The Center for Independent Journalism and UNICEF, partners for including media literacy in the education of children and teenagers in Romania

Students, teachers, and also those who are preparing for a career in education, discover how to combat the phenomenon of disinformation, both online and offline.

BUCHAREST, March 17, 2021 - The Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ) and UNICEF in Romania announce the launch of a long-time partnership through which children and teenagers in Romania will acquire media competences to support their development and that of a generation of citizens who actively participate in civic life. The approach is part of CIJ's Media Literacy Program, which addresses an essential and urgent field of education for young people, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, when falsified information and disinformation have reached alarming levels.

UNICEF supports CIJ in developing a complex model for increasing students' and teachers' media literacy competences, through dedicated training modules and learning and teaching materials, created specifically for this program. Media literacy is the key to reducing the growing disinformation, which threatens the hard-earned progress of society.

UNICEF, together with the Romanian-American Foundation, also supports CIJ in developing, for the first time, a module that introduces and includes media literacy elements in the initial training of future teachers - students in the master's program "Didactics of philological disciplines" at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest.

Among the components of the partnership, CIJ will facilitate a media literacy didactic activity for students and teachers, having the World's Largest Lesson as a model, a project successfully implemented by UNICEF in recent years, with tens of thousands of students and thousands of teachers as beneficiaries. Tens of thousands of children and young people in Romania will understand, through this activity, the importance of a correct information gathering process, and also how to critically and responsibly interact with the media, creating a partial immunity to the effects of disinformation.

Over the next couple of months, CIJ and UNICEF will carry out training activities in the area of media literacy for the members of the National Council of Students and those of the Romanian Children's Board - an informal group set up at the initiative of UNICEF. The trained young people will then disseminate information about media literacy to their peers.

In May 2021, CIJ, with the support of the Romanian-American Foundation and UNICEF, will organize a national media literacy conference for teachers, students and other civil society actors. The event aims to increase the level of information on the role of media literacy in stimulating the civic participation of children and young people, and also to raise awareness of good practices within media literacy teaching models at national and international level, which can be applied in formal educational contexts and informal ones.

Within the same partnership, CIJ and UNICEF will organize discussion sessions on the evolution of media literacy implementation in education, with school inspectors for the subject *Romanian language and literature*.

"The safety and health of children don't only concern the ability to ensure their basic needs. The online environment is becoming a dominant part of their lives and brings with it a number of vulnerabilities, including disinformation, cyberbullying and exclusion. It is crucial that they acquire skills that will help them decipher the equations of disinformation, recognize the mistakes in the *grammar of hatred* and know that they have the right to ask for help and protection", said Cristina Lupu, executive director of CIJ.

"After a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc, it is clearer than ever that there is a need for media literacy classes for children and young people, for action to prevent the spread of false information and to promote the rapid dissemination of scientifically based information", said UNICEF representative in Romania, Pieter Bult. "We must act now to stop the pandemic of disinformation which, because it affects trust in medicine and science, endangers children's health and lives."

According to a CIJ study on the interaction and media use competences of young people (14-19 years old), the majority (90%) use the Internet as their primary source of information. Young people consider trustworthy information that is clear and easy to understand (77%), if it comes from a reliable source (75%), comes from the Internet (50%) and does not contradict their beliefs (69%).

For more information about the Media Literacy Program, please contact Cristina Jamschek, Program Director at CIJ, at e-mail: cristina.mastacan@cji.ro

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About The Center for Independent Journalism

The Center for Independent Journalism is a non-governmental organization active for over 25 years in protecting democracy and those who believe in its values. CIJ works in the service of freedom of expression and media literacy. More than 15.000 media professionals, 2.000 teachers and 25.000 students have walked through CIJ's doors over time. For more information about CIJ's activity, please visit: https://cji.ro/en, Facebook and Instagram.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is present in Romania and in 190 other countries and territories to promote the survival and development of children from early childhood to adolescence. In Romania, UNICEF works with key actors such as the Government, the Parliament, local authorities, the civil society, the private sector, national and international partners and the media, to ensure that all children have access to quality early education and schooling, to ensure the protection of teenagers and monitoring of children's rights and to ensure social protection and mobilization of resources to the benefit of children. For more information about UNICEF and its activity, please visit: https://www.unicef.org/romania/ro.

About the Romanian-American Foundation

The Romanian-American Foundation (RAF) was established in 2009, and its mission is to promote and consolidate the necessary conditions for a sustainable market economy and a democratic society, which would ensure access to opportunities for all segments of the Romanian population. RAF interventions cover three strategic priorities: rural economy, technology and innovation, civic involvement. Educational programs are a transversal component throughout all of the foundation's interventions, providing students with access to quality education and contributing to the sustainability of the programs.