USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

MOLDOVA MEDIA ENABLING DEMOCRACY, INCLUSION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY (MEDIA-M)

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

NOVEMBER 2023

EE/MELDS EVALUATION REPORT

MOLDOVA MEDIA ENABLING DEMOCRACY, INCLUSION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN MOLDOVA (MEDIA-M) PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Contract Title:	Europe and Eurasia / Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Decision Support (EE/MELDS)
Contract Number:	GS-10F-083CA / 7200AA22M00013
Activity Number:	EE/MELDS – 1022.1003
Submitted:	November 27, 2023
Contractor:	Integra Government Services International LLC 1156 15th Avenue NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005
USAID Office:	USAID/Europe and Eurasia Bureau, USAID/Moldova
COR:	Kraemer Lovelace, klovelace@usaid.gov
Photo Credit:	InternewsMoldova, The Independent Journalism Centre

This publication is made possible by the support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and was prepared by Integra Government Services International LLC for the Europe and Eurasia / Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Decision Support (EE/MELDS) Activity.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of evaluating the Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) activity is to assist the United States Agency for International Development in Moldova (USAID/Moldova) in understanding the extent to which the activity is on track to contribute to the Mission's relevant Sub-IR-level results, namely: *Sub-IR-1.1.1* and *Sub-IR-1.3.1.*

The evaluation highlighted several key findings:

1. MEDIA-M enhanced the resilience of Moldova's information space, yet challenges like financial sustainability and foreign malign influence persist.
2. The program bolstered the media's and society's ability to spot disinformation.
3. Diverse media content emerged, supported by robust advocacy and oversight.
4. While technological aid was effective, broader strategies for financial diversification are needed.
5. MEDIA-M successfully advanced media literacy nationwide.
6. More Russian-language content is required, particularly in Russian-speaking regions.
7. Engaging more with regional media can curb misinformation and enhance local accountability.

The evaluation suggests that USAID/Moldova continue to prioritize the bolstering of independent journalism, emphasizing impactful storytelling and media literacy, especially within underserved communities. Equipping media organizations to combat disinformation, diversifying their financial models, and amplifying technical and managerial capacities should be emphasized. Tailored training for media and civil society organizations, alongside collaborations among various stakeholders, will reinforce ethical and transparent media practices. Investing in local content, bridging connections between major and regional media, and aiding Russian-speaking professionals are pivotal in integrating diverse narratives into the national discourse. Integrating modern technical tools, from cybersecurity to artificial intelligence, is essential for media adaptability. Above all, a concerted effort to heighten media literacy across all segments, leveraging journalists as catalysts, can fortify critical thinking and the overall resilience of the information space.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES 5

ACRONYMS 6

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7

1. INTRODUCTION 13

2. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS 15

3. EVALUATION METHODS AND LIMITATIONS 17

4. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 20

ANNEX I: EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK 51

ANNEX II: EVALUATION WORK PLAN 55

ANNEX III: EVALUATION METHODS AND LIMITATIONS 125

ANNEX IV: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TOOLS 127

ANNEX V: SOURCES OF INFORMATION 131

ANNEX VI: EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS 135

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: USAID/MOLDOVA CDCS DO 1: STRENGTHENED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY 14
FIGURE 2: TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS' CONFIDENCE IN IDENTIFYING MISINFORMATION 24
FIGURE 3: USAID/MOLDOVA CDCS DO 1: STRENGTHENED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY 25
FIGURE 4: ENHANCING THE RESILIENCE OF THE INFORMATION SPACE BASED ON TARGETED SUPPORT 27
FIGURE 5: USAID/MOLDOVA CDCS DO 1: STRENGTHENED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY 33
FIGURE 6: LOCAL/REGIONAL MEDIA'S CAPACITY TO COVER INFORMATION NEEDS OF THEIR AUDIENCE 47
FIGURE 7: OBSTACLES PREVENTING THE WORK OF LOCAL/REGIONAL MEDIA INSTITUTIONS 47

ACRONYMS

AI	artificial intelligence
CA	contribution analysis
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
COR	Activity Contracting Officer's Representative
CSOs	civil society organizations
ET	evaluation team
EQ	evaluation question
EWP	evaluation work plan
FGD	focus group discussion
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GOM	Government of Moldova
IJC	Independent Journalism Centre
IP	implementing partner
IR	Intermediate result
KI	key informant
KP	key partner
KIIs	key informant interviews
MEDIA-M	Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova
MOs	media organizations
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
OCA	organizational capacity assessment
TOC	theory of change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Upon request from the United States Agency for International Development in Moldova (USAID/Moldova), Integra Government Services International LLC conducted a performance evaluation of the Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) program to provide an evidence-based and independent review of the activity's implementation to date. MEDIA-M is a $14.3 million USAID/Moldova-funded activity implemented by Internews. USAID/Moldova launched the MEDIA-M program with the overarching objective of fostering the growth of an independent, professional media landscape that provides citizens with access to diverse perspectives and establishes a media sector that is better equipped to withstand political and financial pressures. Moreover, MEDIA-M's focus on Moldova's legal environment aims to reinforce existing protections for freedom of speech, improve the implementation of laws, and advocate for media sector regulation in accordance with international norms.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assist USAID/Moldova in understanding the extent to which the activity is on track to contribute to the Mission's relevant Sub-IR-level results, namely: *Sub-IR-1.1.1 Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight strengthened*; and *Sub-IR-1.3.1 Resilience of the information space strengthened*. The Mission and the implementing partner (IP) will use the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation to determine if the Activity should make any adjustments moving forward to maximize development outcomes.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation questions (EQs) included the following: (1) To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space? (2) To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight? (3) How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims? (4) To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian-language audiences? (5) To what extent has the activity improved media literacy? (6) Would value be added to the Sub-IR-level results this activity seeks to contribute to if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If not, why not? The primary audience of this evaluation comprises the USAID/Moldova team, the prime implementing partner, Internews, and the activity's media partners.

