

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research process and data analysis conducted as part of the activities to fight disinformation, the Metamorphosis Foundation proposes the following recommendations as basis for joint action by all stakeholders in society aimed at solving of this problem:

- A systemic approach is needed to build a culture of critical thinking and social dialogue at all levels, starting with the education system, the relationship of institutions and stakeholders in all sectors, as well as at the family and individual level.
- Given the high multi-line polarization in the society, when preparing disinformation interventions it is important to make data-based decisions about whether it is effective to apply a confrontational approach in a given situation (through which polarization can be enhanced), or to strive through a broad and inclusive social dialogue to give all parties a chance to reconsider some of their values, perceptions and considerations.
- Susceptibility to conspiracy theories and other alternative narratives is a consequence of structural factors that need to be addressed by specific programs, rather than by pathology or practices of politicization, rejection, or ignorance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE INSTITUTIONS

- Institutions, in partnership with the media and civil society organizations, need to create policies and mechanisms to develop media literacy and increase resistance to disinformation.
- In doing so, they should upgrade the Codes of Ethics that apply to their employees in order to incorporate the fight against disinformation as a core value and further development of appropriate work procedures.
- All institutions, especially those in the field of health, should support the media, services, organizations that work directly on the detection of disinformation related to Covid-19 by promoting the contents of their profiles on social networks and websites.
- State institutions from the legislative and executive branches should take a proactive role in strengthening the financial capacities of the media, as well as in creating a favorable environment for financial investments in the media industry.
- It is especially important to invest in raising awareness of the role of the media as drivers of democracy in society, and improving the situation with the media to be treated as a strategic goal.
- The Ministry of Education and Science, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, should establish a special fund to enable cooperation with the academic community, universities and scientific institutes in the direction of implementation and scientific research on the presence of disinformation related to Covid-19.
- The Government of RNM should as soon as possible fully implement the "Action Plan for Decisive Action Against the Spread of Disinformation", whose draft version was presented to the public on July 24, 2019. During this process it's particularly important to strengthen and complete the implementation of the second part of the action plan entitled "Proactive measures":
 - Activation of Action Group composed of officials at the highest level;
 - Implementation of the planned educational campaigns, both those intended for the public, and also the internal ones intended for the employees and officials in the public administration;
 - Continuing the discussion with the media and civil society organizations on how to support the production of media content on the topic of combating disinformation.
- State institutions should initiate a process for creating a state strategy for combating disinformation that will take into account the experiences from the implementation of the Action Plan, as well as the needs for its upgrade in conditions of a pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIVATE COMPANIES, MARKETING AGENCIES AND OTHER ADVERTISERS THAT ALLOW THE WORK OF MEDIA OUTLETS

- Advertisers should upgrade their codes of ethics and corporate social responsibility policies with criteria that will enable regular monitoring (monitoring) of whether they are used to sponsor media that spread disinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL MEDIA WORKERS I.E. JOURNALISTS

- Media workers, as well as the media as a whole, should strive for increased respect for professional and ethical standards in journalism, as well as increased application of self-regulatory tools.
- The media should actively participate in the fight against all types of disinformation and the promotion of media literacy by increasing the quality and diversity of media programs of informative and educational character.
- In case they do not have their own content, they should advocate for the transfer of fabricated content from all other fact-checking services or media that regularly debunk disinformation within their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND RELATED BODIES

- It is necessary to increase cooperation between professional media organizations as well as other institutions relevant to the media sector.
- It is extremely important to further promote the mechanisms of self-regulation as a means through which citizens have the opportunity to point out abuses by unethical media.
- In addition, it is important that public fact-checking activities be affirmed as a form of self-regulation within the media community, and as a means of encouraging public debate on the quality of media content and the kind of informal education with which professional standards are practically approaching a wider audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CSOS

- CSOs should continue to create and accumulate knowledge related to the problem of disinformation, building content archives that will gather knowledge and explanations for the exposed manipulations and disinformation, which are published under licenses that allow use by other bodies. An example of such a resource is the CriThink website (crithink.mk) which also contains an archive of analytical and educational articles and an e-library with multimedia content, digital editions and training materials. In that way, each of the civil society organizations will be able to download the content and disseminate it on their websites or social networks, to initiate and lead training projects for their target groups, as well as to contribute with their content in the same way.
- As many organizations as possible should commit to launch their own projects to work with the public on disinformation awareness or to join projects in that part of the NGO sector that is already working on debunking disinformation. At the same time, they should work on diversifying the target groups from their communities, which they will find to be most susceptible to the negative impact of disinformation. To consider different approaches to explaining the harmfulness of disinformation in different age groups, with special emphasis on young people;
- CSOs should create content and promotional campaigns to present to the public positive narratives based on facts, outlining measures to prevent the spread of the epidemic and the benefits of vaccination, in order to reduce vaccine hesitancy, but also the opposition of the use of Covid-19 vaccines.
- More local and grassroots CSOs need to be involved in efforts to increase media literacy and critical thinking in their communities at all levels: through curricula that they create independently or in collaboration with academia, specifically developed to combat disinformation about Covid-19, citing the current practice of fact-checkers in the country.
- CSOs working in the field of media literacy and fact checking will increase their influence and opportunities for cooperation by joining the national Media Literacy Network and regional or international networks designed to combat disinformation.
- CSOs should begin with lobbying and advocacy activities in order to increase the support of public and state institutions in the fight against disinformation and the strengthening of media literacy and strengthening critical thinking. In addition, there should be efforts of relevant state bodies (prosecution, judiciary) to enforce relevant laws against impunity, and for the government to continue to develop and implement public policy documents, starting with the second part of the Action Plan to resolutely combat disinformation.