

## **Media and Information Literacy in Latin America and the Caribbean. Challenges and opportunities of an unequal region<sup>1</sup>**

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**Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa en América Latina y el Caribe. Desafíos y oportunidades de una región desigual**

**Alfabetização Midiática e Informativa na América Latina e no Caribe. Desafios e oportunidades de uma região desigual**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the challenges and opportunities of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in Latin America and the Caribbean, within a context marked by profound inequalities and a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem. MIL is presented as an essential tool for promoting human rights and strengthening citizen participation in a diverse region. Through various regional initiatives and studies, the article examines how collaboration among diverse actors, from academic institutions to social networks and governments, can drive effective MIL policies. The discussion highlights the importance of a critical and collaborative approach to building an informed and resilient citizenry.

### **Keywords:**

Media and Information Literacy, Human Rights, Inequality, Latin America, Collaboration, Informed Citizenship

**Resumen:** Este artículo explora los desafíos y oportunidades de la Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa (AMI) en América Latina y el Caribe, en un contexto marcado por profundas desigualdades y un ecosistema digital en rápida evolución. La AMI se presenta como una herramienta esencial para promover los derechos humanos y fortalecer la participación

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ciudadana en una región diversa. A través de varias iniciativas y estudios regionales, el artículo analiza cómo la colaboración entre actores diversos, desde instituciones académicas hasta redes sociales y gobiernos, puede impulsar políticas de AMI efectivas. La discusión resalta la importancia de un enfoque crítico y colaborativo para construir una ciudadanía informada y resiliente.

**Palabras clave:**

Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa, Derechos humanos, Desigualdad, América Latina, Colaboración, Ciudadanía informada

**Resumo:** Este artigo explora os desafios e as oportunidades da Alfabetização Midiática e Informativa (AMI) na América Latina e no Caribe, em um contexto marcado por profundas desigualdades e um ecossistema digital em rápida evolução. A AMI é apresentada como uma ferramenta essencial para promover os direitos humanos e fortalecer a participação cidadã em uma região diversa. Através de várias iniciativas e estudos regionais, o artigo analisa como a colaboração entre diversos atores, desde instituições acadêmicas até redes sociais e governos, pode impulsionar políticas eficazes de AMI. A discussão destaca a importância de uma abordagem crítica e colaborativa para construir uma cidadania informada e resiliente.

**Palavras-chave:**

Alfabetização Midiática e Informativa, Direitos humanos, Desigualdade, América Latina, Colaboração, Cidadania informada

**1. Introduction**

In an environment in permanent evolution, collaboratively building bridges and boards seem to be an effective strategy to know, understand, accompany, and influence the cultural transformations of which we are witnesses and protagonists.

The challenges that humanity is going through in multiple dimensions in the second decade of the 21st century have become more complex. These transformations, accelerated even more by the rapid advances in the development of generative artificial intelligence, put education

in jeopardy. For this reason, it is essential to remember that the focus of the new intervention approaches must be anchored in protecting human rights.

In the face of a rapidly evolving media ecosystem, there is an urgent need to rethink interventions in the communication and education framework, placing it within a framework that prioritizes the protection of human rights in all its dimensions throughout the different stages of life. In this context, media and information literacy (MIL) emerges as a space for multi-actor conversation, not only to adapt to the dizzying changes in the digital environment but also to preserve the fundamental principles of freedom of expression, access to truthful information, citizen participation and the right to privacy, among others.

MIL acts as a pillar for promoting human rights, allowing people and groups to question, participate, and advocate for changes in their communities. “Media literacy allows you to look at the world more alertly” (Bacher, as cited in Dillon, 2023). In this sense, MIL contributes to creating a more just and equitable environment.

UNESCO has put it in motion as a further step in its journey into issues linked to the communication and education framework on which it has been working for decades. Thinking about it this way enables us to build new ways of analyzing and intervening without ignoring pre-existing debates, which are crossed by new scenarios and actors today.

Consumption habits of information and entertainment are moving from traditional media to social networks such as TikTok, which offers agile content in short videos consumed at the fast pace of “snack culture.” In this transition, however, essential aspects of critical reading can be reduced, such as identifying biases, stereotypes, manipulation of information, or respect for diversity. AMI, as we see, is not just a set of skills but a critical and reflective approach that allows us to navigate complex digital environments, empowering citizens and strengthening Democracy, following Crawford when referring to Artificial Intelligence (we extend this to a broader view that includes algorithms and platforms), “AI is not a neutral computational technique that makes determinations without human direction. Its systems are integrated into social, political, cultural, and economic worlds outlined by humans, institutions, and imperatives that determine what they do and how they do it” (Crawford, 2022).

## 2. AMI in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America has pioneered what today constitutes the concept of Media and Information Literacy.

In the Region, this journey has historically grown from different conceptions such as educommunication, media education, communication and education, education of the gaze, digital citizenship, and educational technology, among others. It has the particularity of being choral, enhanced by intergenerational dialogue, a characteristic given by the debates shared between pioneering and young voices, essential to thinking about the time we inhabit as part of a historical process. As Baricco (2019) points out, “Thus, all the digital forces that currently mark our landscape should be read as geological formations pushed towards the sky by an underground earthquake”.

In this marked reading, it is appropriate in the era of the prompt to mention the pedagogy of the question, a key concept in Paulo Freire’s et al. (2014) worldview, which conceives learning as an act of joint construction of knowledge through formulating and exploring questions.