METHODOLOGY

The Evaluation Team utilized a mixed-method approach to conduct this performance evaluation thoroughly. In total, 59 respondents engaged qualitatively through 36 key informant interviews and six focus group discussions, enriched by reviewing up to 30 MEDIA-M-related documents and administering two online surveys in Romanian and Russian languages. Contribution analysis was the primary framework to assess the causal relationships between program activities and changes in media resilience, literacy, and reactions to malign influences.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

EQ 1 FINDINGS

MEDIA-M has been instrumental in bolstering independent media outlets through diverse support, resulting in improved business operations and content quality. 75% of survey respondents identified the current space as either "*significantly more resilient*" or "*more resilient*" compared with the past six years, though issues like media ownership's political ties and foreign influence, especially in areas like Gagauzia, remain. Independent media continues to grapple with challenges like a shortage of professionals, financial instability, and a monopolized advertising market. Although online media platforms are on the rise, they often house disinformation. The existing legal framework, especially the Press Law, is outdated and vague concerning modern content creators. A pressing need exists for a refined regulatory approach to online media and digital platforms.

EQ 1 CONCLUSION

*The MEDIA-M program made a relatively **strong contribution** to strengthening the resilience of the information space, in alignment with USAID CDCS Sub-IR-1.3.1.*

EQ 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID should persistently back independent journalism in Moldova through grants, training, and legal provisions while emphasizing engaging narratives. The agency should amplify MEDIA-M's success, emphasizing incentives for media evolution and prioritizing support for fact-checking entities to counteract misinformation, especially at grassroots levels. Recognizing the national security implications of localized news, which acts as a defense against misinformation and an alert system for arising concerns, is essential to bolster public trust. There's a call for reinforced transparency concerning media ownership and for USAID to bridge collaborative efforts between the government and tech giants addressing online safety, misinformation, and cybersecurity. Despite market challenges, the professional growth of journalists is indispensable for quality reporting. Media institutions require bolstered managerial and digital capabilities to adeptly tackle challenges and remain pivotal in information dissemination. Lastly, fostering partnerships among media outlets, journalists, and civil society organizations (CSOs) can optimize costs, amplify news impact, and diversify audience reach.

EQ 2 FINDINGS

Over the past six years, 43% of media outlets and associated stakeholders observed enhancements in media diversity and inclusivity, with the media now addressing a broader spectrum of topics, some previously deemed taboo. MEDIA-M's advocacy for marginalized groups has facilitated more open discourse and policy discussions, though a centralized advocacy core on media issues remains absent. Media sensitivity to social issues has grown, but such content largely depends on donor funding. More than half the respondents noted the low appeal of socially driven content to advertisers, leading to a project-centric editorial focus. While MEDIA-M has fostered safe platforms for discourse and advocacy, 52% believe these efforts are insufficient, primarily due to financial and staffing challenges. Nevertheless, 40% are committed to continuing advocacy without external funds. Engaging influencers has been fruitful in expanding audiences. With MEDIA-M's support, journalists now work in a safer environment, benefiting from legal aid, especially in a politically volatile context. The program's adaptability has empowered journalists to tackle diverse societal challenges.

EQ 2 CONCLUSION

*The MEDIA-M program has made a **relatively strong contribution** to strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight.*

EQ 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID is encouraged to maintain its media support, emphasizing outreach to marginalized and underserved communities, with a special focus on people with visual and hearing impairments. The agency should champion legally binding measures to ensure these communities' right to information, moving beyond self-regulation. The importance of backing the creation of socially relevant content with editorial agility is highlighted, enabling timely responses to unforeseen national or international events, be they socioeconomic, political, or humanitarian crises. MEDIA-M should tailor its aid, training, and consultancy to media organizations (MOs) and CSOs in the region, enhancing their advocacy and oversight capacities. Supporting independent media monitoring mechanisms, like the Press Council, is advised for maintaining media ethics and addressing audience grievances. In tandem, the existing Press Council's role and credibility should be fortified. Finally, USAID is recommended to sponsor platforms for engagement, spurring dialogue between media entities and the public and prompting media outlets to continually seek and incorporate community feedback.

EQ 3 FINDINGS

In recent years, Moldova's media realm has witnessed a surge in digital platform usage as audiences pivot away from conventional media like TV and radio, shifting their trust to social media platforms, including individual online influencers like YouTubers and bloggers. Media entities now favor multimedia content for its engaging nature, resulting in heightened audience interaction. The MEDIA-M initiative has been pivotal in aiding organizations to adapt to modern technologies and enrich their content

capabilities, with technological proficiency scores of supported entities rising by 16%. Despite recognizing the potential of crowdfunding and subscription models for financial viability, their efficacy is limited due to factors such as the public's reluctance regarding paid content and unclear crowdfunding regulations. Data security and privacy, coupled with compliance with policies like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), are anticipated challenges, highlighting a need for journalists to bolster their expertise in these areas.

EQ 3 CONCLUSION

*MEDIA-M's contribution is deemed **relatively strong**, with a strong impact on building the technological capability of the supported beneficiaries and a weak contribution to ensuring financial sustainability based on financial tools.*

EQ 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID should persistently back media organizations in updating their technical proficiencies to align with modern media consumption habits with an emphasis on elevating journalists' expertise in data management and reinforcing cybersecurity defenses. The agency should also facilitate media organizations' adeptness in harnessing artificial intelligence to enhance operations, automate routine tasks, and optimize resource utilization. Collaborative efforts with beneficiaries should be pursued to augment the efficacy of financial instruments. This might involve initiatives that promote media support via subscriptions and contributions, broaden revenue avenues like sponsorships and merchandise sales, bolster advocacy to refine the regulatory landscape, and engage both local communities and expatriates to cultivate a sense of unity and support for the media.

EQ 4 FINDINGS

The MEDIA-M program contributed significantly to covering the information needs of the Russian-speaking audience, although it had limited success in growing this audience. While the program enhanced the capacity and content diversification for Russian speakers, expanding this particular audience posed challenges. Their distinct information needs, shaped by external influences, differ from the Romanian-speaking audience. Neglecting the Russian-speaking segment has implications for Moldova's information ecosystem, albeit moderately. An evident concern centers on the availability of diverse Russian content. Although quality Russian content can draw Romanian speakers, Russian-speaking individuals predominantly consume content in their native language. Factors such as language comfort, habits, trust, and content quality drive these preferences. Addressing this requires an understanding of the needs and preferences of the Russian-speaking audience.

EQ 4 CONCLUSION

*The collected evidence, coupled with the expert opinion of the ET, suggests that MEDIA-M made a **relatively strong contribution** to supporting Russian-language MOs and other MOs providing Russian-language content.*

EQ 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID should consistently back independent MOs and media-monitoring CSOs, guiding them to tailor their institutional frameworks to current demands. The emphasis should be on enhancing the professionalism of their teams and ensuring they produce unbiased, top-tier content that appeals to both Russian- and Romanian-speaking demographics at various geographical levels. Strengthened partnerships among independent MOs, media-monitoring CSOs, academic circles, and media professionals are essential. Such collaborations should aim to pinpoint and train native Russian-speaking experts and influential figures on diverse scales. Furthermore, the agency should motivate and guide regional Russian-language MOs to align with their national counterparts, guaranteeing consistent information exchange, data verification, and coverage of local incidents with broader national ramifications.

