1	-1	-1
Romania	**31**	37	4	**34**	32	4	3	5	0
Serbia	**32**	35	4	**31**	33	4	-1	2	0
Cyprus	**33**	33	4	**28**	39	3	-5	-6	-1
Bulgaria	**34**	32	4	**35**	31	4	1	1	0
Moldova	**35**	31	4	**32**	32	4	-3	-1	0
Turkey	**36**	30	4	**36**	29	4	0	1	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	**37**	24	5	**37**	24	5	0	0	0
Georgia	**38**	20	5	**41**	20	5	3	0	0
Albania	**39**	19	5	**38**	23	5	-1	-4	0
North Macedonia	**40**	19	5	**39**	22	5	-1	-3	0
Kosovo	**41**	16	5	**40**	21	5	-1	-5	0

Comparisons across the world: the Expanded Media Literacy Index:

Expanded Media Literacy Index 2026 (clusters 1 and 2)			
Ranking (1-47)	**Country**	**Scores (100-0)**	**Cluster**
1	Denmark	71	1
2	Finland	71	1
3	Ireland	71	1
4	Netherlands	71	1
5	Norway	70	1
6	Estonia	69	1
7	Sweden	68	1
8	Switzerland	66	1
9	**Canada**	**66**	**1**
10	**Australia**	**64**	**1**
11	Germany	62	2
12	UK	62	2
13	Austria	61	2
14	Belgium	60	2
15	**Japan**	**60**	**2**
16	**South Korea**	**60**	**2**
17	Czech Republic	59	2
18	**USA**	**59**	**2**
19	Iceland	58	2
20	Lithuania	58	2
21	Latvia	57	2
22	Portugal	57	2
23	Spain	57	2
24	France	55	2
25	Poland	54	2
26	Slovenia	54	2
27	Luxembourg	52	2
28	Italy	51	2

Expanded Media Literacy Index 2026 (clusters 3,4 and 5)			
Ranking (1-47)	**Country**	**Scores (100-0)**	**Cluster**
29	Croatia	47	3
30	Slovakia	47	3
31	Montenegro	44	3
32	Hungary	43	3
33	**Israel**	**43**	**3**
34	Malta	40	3
35	Ukraine	38	4
36	Greece	37	4
37	Romania	37	4
38	Serbia	35	4
39	Cyprus	33	4
40	Bulgaria	32	4
41	Moldova	31	4
42	Turkey	30	4
43	Bosnia and Herzegovina	24	5
44	Georgia	20	5
45	Albania	19	5
46	North Macedonia	19	5
47	Kosovo	16	5

The Expanded Media Literacy Index 2026 features 47 countries as it includes six additional countries outside of Europe – Australia, Canada, Japan, Israel, South Korea, and the USA – to the 41 European countries from the regular index.

In addition to the regular MLI with 41 European countries, there is also an expanded MLI, which includes six additional countries as a “control group” for international comparisons.