The AMI involves multiple actors who, until recently, were not part of the conversation: governments, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and large technology companies, including social networks, search engines, and video platforms. Identifying, maintaining active listening, and understanding the tensions between these actors is essential. Debates on media regulation, freedom of expression, and access to information are essential for the development of effective policies to disseminate information and empower citizens.

As of 2023, the Latin American and Caribbean Representation of the Global Alliance for MIL, promoted by UNESCO, has launched a series of multi-stakeholder initiatives to identify, encourage articulations, and make visible actions related to media literacy in the Region. In collaboration with a team of colleagues from different backgrounds, areas of interest, and trajectories that make up the Regional Chapter, strategies have been developed to address the cultural, social, and technological transformations that define the current panorama, emphasizing the importance of a collaborative and multi-level approach, to produce indicators and recommendations that are useful for researchers, journalists, public policy, among others.

### 3. Regional Initiatives in MIL

Although the Regional Chapter promotes multiple initiatives, it is possible to mention some. It should be noted that these works in progress seek to give visibility to the puzzle pieces built from the diversity of actions, debates, perspectives, and actors.

- a. **Publications on AMI:** This Dossier results from a strategic alliance between the Regional Representation of AMI, ALAIC, CIESPAL, and the Civil Association Las Otras Voces. Communication for Democracy, this initiative seeks to account for the thematic breadth and multidimensionality of AMI, with the participation of diverse voices and perspectives from the Region that you will find in the index of this Dossier. This effort is expected to continue with new publications that broaden the debate, incorporating different actors and emerging scenarios in media literacy.
  
- b. **Interactive Multi-Actor and Multi-Level Map on MIL in Latin America and the Caribbean:**<sup>3</sup> The Regional Chapter has been developing research that is systematizing and identifying trends in the conditions and context in which MIL experiences or practices are created, from media organizations, research centers or groups, civil society organizations, and public policies, in Latin America and the Caribbean. The map allows for analyzing and visualizing the conditions and environments in which MIL initiatives are developed in Latin America and the Caribbean. It not only offers a comprehensive view of the practices and actors in the media and information ecosystem but also facilitates the monitoring of emerging trends and constitutes a tool for evaluating and strengthening the capacities of individuals and organizations in the Region, as well as a space for tracking keys for the development of public policies. Using tools such as Google Form, Power BI, and NVivo, the project has collected data from 19 countries, 41 cities and 92 initiatives to characterize actors, practices and resources in the media ecosystem as of this publication. The analysis and visualization of this data are essential to promote a more inclusive and critical media ecosystem, in line with the principles of MIL.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://acortar.link/E1Asvm>

**c. Regional Survey and Course on Artificial Intelligence in Educational Settings:**

Collaborating with the UNESCO MIL Alliance, Wikimedia Argentina, and Las Otras Voces. Comunicación para la Democracia, a survey has been carried out on using Artificial Intelligence in the educational setting. The first results indicate that more than 47% of the teachers surveyed are unfamiliar with MIL, and more than 60% have not received specific training in the last three years. Among the main concerns expressed by teachers, the difficulty in identifying reliable sources, the uncritical use of AI in educational activities, and the lack of critical reading skills stand out. These concerns underline the need to integrate MIL into teacher training, mainly where AI plays a central role in education.

**d. The voices of Latin American children:** TAL (Red de Televisoras Públicas de América Latina) and the LAC MIL Alliance are carrying out a participatory transmedia project co-created with children from all over the Region to make visible the view of children on bullying and its relationship with daily digital consumption, raise awareness about its consequences and generate opportunities for exchange for the construction of a more plural, respectful and loving world. TALI is a council made up of 67 children from 36 public and cultural channels from 14 countries in the Region: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela.

#### **4. Beyond Representation**

The AMI agenda is becoming visible in the Region, and more and more initiatives with a collaborative and sustainable approach are perceived as pieces of this space. It is possible to find them from academic networks - such as Alfamed, the Euro-American Network of Researchers in Media Competencies, which brings together more than 250 researchers with international conferences of outstanding attendance, or ALAIC, which incorporates AMI into its work agenda - to social organizations - located in the most diverse areas of the Region - from networks of journalists, content creators, influencers or newsfluencers to those responsible for the implementation of public policies - such as those carried out since 2018 by the Federal Institute of Telecommunications of Mexico, with which it seeks to empower its audiences or the

Coordination of Media Education in the SECOM of the Presidency of the Republic in Brazil. Pedagogical initiatives have a special place, such as incorporating curricula such as those produced by UNESCO or ALFAMED and others built and tested by educational communities.

All these actors are a necessary part of this map in which regulators, platforms, and those responsible for developing social networks and media are invited to participate.

On the other hand, UNESCO documents (whether training documents such as the MIL Massive Open Online Courses or guidelines such as the Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms or even the Pact for the Future produced by the United Nations) allow for the establishment of reference frameworks in the development of MIL, since they can guide public policies that support media education.

However, achieving a network that strengthens the empowerment of people, only girls, boys, and young people, of older adults, people with disabilities, and vulnerable groups so that they can exercise their rights in full citizenship is a task in the early stages.

## **5. Final Comment**

In a social and economic context of profound inequalities and violence, the digital environment, crossed today by deep gaps, potentially presents itself as a time of challenges and opportunities. It is there where media and information literacy can become a central tool for developing more just and democratic societies in Latin America.

Promoting policies and practices that strengthen MIL build indicators and evaluation instruments to weigh its results is a priority, ensuring that all citizens can fully participate in a complex and challenging media world. MIL not only empowers people but also contributes to the construction of a more equitable and participatory future.

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