EQ 5 FINDINGS

The MEDIA-M program, in combination with other donor programs, has effectively contributed to combating disinformation and enhancing media literacy among diverse audiences. Media literacy programs have been well received, focusing on tailored, user-friendly content. However, to ensure sustainability, media literacy should shift toward an interdisciplinary subject promoting critical thinking as a daily practice.

A need exists to expand media literacy activities to different regions of Moldova and consider linguistic particularities. Teachers and librarians emphasize the importance of customization in teaching techniques to address the needs of both Russian- and Romanian-language speakers. The evaluation team recommends a territorial approach to reach communities facing a higher threat of disinformation and investment in local media practitioners to increase community media literacy knowledge. Expanding media literacy skills is crucial in the digital age to combat the spread of fake news and disinformation.

EQ 5 CONCLUSION

*The MEDIA-M program has **strongly contributed** to raising awareness and promoting media literacy at the national level.*

EQ 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID should prioritize collaboration with key public institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and Research, Parliament, the Presidential Office, and the Audiovisual Council, especially as they contemplate national initiatives to boost media literacy and awareness. The Mission should envisage continual education tailored for media literacy trainers, aligning with the evolving needs of the information landscape. Special attention should be given to the media literacy requirements of vulnerable groups, including those with sensory impairments, ethnic minorities, and children in institutional care or vocational education. USAID should back endeavors focused on the creation and widespread distribution of media literacy educational resources across Moldova. Broadening the collaboration network to encompass local governing bodies is vital. Investing in community journalists

and local media platforms can amplify the outreach of media literacy initiatives. Engaging prominent journalists, influencers, and content creators can catalyze a societal shift towards heightened critical thinking and information safety awareness.

EQ 6 FINDINGS

The evidence collected highlights the essential role of developing national and regional media in Moldova. Local media outlets contribute to diverse voices, community building, trust in media, and well-informed citizens. They act as watchdogs, counteracting misinformation and promoting transparency in local governance. The absence of local media outlets leads to a knowledge gap in local communities. Efforts to address this issue involve partnerships between national media and individual journalists or local outlets to produce local content. However, regions with inconsistent or no media coverage remain underserved. Local media outlets encounter challenges similar to national ones, with a more pronounced impact due to limited financial resources and workforce issues. The scarcity of professional journalists and low pay hinder their activity, as indicated by 90% of online survey respondents. Economic viability is a pressing concern, given smaller markets, declining advertising revenues, and the need for sustained investment in quality journalism.

EQ 6 CONCLUSION

The consistent emphasis on the production of local content for local communities by the vast majority of respondents ***reaffirms the intrinsic value of grassroots journalism.*** *Local media outlets are uniquely positioned to cater to the specific needs, concerns, and interests of their communities. Developing local and regional media would strengthen the overall resilience of the information landscape, ensuring diverse voices are heard, and local issues are addressed.*

EQ 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID should promote collaborations between major media entities and individual journalists or regional and local outlets, aiming to bridge informational voids and foster diversity in media voices. Mentorship initiatives can guide smaller regional newsrooms in upholding communication standards. The agency should assess the feasibility of establishing regional informational hubs in the North and South parts of the country to channel regional socioeconomic and political updates to a national audience. Emphasizing regional journalism schools can tap into a pool of enthusiastic individuals with varied skill sets, even if they lack journalistic backgrounds. Establishing partnerships with regional universities can attract students interested in pursuing a career in journalism. Augmenting local media's capabilities in fact-checking and investigative journalism will play a crucial role in dispelling misinformation, thus fortifying well-informed and responsible communities. Lastly, technological advancements, including leveraging artificial intelligence, should be integrated into the operational framework of regional and local media to stay in sync with contemporary media consumption behaviors.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT

Six years ago, the media environment in Moldova faced significant vulnerabilities, including political and financial pressures that threatened the independence and diversity of media outlets. The information space was marked by limited access to diverse voices and perspectives and independent media struggling to withstand external influences that could compromise their editorial integrity.

To address these challenges, the Government of Moldova (GOM) made media development a top priority. Recognizing the pivotal role that mass media plays in informing the public on matters of public interest, shaping public opinion, and advancing democratic values, the Parliament of Moldova adopted the National Concept for Media Development in the Republic of Moldova for 2018–2025. In 2018, a new Audiovisual Media Services Code was introduced, with subsequent amendments in 2022, aimed at promoting freedom of expression, editorial independence, and transparency in media ownership, safeguarding journalists, and countering disinformation. As a result, Moldova has made significant progress in the World Press Freedom Index in 2023, moving up 16 places to the 28th position from its 44th ranking in 2022.[1]

Moldova's media landscape is diverse. However, the growing dissemination of media content through nontraditional platforms introduces fresh prospects and challenges. This becomes particularly relevant in the current climate heavily influenced by mis-, mal-, and disinformation. Russia's war in Ukraine created new challenges and raised the stakes for Moldova's media community. Fostering a media sector more resilient to political and financial pressures is among the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s and Moldova's priorities to ensure a democratic society and catalyze citizen engagement.

To this end, USAID, Freedom House, and United Kingdom Aid designed the Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) program to strengthen the ability of independent media to fulfill its role as a watchdog over the government and serve as a space for citizens to engage in public policy dialogue. By August 2023, 54 national, 20 regional, and 10 local media outlets, along with 26 media-monitoring Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), benefited from the support rendered under the MEDIA-M program, such as grants/subgrants, training, consultancy, and other technical assistance.

1.2 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND THEORY OF CHANGE

The MEDIA-M program aims to promote the development of independent, professional media in Moldova that gives citizens access to various perspectives and is more resilient to political and financial pressures. Moreover, MEDIA-M's focus on Moldova's legal environment aims to reinforce existing protections for freedom of speech, improve the implementation of laws, and advocate for media sector regulation in accordance with international norms.