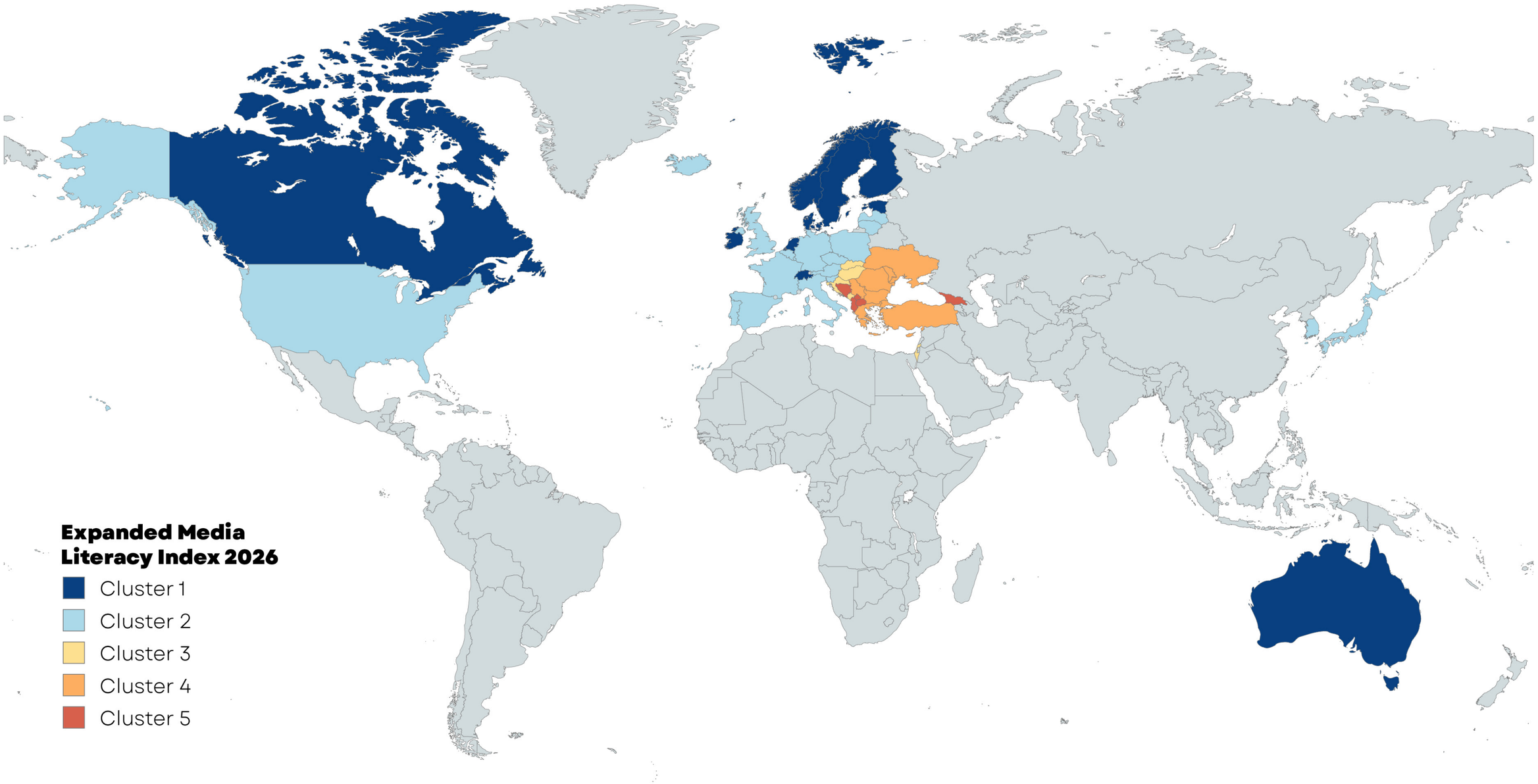
Canada and Australia are respectively 9th and 10th in the ranking of 47 countries, with scores of 66 and 64 points respectively. Both countries are a part of the first cluster of the primarily Nordic countries.

Japan and South Korea are in 15th and 16th place respectively, both with 60 points and both in the second cluster in the company of mainly Western European countries such as Germany, the UK, Austria and Belgium.

The US is also in the second cluster in 18th place with 59 points, alongside the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Latvia.