[1] https://rsf.org/en/country/moldova

MEDIA-M focuses on three programmatic and one cross-cutting objective to be achieved with implementing partners (IPs), the Independent Journalism Center (IJC), and Freedom House (Figure 1).[2]

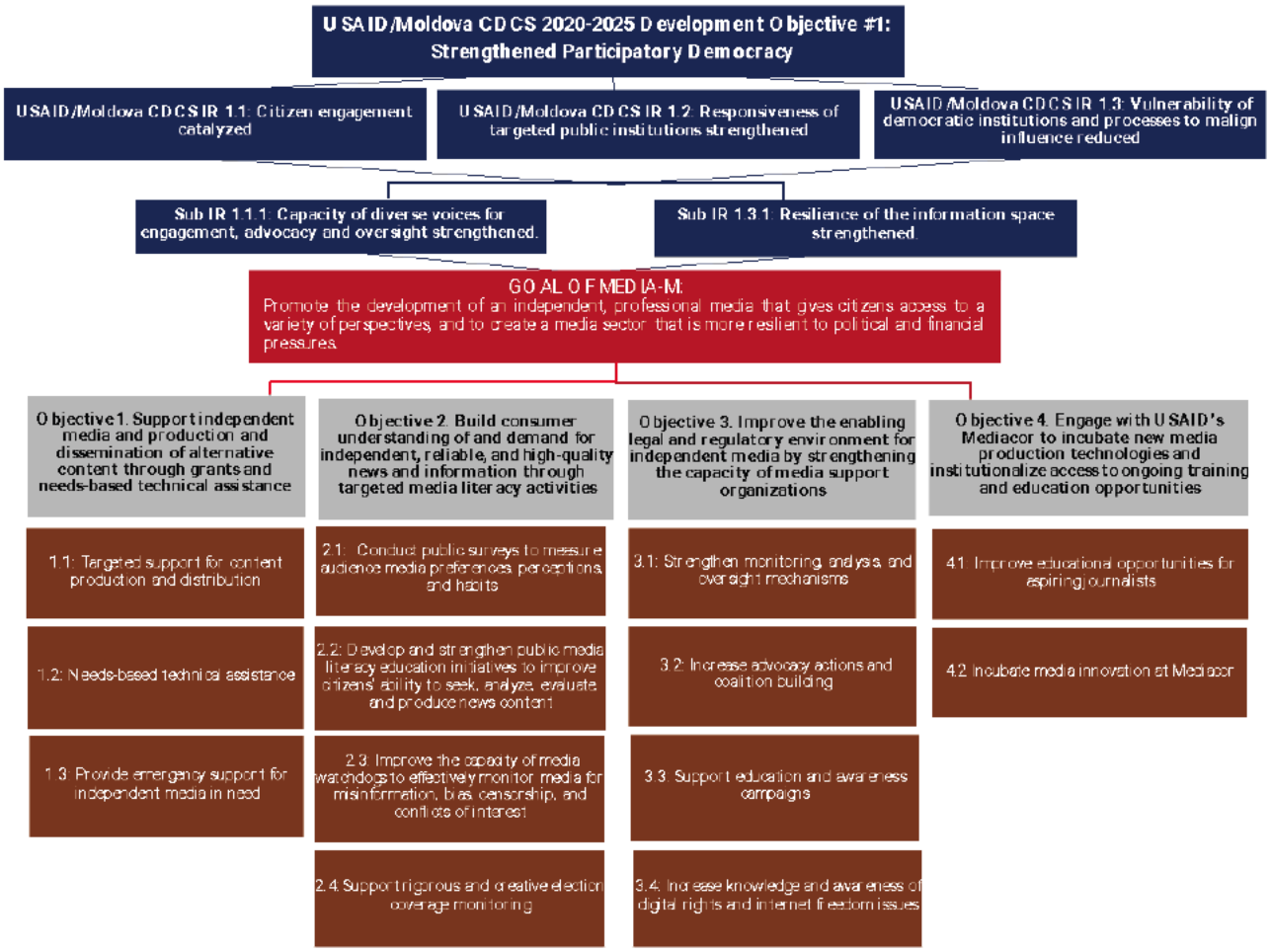


FIGURE 1: USAID/MOLDOVA CDCS DO 1: STRENGTHENED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Initially a five-year program, MEDIA-M received a time and cost extension for 18 months in June 2021, pushing the activity end date to September 30, 2023. On May 5, 2023, USAID awarded the activity another time and cost extension through September 30, 2026. In addition to USAID funding, USAID receives gift funds from the British Government for the MEDIA-M activity with additional contributions to program objectives from the Swedish Foreign Ministry, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Open Society Foundation, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[2] The objectives below are presented based on the Technical Narrative as of March 2023.

2. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

2.1 EVALUATION PURPOSE

The purpose of this evaluation is to assist USAID/Moldova in understanding the extent to which the activity is on track to contribute to the Mission's relevant Sub-IR-level results, namely: Sub-IR-1.1.1 Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight strengthened, and Sub-IR-1.3.1 Resilience of the information space strengthened. The Mission will use the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation to determine if the activity should make any adjustments moving forward to maximize development outcomes.

As per USAID's Resilience Policy, resilience refers to the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth. As per the context of the MEDIA-M program, resilience refers to the capacity of individuals, communities, and societies to effectively navigate and respond to challenges related to disinformation, fake news, and the influence of malign actors. It encompasses their ability to analyze information critically; identify and mitigate the risks of misinformation and disinformation; and actively participate in shaping a media landscape that promotes democratic values, transparency, and accountability. Resilience in this context involves building knowledge, skills, and awareness to counteract harmful narratives, safeguard media integrity, and foster a resilient information ecosystem that empowers individuals and protects societies from the negative impacts of malign influence.

2.2 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation addressed the following evaluation questions (EQs):

1. TO WHAT EXTENT ARE ACTIVITY OUTPUTS STRENGTHENING THE RESILIENCE OF THE INFORMATION SPACE?

Under this EQ, the Evaluation Team (ET) gauged the ability of MEDIA-M–supported media outlets to respond to increased malign influence and reduce their vulnerability to such pressures. To what extent did the collaboration with the MEDIA-M program contribute to improving their resilience? The Evaluation Team will also seek to measure the ability of MEDIA-M beneficiaries (grant recipients, teachers, and librarians) to identify disinformation and their self-reported critical thinking skills to be able to recognize it. How has the role of media evolved in the last six years from being an information conveyor to an educator, and what was the contribution of the MEDIA-M program to any progress?

2. TO WHAT EXTENT ARE ACTIVITY OUTPUTS STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF DIVERSE VOICES FOR ENGAGEMENT, ADVOCACY, AND OVERSIGHT?

Under this EQ, the ET will assess the extent to which the MEDIA-M program created the opportunities and empowered media, influencers, and civic groups to make their voices heard. Moreover, the performance assessment will look into media capacity and practices to be more inclusive of those with disabilities, members of ethnic minority groups, and other marginalized communities. In addition, the Evaluation Team will gauge the degree of change in the ability of diverse voices (media, influencers, vloggers, and civic groups) to manifest their engagement, advocacy, and oversight and the contribution and sufficiency of the MEDIA-M program's support in this change process.

3. HOW DID USING TECHNOLOGY (INCLUDING MULTIPLE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS) HELP THE ACTIVITY AND ITS BENEFICIARIES ACHIEVE ITS AIMS?

Under this EQ, the ET gauged the awareness of new tools (such as crowdfunding and subscriptions) and digital media among MEDIA-M–supported beneficiaries. Moreover, the ET assessed the degree of usage of these tools and MEDIA-M's role in increasing the scale of the activity and improving the sustainability of the beneficiaries (media outlets, media influencers).

4. TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE ACTIVITY SUCCESSFUL IN REACHING RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE AUDIENCES?

Under this EQ, the ET assessed the effectiveness and sufficiency of current MEDIA-M support efforts for Russian-speaking media outlets. Moreover, the ET gathered evidence on factors influencing audience engagement (quality/language/etc.). The ET assessed what worked, what did not, and what could have been done differently to yield better results.

5. TO WHAT EXTENT HAS THE ACTIVITY IMPROVED MEDIA LITERACY?

Under this EQ, the ET assessed the strategy MEDIA-M implemented to enhance media literacy at the national and local levels. The team also evaluated the extent to which the MEDIA-M program contributed to improving the media literacy capacity of its participants (self-assessment). Furthermore, the ET analyzed how the MEDIA-M program's media literacy activities addressed the specific needs of the Russian-speaking population in Moldova and compared the findings with those targeting the Romanian-speaking population. Lastly, the evaluation identified the success factors and lessons learned from the program and recommended further actions to enhance media literacy among program participants.

6. WOULD VALUE BE ADDED TO THE SUB-IR-LEVEL RESULTS THIS ACTIVITY SEEKS TO CONTRIBUTE TO IF IT ENGAGED MORE WITH REGIONAL MEDIA OUTLETS? IF YES, HOW? IF NO, WHY NOT?

Under this EQ, the ET sought to collect relevant evidence to gauge whether value could be added by providing more local media support and, if so, to identify entry points for potential donor funding to reduce disinformation spread at local levels. In addition, should the merits be strong enough to warrant it, the ET may provide recommendations on potential ways of engaging with local and national players to increase the breadth and diversity of beneficiary groups.

3. EVALUATION METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

3.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

The Evaluation Team implemented a robust mixed-method approach to assess the efficiency and impact of the MEDIA-M program in Moldova. This comprehensive methodology was structured to collect diverse yet interlinked data, enabling a well-rounded assessment. Here is a structured breakdown of the methods employed:

- Review of up to 30 MEDIA-M-related documents, including annual progress reports; annual implementation plans; organizational capacity assessments; monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans; and secondary documentation relevant to the Moldovan media environment (including public opinion barometers).
- Thirty-six key informant interviews (KIIs) with 36 participants, including the implementing organization, media organizations, civil society organizations, government institutions, and donor organizations.
- Six focus group discussions (FGDs) with 23 beneficiaries, including teachers, librarians, and other civil society organizations that were involved in MEDIA-M activities.
- Two online surveys in both Romanian and Russian languages. These garnered a 76% response rate from primary beneficiaries and a 29% response rate from teachers and librarians, accumulating a total of 106 respondents.
- Site visits to Comrat (Gagauzia), Balti, and Soroca.

Various analytical techniques complemented this approach, such as contribution analysis (a primary analytical framework to address the EQ1 and EQ2, as well as complementary analytical framework for addressing EQ3, EQ4, and EQ5), logic model analysis (a complementary analytical framework to address EQ3), and comparative analysis (a complementary analytical framework to address EQ6), as did

some data-specific analytical techniques (frequency distribution and cross-tabulations specifically for data collected through online surveys).

The limitations of this evaluation include recall or response biases from participants, alongside the ever-present risk of biases introduced by the very individuals guiding the sessions, be it interviewers or focus group facilitators. In response to these challenges, the ET adopted a multipronged approach. The ET actively sought to cross-validate data by juxtaposing feedback from implementers with that of beneficiaries and supplementary data sources. Furthermore, the evaluation team encouraged respondents to be transparent and genuine in their responses, with reassurances about safeguarding the confidentiality of their shared information.

3.1.1 CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

The evaluation primarily utilized contribution analysis (CA) as the underlying design framework, in line with USAID guidance on CA. Through the CA, the ET examined the causal links between program activities and observed changes in media resilience, media literacy, and responses to malign influence.

The evaluation team utilized the following four-phase approach when developing the contribution story of the MEDIA-M program:

- **Phase A:** Existing evidence of MEDIA-M's contributions (desk review findings)
    - The ET thoroughly reviewed available documents and sources to gather existing evidence either supporting or challenging the MEDIA-M program's contributions and related underlying assumptions.
- **Phase B:** Other contributory factors (desk review and fieldwork findings)
    - Drawing insights from in-depth qualitative interviews with 59 key stakeholders and quantitative data collected from online surveys, the ET complemented these findings with firsthand observations from site visits. Through this multidimensional approach, the team determined additional factors contributing to the success of the MEDIA-M program.
- **Phase C:** Evidence supporting the re-examined contribution story (fieldwork findings)
    - Following the initial assessments, the ET revisited the Theory of Change (TOC), refining and recalibrating it based on emerging insights. This phase focused on gathering concrete evidence, primarily from fieldwork, that supported this refined TOC and the ensuing contribution narrative.
- **Phase D:** Challenges restraining outcomes under the re-examined contribution story (fieldwork findings)
    - During this phase, the ET identified the factors that constrained the MEDIA-M program from achieving the re-examined contribution story.

The phased approach was crucial in developing the contribution story because it ensured a systematic and iterative process that valued depth, clarity, and adaptability. By segmenting the evaluation, the ET

could refine its understanding progressively, ensuring that each subsequent phase built on the insights and findings of the previous one. This iterative approach ensured that the ET's narrative was constantly cross-checked and refined, leading to a more robust and comprehensive story. Furthermore, it enabled the ET to be adaptive, allowing the evaluation to respond dynamically to emerging patterns and findings, ensuring that the final contribution stories were not only evidence-based but also deeply reflective of the complexities and nuances of the MEDIA-M program. In essence, the phased approach provided the ET with a structured yet flexible framework, ensuring precision and depth in its storytelling.