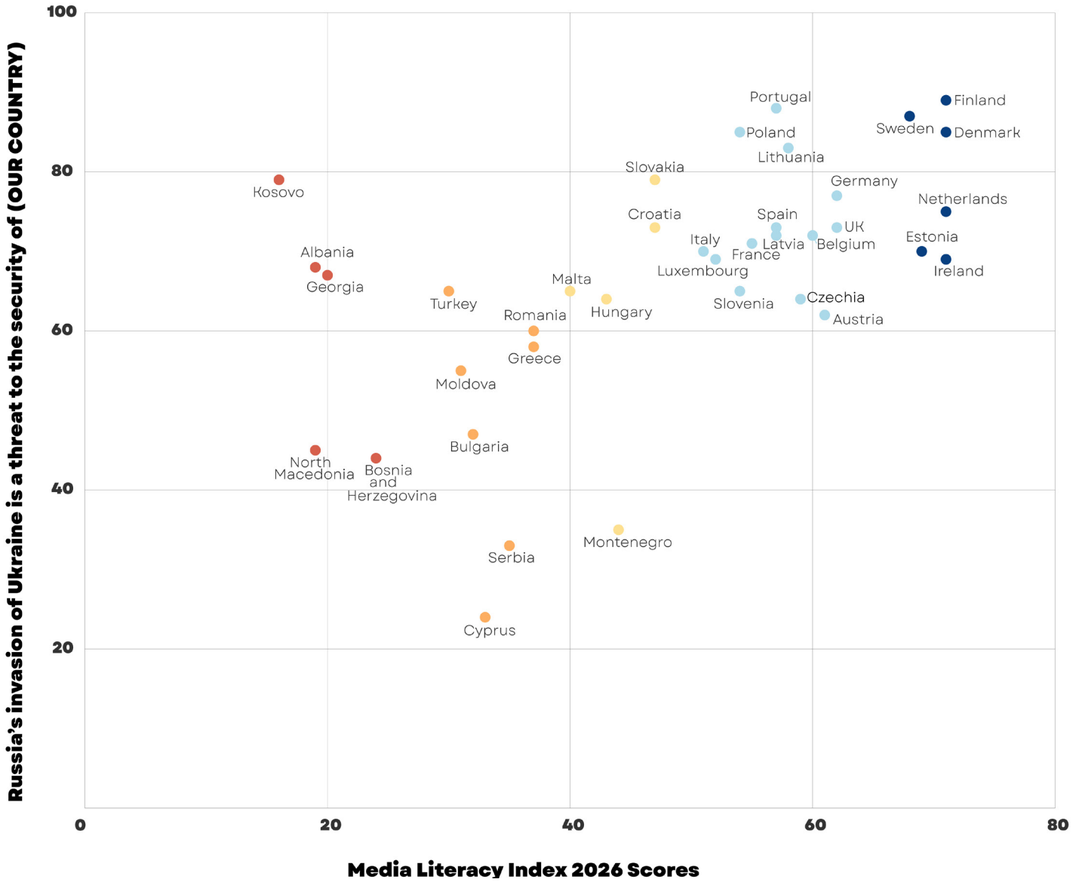
Finally, Israel is in 33rd place with 43 points in the third cluster next to Hungary and Malta.

The Expanded Media Literacy Index 2026: international comparisons



Vulnerability and resilience: two test cases

One of the useful aspects of the index is that the standardized scores provide an opportunity for further research and comparisons to delve deeper into aspects of the vulnerability or the resilience to disinformation of societies.



The first test case investigates the relationship between the countries' MLI scores and their level of concern about Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a national security threat. When the MLI scores are compared to public opinion data on the subject from Eurobarometer[5], a pattern emerges: the more vulnerable a country is to disinformation, the less it is concerned about Russia as a security threat. Serbia, Montenegro and Cyprus form a group of their own with low index scores and low concerns about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There are exceptions to the rule though, as Albania, Kosovo and Georgia express high levels of concern, while having a low index ranking. In this group, Georgia has first-hand experience of war with Russia and Russian occupation of a considerable part of its territory from 2008. Other vulnerable to disinformation countries such as North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria are in the middle, with moderate levels of concern on the subject. Conversely, the countries that are more resilient to disinformation and misinformation are much more concerned about Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a security threat to their country. This includes Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Estonia, and Ireland, which are both the highest-ranking in the index and the most concerned about Russia as a security threat.

The second test case compares the MLI 2026 results to the public opinion data that showcases the proportion of people that say they sometimes or often avoid the news,[6] released by the Reuters Institute in its Digital News Report.