After extensive desk review findings triangulated with the primary data collected through KIIs, FGDs, online surveys, and site visits, the ET elaborated two contribution stories to provide a neutral and evidence-based assessment of MEDIA-M's effectiveness in strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight (USAID/Moldova Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2020-2025 (CDCS) Sub-IR 1.1.1) and enhancing the resilience of the information space (CDCS Sub-IR 1.3.1), along with the four previously outlined objectives, as per following:

- Contribution story 1 represents the contribution story of the MEDIA-M program in achieving Sub-IR-1.3.1: Resilience of the information space strengthened.
- Contribution story 2 envisages the contribution of the MEDIA-M program in achieving Sub-IR-1.1.1: Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight strengthened.

The decision by the ET to develop contribution stories specifically for the first and second evaluation questions was rooted in prioritizing depth and precision over breadth. The nature of these two questions pertained to crucial aspects of the MEDIA-M program – the strengthening of the resilience of the information space and amplifying the capacity of diverse voices for advocacy. These questions represented core facets of the program's objectives and had overarching implications for its effectiveness and impact.

Given the overarching nature of these Sub-IRs and their encompassing relationship with the EQs, the ET considered it reasonable to focus on these contribution stories. In addition to those mentioned above, the ET measured the strength of evidence that supports MEDIA-M's contribution to observed results, applying a four-tier approach as per USAID's guidance on CA[3]: Weak, relatively weak, relatively strong, and strong. This measurement is presented in conclusions under each EQ. The strength of evidence was gauged based on the robust methodology grounded in both qualitative and quantitative data triangulation, enhanced by an extensive desk review of relevant documents. This approach thoroughly combined insights from interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and data analytics to produce an evidence-based assessment. Following USAID's guidance, the evidence was systematically classified from 'Weak' to 'Strong', ensuring that conclusions drawn reflected a deep and comprehensive understanding of MEDIA-M's contributions and were firmly rooted in verifiable data sources.

[3] https://usaidlearninglab.org/community/blog/decision-points-contribution-analysis

4. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 EVALUATION QUESTION 1[4]

To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?

4.1.1 PHASE A: EXISTING EVIDENCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION (DESK REVIEW FINDINGS)

FINDING 1: *The desk review reaffirmed MEDIA-M's contributions to improving the resilience of Moldova's media landscape.*

In the evidence generated from an extensive desk review of progress reports, implementation plans, and monitoring and evaluation data, the ET observed that MEDIA-M's technical assistance has contributed to enhancing policy and regulatory frameworks related to freedom of expression, access to information, the fight against disinformation, and the overall integrity and resilience of Moldova's media landscape. The annual Media Policy Forums have served as important platforms for discussions among experts from civil society, independent media, government institutions, academia, and the international community regarding key issues that impact Moldova's information space. These discussions encompassed a wide range of topics, including the transparency of public institutions, challenges related to wartime journalism, harassment of journalists, the financial sustainability of quality journalism, evolving media formats, journalism ethics and standards, and the management of media organizations. These dialogues were instrumental in identifying pragmatic policy solutions.

Over the program's duration, MEDIA-M has successfully produced 19 policy briefs covering diverse topics relevant to the media environment. These policy briefs offered valuable insights and recommendations to inform policy development. Furthermore, the Freedom of Information and the State of the Press Indexes prepared within the MEDIA-M program provide valuable insights in terms of transparency of public institutions in Moldova and a diagnostic overview of the entire media sector, identifying specific issues and key developments within the industry.

MEDIA-M has actively engaged with the Parliamentary Working Group and the Moldovan Government to improve the country's legal framework related to the media. This engagement encompassed significant initiatives, including the National Program and Action Plan on Media Development in Moldova 2022–2025, the Law on Attracting Investment for Film and Other Audiovisual Works Production, the Audiovisual Media Services Code, and the Strategy on Information Security. With the program's support, an emergency working group was established involving civil society organizations to

[4]Contribution Story 1: the contribution story of Media-m program in achieving Sub-IR-1.3.1: resilience of the information space strengthened

enhance key pieces of media legislation. By September 2022, the cumulative adoption of 12 initiatives comprising policies, regulations, and administrative procedures by the Moldovan Government had been achieved with MEDIA-M's assistance. This significant milestone exceeded the cumulative target of 10 initially set for accomplishment by September 2023. These achievements underscore the program's effectiveness in driving positive changes within Moldova's media policy and regulatory landscape.

The Program successfully promoted active engagement by civil society organizations in media monitoring and advocacy for media freedom. Additionally, it provided support to fact-checking organizations to verify the accuracy of information. These collaborative efforts resulted in the production of 25 media monitoring reports that exposed cases of manipulative information and propaganda and other topics of high public interest. Moreover, *Mediacritica.md*, a platform developed with the program's support and dedicated to countering propaganda, manipulation, and misinformation in Moldovan media, witnessed a remarkable increase of 600% in its readership.

Over 600 students, teachers, and librarians, as well as members of the general public, were educated on how to assess information sources critically and identify fake news. This MEDIA-M initiative, along with providing training and capacity building for journalists to enhance their skills in reporting, fact-checking, and digital security, collectively contributed to a more resilient information space in Moldova.

4.1.2 PHASE B: OTHER CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS (DESK REVIEW AND FIELDWORK FINDINGS)

FINDING 2: *The resilience of the information space is context-driven.*

While acknowledging the contribution of the MEDIA-M program, half of KII respondents highlighted that other factors have also contributed to the resilience of Moldova's information space. The respondents noted the correlation with changes in the political environment, efforts to reduce political pressure on media outlets, and financial support granted by donor organizations. Over the past several years, Moldova has experienced political shifts and changes in government leadership. These shifts have resulted in a more favorable environment for media freedom. Furthermore, the presence of an independent and empowered audiovisual regulatory body, coupled with access to various funding sources, has significantly diminished political interference in media affairs, an observation reiterated by several CSOs' beneficiaries and IPs.

Still, the dynamics of media ownership are closely tied to political power. Five key respondents highlighted that the resilience of Moldovan society to foreign malign influence remains low due to economic vulnerability and existing social or political affiliations. The ET was offered the example of Ilan Sor, a political party leader, who has managed to maintain his sway through pro-Kremlin and other TV stations affiliated with him. Three out of the six channels with suspended licenses, all linked to Sor, have

continued their operations without obstacles by relocating their editorial content to other channels and expanding their reach into other regions, including Gagauzia.[5]

4.1.3 PHASE C: EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RE-EXAMINED CONTRIBUTION STORY (FIELDWORK FINDINGS)

FINDING 3: *Respondents reported an improvement in the resilience of the information space over a six-year period.*

"Along with the change in power, the political pressure decreased. Compared to six years ago, currently there are more opportunities for media," a Media Organization (MO) noted. Feedback from stakeholders now paints a much-improved picture. 74% of the interviewed key informants (KIs), consisting of national and local media outlets, media-monitoring CSOs, public officials, and researchers, assessed the current information space as "*more resilient.*" This perception is consistent with data from online surveys, where 75% of respondents identified the current space as either "*significantly more resilient*" or "*more resilient*" compared with six years ago.

According to them, MEDIA-M activities have contributed to creating relevant avenues for enhancing the resilience of the information space. Key Partners (KPs) highlighted that the program has bolstered the capabilities of independent media to operate effectively as a government watchdog and to provide platforms for citizens to engage actively in public policy dialogue. The online survey further revealed that every second MEDIA-M supported organization implemented activities aimed at achieving financial independence, strengthening editorial independence, and fostering professional development. Additionally, 75% of outlets indicated that they had implemented activities to mitigate the growing foreign malign influence and vulnerabilities in Moldova's information space to a great extent or significantly.

FINDING 4: *Interviewed media outlets reported valuing the support from MEDIA-M for capacity building and content diversification.*

The FGDs and interviews revealed that MEDIA-M was a "safety net" for the independent media in Moldova. Of interviewed MOs, 53% confirmed the program has played a pivotal role in helping them develop the capacity to sustain their operations. This was achieved through the organizational assistance, consultancy, training, and financial support provided by MEDIA-M and other donors. The review of MEDIA-M monitoring and evaluation data shows the KPs' business capacity increased by 70% compared with the 2017 baseline, and their administration and strategic planning improved by 45%.[6]

[5] The Audiovisual Council's monitoring reports revealed that the suspended outlets inaccurately reported on national events and the war in Ukraine.

[6] https://internews.md/project/

FINDING 5: *Interviewed media outlets reported significant expansion in their audience reach, largely thanks to MEDIA-M investments*

During the interview phase, every third interviewed media outlet reported substantial expansions in its audience reach. This increased reach has allowed the media outlets to serve as vital sources of information and promote transparency. Based on data received during the KIIs, on average, the audience of independent media increased by 20% to 30%, primarily as a result of media outlets' expansion on various social media platforms and MEDIA-M investment in equipment to enhance production quality. Moreover, the editorial independence among supported MOs allowed for the production of unbiased and credible content. PRO TV accomplished a remarkable 50% surge in web audience in March 2023 compared with September 2022.[7]

FINDING 6: *Interviewed media outlets reported that thanks to the technical and financial support from MEDIA-M, the quality of media content has improved*

One-quarter of KII respondents pointed out that thanks to investments in new software and hardware, along with training on editorial policy and video production, the quality of media content has improved, particularly in the realm of social media. With the support of MEDIA-M, several MOs engaged marketing and social media managers and graphic designers who played a crucial role in generating customer interest in products and services across various media channels. Media outlets have leveraged digital tools to engage with audiences effectively and disseminate information rapidly. Ziarul de Garda, one of MEDIA-M's key partners, serves as an eloquent example. In 2022, it successfully boosted its subscriber base by 30% compared with the previous year, 2021.

4.1.4 PHASE D: CHALLENGES RESTRAINING OUTCOMES UNDER THE RE-EXAMINED TOC/ CONTRIBUTION STORY (FIELDWORK FINDINGS)

FINDING 7: *Shortage of media professionals, financial challenges, and dependency on donor funding have been stated as the top three challenges for long-term media resilience*

Several systemic constraints prevent the development of independent media. Lack of media professionals was recognized by 76% of KII respondents as the most critical problem in the media sector. Poor academic background and shortage of skilled staff, coupled with lower salaries compared with politically affiliated media outlets, result in an inadequate supply of professionals and a high rate of staff turnover within independent media organizations, several media outlets stated. Given the exodus of the labor force in Moldova, including in the media industry, media outlets have to recruit new staff and train them on their own.

[7] MEDIA-M Semi-annual narrative report, May, 2023

Of interviewed MEDIA-M beneficiaries and KPs[8] 74% acknowledged the media sector still faces challenges in terms of financial sustainability. Dependency on donor funding is strong for many outlets, which is a significant concern, especially for investigative journalism, which must be highly cautious about the sources of their funding. Of KII respondents, 44% expressed the opinion that the advertising market remains small, monopolized, and unattractive to foreign investment, which makes it difficult for independent media outlets to develop and operate in the local market.

The COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the war in Ukraine, led to a significant decrease in the income derived by media from advertising, with the annual revenue decreasing in the case of TV from 14 million euros (prior to COVID-19) to approximately eight million euros in 2022. In addition, most advertising revenue has shifted from traditional media to online media and social networks.[9]

Apart from TV channels like TV8 (a MEDIA-M beneficiary), which in 2022 received 56% of its overall revenues from donors, the majority of KII respondents indicated that donors currently cover more than 90% of their financial needs. This heavy reliance on donor funding underscores the challenges faced by independent media in diversifying their revenue sources and achieving financial sustainability. It also highlights the critical role that donors play in supporting independent journalism and media organizations in Moldova.

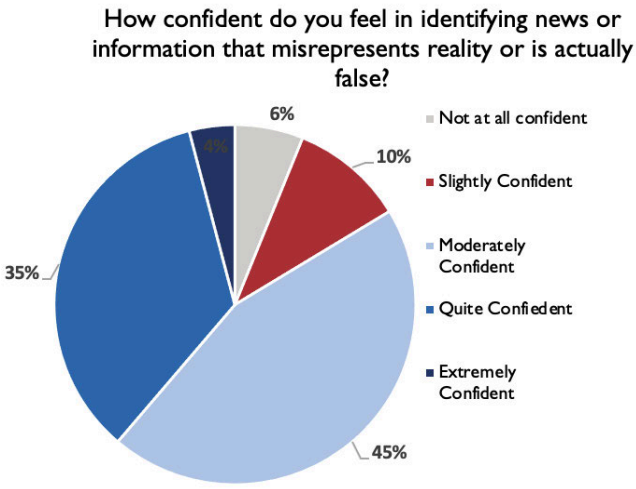


FIGURE 2: TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS' CONFIDENCE IN IDENTIFYING MISINFORMATION

FINDING 8: *Respondents noted the absence of legislative regulation addressing disinformation in the online space.*

Online media often serves as a gateway for promoting disinformation and fake news. A KI noted that the public requires ongoing guidance to distinguish between accurate and fake information. This perception is consistent with data from online surveys, where 45% of respondents identified their confidence level in identifying news or information that misrepresents realtors or is even false as "*moderately confident*" (Figure 2).