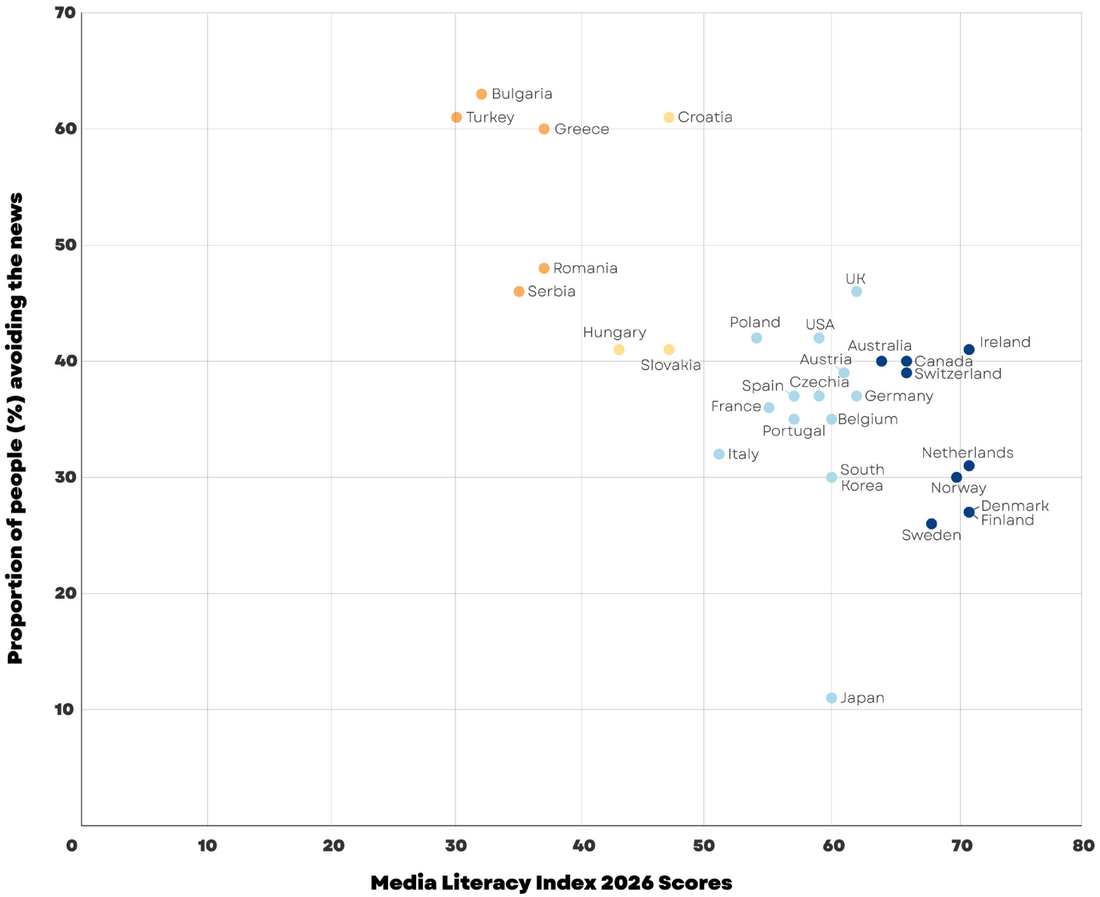
There is generally an inverse relationship between them – the lower the MLI score, the higher the news avoidance and vice versa – the better the performance in the index, the lower the avoidance of the news. The world champion of news avoidance is Bulgaria (63% of respondents avoid the news), followed closely by its neighbours Turkey, Greece and Croatia, all four with low to medium scores in the index. Interestingly, there is a regional Southeast European pattern here, as Romania and Serbia also have comparatively high levels of people avoiding the news – and at the same time, all these countries are ranking low in the Media Literacy Index. The avoidance of the news could be the effect of the worsening media environment, with controlled media, deterioration of the quality of media,

5 Standard Eurobarometer 104, Autumn 2025, https://cyprus.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/standard-eurobarometer-104-autumn-2025-2025-12-19_en?prefLang=el , answers to the question QD3.2 Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the security of (OUR COUNTRY) (%)

6 All data from Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, available at https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Digital_News-Report_2025.pdf

increased disinformation and misinformation and eventually – broken trust between the media and the citizens. In contrast, the highest-ranking countries in the index, i.e. those most resilient to disinformation and misinformation, have much lower levels of the news avoidance. This includes the top performers Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, where less or about 30% of people tend to avoid the news. Japan has the lowest rate of people who avoid the news – about 11%.

The lower the MLI score, the higher the news avoidance and vice versa.
The world champion of news avoidance is Bulgaria, followed closely by its neighbours Turkey, Greece and Croatia, all four with low to medium scores in the index.



About the solutions: common sense wanted

In cases where societies are deeply divided, there are several approaches that could be adopted: agreeing that it is common sense to address these problems and it is in everyone's interest, countering foreign malign influence – especially on foreign policy and democratic principles, promoting media literacy and restoring trust as the mutually acceptable way to go.

Therefore, the first step is to agree that leaving disinformation unchecked or using it for short term partisan political gains is a race to the bottom, and this needs to be addressed as a matter of common sense. Furthermore, as it is known that the democratic fundamentals and values are the first to be attacked in external disinformation campaigns, democracies have to be made more resilient to this particular danger.

It is clear there is no single silver bullet to resolve the issues, and a combination of approaches is needed. The "education along with regulation" path might be taken into consideration. There is already enough experience to judge what can work and when. As far as regulations are concerned, the lumping of different sorts of regulations together in public debates and in the public imagination has created misunderstandings or a backlash. In less democratic and less accountable settings, excessive regulations by autocratic regimes under the pretext of fighting disinformation might stifle free speech. On the other hand, a total lack of transparency and accountability of algorithms of social networks with the power to influence millions and billions of people, the protection of data of users and their privacy is another side of the coin that needs to be addressed. Despite the US and Europe disagreeing very visibly as far as approaches to regulations are concerned, the case of Tik-Tok indicates that they may share similar concerns after all.

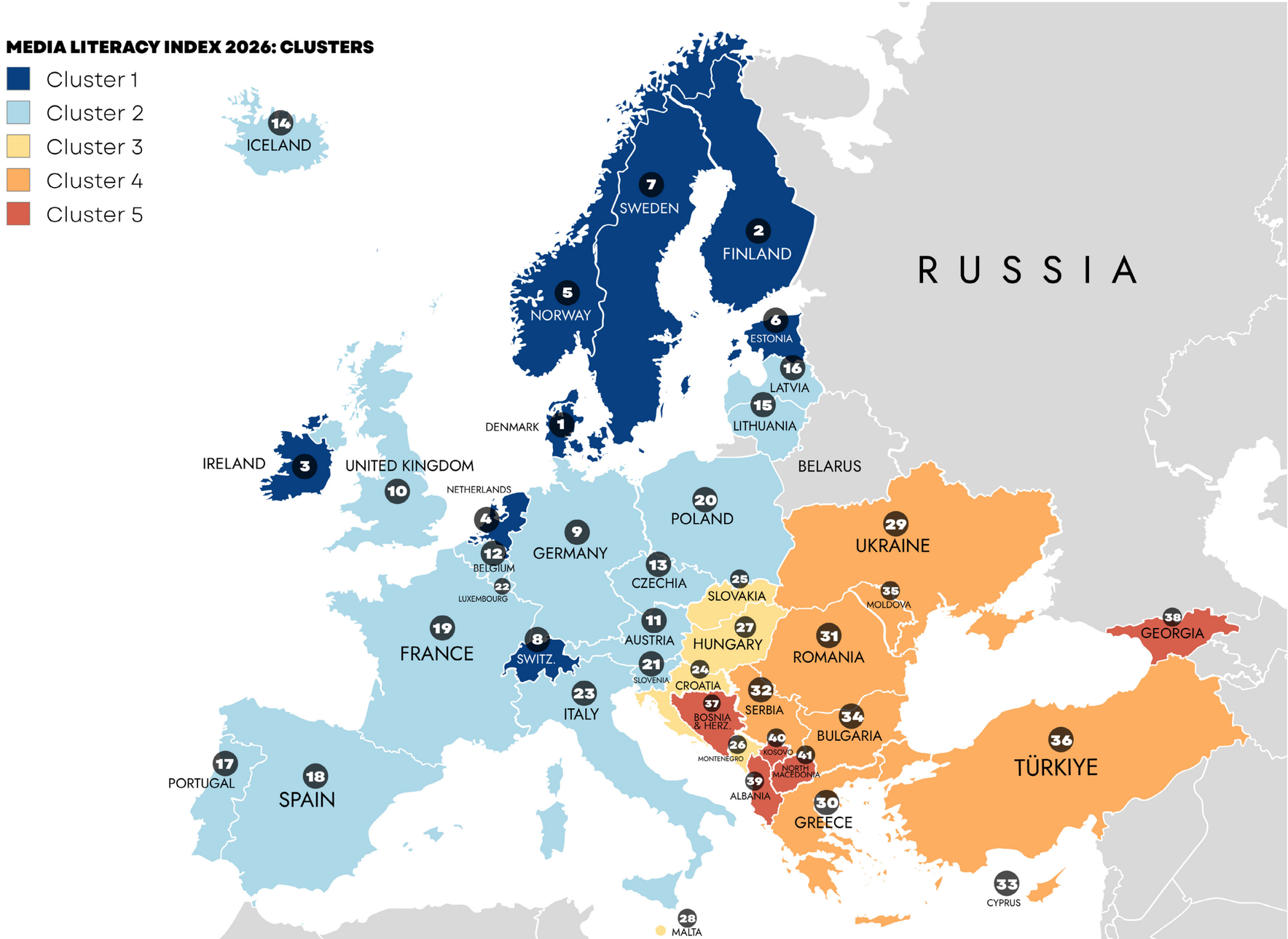
Education is probably the best approach, but it is a long-term solution that needs time. The best-case scenario is in Finland, where media literacy is taught starting at kindergarten level with a society-wide effort. It is also part of the total defence concept for the country, which manages to remain at the top of the democracy and media freedom charts. But Finland has developed and has been carrying out this strategy for many years now to see such results.

And while we consider the "education" approach, it may be important to conclude with two aspects that may remain overlooked as debates become more polarised or specialised.

The first one is related to education about moral aspects and values that would prevent the "fake news" from the "online world", the print, TV or radio, from spilling over as a violent act into the "offline world". These would be some of the guardrails in democratic societies that allow free debate without societal violence.

Second, education about disinformation might include the psychological mechanisms associated with disinformation such as confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, in-group bias, emotional triggers, conspiracy thinking, projection or information fatigue, among others. These are already used or misused to a significant effect in the social networks and their algorithms, echo chambers and filter bubbles, the malign influence campaigns, etc. The vast majority of people are not aware of these phenomena. As noted in the beginning, "post-truth" is more about the prevalence of one's emotions over facts.

Annex: Map of Europe



Annex: Expanded Media Literacy Index 2026 – Indicators, Scores and Overall Ranking

Rank (1-47)	Country	Freedom of the Press score by Freedom House	Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders	PISA score in reading literacy	PISA score in mathematical literacy	PISA score in science literacy	Tertiary education enrolment	Trust in others	E-participation	Overall Score	Cluster
		(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(100-0)	(1-5)
1	Denmark	73	73	63	64	61	56	95	78	71	1
2	Finland	73	73	64	61	69	73	89	65	71	1
3	Ireland	65	73	76	65	65	48	83	69	71	1
4	Netherlands	74	75	69	59	66	60	77	71	71	1
5	Norway	78	81	58	53	54	67	93	61	70	1
6	Estonia	68	77	73	74	75	44	52	74	69	1
7	Sweden	74	75	63	60	61	55	83	52	68	1
8	Switzerland	72	68	61	73	65	46	77	55	66	1
9	Canada	65	60	72	68	71	49	66	69	66	1
10	Australia	60	55	68	63	67	75	68	61	64	1
11	Germany	63	68	59	57	60	49	61	76	62	2
12	UK	56	61	66	64	64	52	59	76	62	2
13	Austria	60	60	60	63	60	64	69	50	61	2
14	Belgium	73	63	59	64	59	55	52	12	60	2
15	Japan	54	37	75	87	85	38	52	78	60	2
16	South Korea	45	38	75	83	76	72	51	76	60	2
17	Czech Republic	61	68	63	63	63	43	45	23	59	2
18	USA	59	41	70	52	63	51	56	72	59	2
19	Iceland	69	64	40	49	40	56	83	74	58	2
20	Lithuania	61	66	56	57	57	49	50	57	58	2
21	Latvia	55	65	57	61	61	61	40	50	57	2
22	Portugal	66	69	58	55	57	48	34	31	57	2
23	Spain	53	58	57	56	57	64	60	54	57	2
24	France	55	57	57	56	58	44	44	54	55	2
25	Poland	45	54	63	64	63	47	42	46	54	2
26	Slovenia	59	53	54	62	64	54	43	50	54	2
27	Luxembourg	70	67	44	52	48	0	52	29	52	2
28	Italy	49	44	60	55	54	46	45	33	51	2
29	Croatia	36	39	57	51	56	52	31	69	47	3
30	Slovakia	55	50	45	51	47	27	39	38	47	3
31	Montenegro	33	52	50	66	58	30	39	12	44	3
32	Hungary	33	37	56	56	57	32	45	18	43	3
33	Israel	46	19	57	48	48	32	41	38	43	3
34	Malta	59	37	29	26	26	50	45	44	40	3
35	Ukraine	21	38	36	39	41	48	46	80	38	4
36	Greece	33	25	41	34	37	100	25	35	37	4
37	Romania	40	42	36	33	31	32	29	37	37	4
38	Serbia	26	23	42	39	40	45	34	65	35	4
39	Cyprus	59	31	15	28	23	68	23	38	33	4
40	Bulgaria	35	33	26	27	28	55	34	35	32	4
41	Moldova	18	52	26	22	20	35	29	42	31	4
42	Turkey	0	0	49	46	53	93	31	61	30	4
43	Bosnia and Herzegovina	24	27	25	22	18	21	26	18	24	5
44	Georgia	25	18	12	14	11	52	26	20	20	5
45	Albania	24	30	5	3	8	38	19	42	19	5
46	North Macedonia	7	48	5	13	9	28	32	21	19	5
47	Kosovo	28	21	0	0	0	19	32	42	16	5

Annex: Media Literacy Index 2026: Sources and Data (including expanded index)

Country	Freedom of the Press score by Freedom House	Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders	PISA score in reading literacy (OECD)	PISA score in scientific literacy (OECD)	PISA score mathematical literacy (OECD)	Tertiary Education enrolment (World Bank, UN)	Trust in People (World Values Survey)	E-participation (UN)
	On a scale from 0 to 100 (best to worst)	On a scale from 100 to 0 (best to worst)	500 is very good and below 300 is a very poor result	500 is very good and below 300 is a very poor result	500 is very good and below 300 is a very poor result	In percentages (higher is better)	On a scale from 10 to 0 (highest to lowest)	On a scale from 1 to 0 (highest to lowest)
Weight of the indicator	**20%**	**20%**	**30%**	**5%**	**5%**	**5%**	**10%**	**5%**
Albania	51	58,18	358	376	368	65	2,8	0,726
Austria	22	78,12	480	491	487	95	49,8	0,7808
Belgium	12	80,12	479	491	489	84	33,9	0,5068
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51	56,33	403	398	406	45	9,6	0,5479
Bulgaria	42	60,78	404	421	417	84	17,1	0,6712
Croatia	41	64,2	475	483	463	81	13,6	0,9178
Cyprus	23	59,04	381	411	418	98	6,6	0,6986
Czech Republic	21	83,96	489	498	487	71	27,3	0,589
Denmark	12	86,93	489	494	489	85	73,9	0,9863
Estonia	16	89,46	511	526	510	71	33,9	0,9589
Finland	12	87,18	490	511	484	105	68,4	0,8904
France	26	76,62	474	487	474	71	26,3	0,8082
Georgia	50	50,53	374	384	390	80	9	0,5616
Germany	20	83,85	480	492	475	77	41,6	0,9726
Greece	44	55,37	438	441	430	167	8,4	0,6712
Hungary	44	62,82	473	486	473	58	27,2	0,5479
Iceland	15	81,36	436	447	459	85	62,3	0,9589
Ireland	18	86,92	516	504	492	77	62,8	0,9178
Italy	31	68,01	482	477	471	74	26,6	0,6575
Kosovo	48	52,73	342	357	355	43	15,1	0,726
Latvia	26	81,82	475	494	483	91	22,2	0,7808
Lithuania	21	82,27	472	484	475	77	31,7	0,8356
Luxembourg	14	83,04	445	466	466	21	33,9	0,6301
Malta	23	62,96	411	417	414	79	27,2	0,7397
Moldova	56	73,36	405	403	406	61	12,1	0,726
Montenegro	44	72,83	459	488	493	55	21,7	0,5068
Netherlands	11	88,64	501	504	479	89	57	0,9315
North Macedonia	64	70,44	359	380	389	53	15,1	0,5753
Norway	8	92,31	477	478	468	98	72,1	0,863
Poland	34	74,79	489	499	489	75	24,1	0,7534
Portugal	17	84,26	477	484	472	76	16,9	0,6438
Romania	38	66,42	428	428	428	58	12,1	0,6849
Serbia	49	53,55	440	447	440	73	16,3	0,8904
Slovakia	26	71,93	447	462	464	52	21,6	0,6986
Slovenia	23	74,06	469	500	485	82	25,3	0,7808
Spain	28	77,35	474	485	473	95	41	0,8082
Sweden	11	88,13	487	494	482	84	62,8	0,7945
Switzerland	13	83,98	483	503	508	74	57,1	0,8219
Turkey	76	29,4	456	476	453	128	14	0,863
UK	25	78,89	494	500	489	80	40,2	0,9726
Ukraine	53	63,93	428	450	441	76	28,4	1
Australia	22	75,15	498	507	487	106	48,5	0,863
Canada	18	78,75	507	515	497	77	46,7	0,9178
Israel	33	51,055	474	465	458	58	22,9	0,6986
Japan	27	63,14	516	547	536	65	33,7	0,9863
South Korea	34	64,06	515	528	527	103	32,9	0,9726
USA	23	65,487	504	499	465	79	37	0,9452

Media Literacy Index 2026. Report

January 2026

About this report

The report presents the findings of the Media Literacy Index project of the Open Society Institute – Sofia Foundation (OSIS). This product is for non-commercial use only. The views expressed in the report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of OSIS.

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About the author

Marin Lessenski is a Program Director, Open Society Institute – Sofia
E-mail: mlessenski@osi.bg

Statistical processing: Petia Brainova and Dragomira Belcheva, Open Society Institute – Sofia.

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Address:
56 Solunska Str.
Sofia 1000
Tel.: (+359 2) 930 66 19
E-mail: info@osi.bg
Web: osis.bg

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MLI MEDIA LITERACY INDEX