[8] MEDIA-M KPs: PRO TV, RISE Moldova, Ziarul de Garda, SP, and NewsMaker

[9] According to the study, "Media market in Moldova: realities and trends," (IJC, 2023), the online market accounts for 28% of the total volume of the advertising market, being second to television.

Several officials and independent MOs referred to the legal framework that needs further improvement. In particular, the Press Law is outdated and lacks clarity in its definition of a media institution, especially in the context of new media, such as bloggers, vloggers, and influencers, and their operational environment. The absence of a well-developed normative framework for online media is a notable concern in Moldova.

It was highlighted to the ET that public authorities are looking to the European Union for guidance, particularly given the limited legislation at the European Union level, with the exception of the Digital Services Act. This situation underscores the need for a more robust and specific regulatory framework to address the unique challenges posed by online media and digital platforms. Specifically, the fact that penalties have been raised but appear to have an insignificant effect on larger media players suggests that more robust enforcement mechanisms are needed, one key respondent noticed.

4.1.5 EQ 1 CONCLUSION

*The outcomes produced under objectives 1, 2, and 5 by the MEDIA-M program made a **relatively strong contribution** to the strengthened resilience of the information space, in alignment with USAID CDCS Sub-IR-1.3.1.*

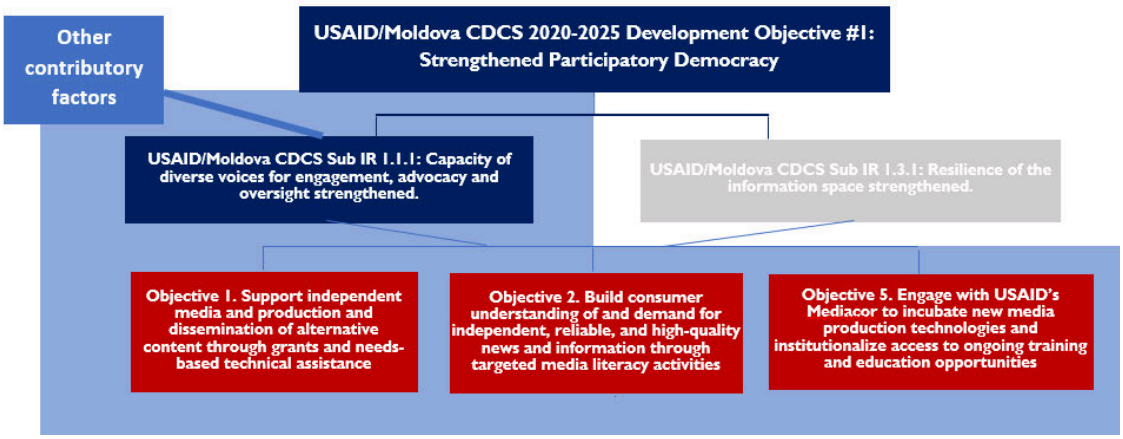


FIGURE 3: USAID/MOLDOVA CDCS DO 1: STRENGTHENED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

This assertion is reinforced by findings 3, 4, and 5, which are derived from the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data and are completely evidenced, as thoroughly detailed in the previously outlined contribution story.

Findings 3 to 6 indicate that MEDIA-M has played a relatively strong contributory role in strengthening the resilience of Moldova's information space. Of interviewed KIs, 74% assessed the current information space as "more resilient." The capacities of supported media outlets have been significantly enhanced. More than half of interviewed MOs confirmed the program has played a pivotal role in helping them develop the capacity to sustain their operations. The intricate dynamics of the wider

socio-political and economic environment must also be recognized for their concurrent influence on the media landscape.

Based on the findings listed under Phase D (from 7 onward), factors such as the intertwining of media ownership with political dynamics, systemic challenges inherent in the media sector, and a substantial dependency on donor funding undeniably shape the trajectory of media resilience. Although the MEDIA-M program's contributions stand out, they are nested within a broader spectrum of influencers.

The evolving digital domain presents a dual-edged reality. While endeavors by the MEDIA-M program to counteract disinformation are commendable, the flux in media consumption habits indicates the necessity for sustained efforts. The program's initiatives, thus, exist within an intricate interplay of multifarious determinants.

4.1.6 EQ 1 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. USAID should continue providing support to independent journalism through grants, training, and legal protections to ensure an accountable, robust, and free press, encouraging a more engaging storytelling approach that resonates with the public.
2. In the future, USAID should build on MEDIA-M results that incentivize media development in Moldova. Support must be prioritized for fact-checking organizations and initiatives to debunk false information and provide accurate, evidence-based information to the public (see Figure 3), including those at the regional and local levels.

   While local-related content and news may seem localized, they can have a significant impact on national security by informing, engaging, and safeguarding local communities, countering misinformation, and serving as early warning mechanisms for emerging issues. This should ultimately enhance citizens' trust in the media.
3. Future MEDIA-M interventions should support initiatives to enforce transparency in media ownership to ensure citizens are aware of who controls media outlets.
4. To address issues related to online safety, misinformation, cybersecurity, and more, USAID should consider facilitating collaboration between government and social media and tech platforms. A need exists for more effective donor coordination to prevent overlap and duplication and ensure a more strategic development of the information space in Moldova.
5. Despite a shrinking market, investing in the training and development of journalists both at national and local levels remains crucial. Well-trained journalists are more likely to produce high-quality content that attracts and retains audiences.

Prioritize enhancing managerial and digital capacity within media organizations that can empower them to navigate challenges effectively, adapt to evolving media environments, and continue serving as vital sources of information and watchdogs in society.

6. USAID should foster collaboration among media outlets, journalists, and CSOs on projects or investigations. This can reduce costs, increase the impact of reporting, and reach new audiences.

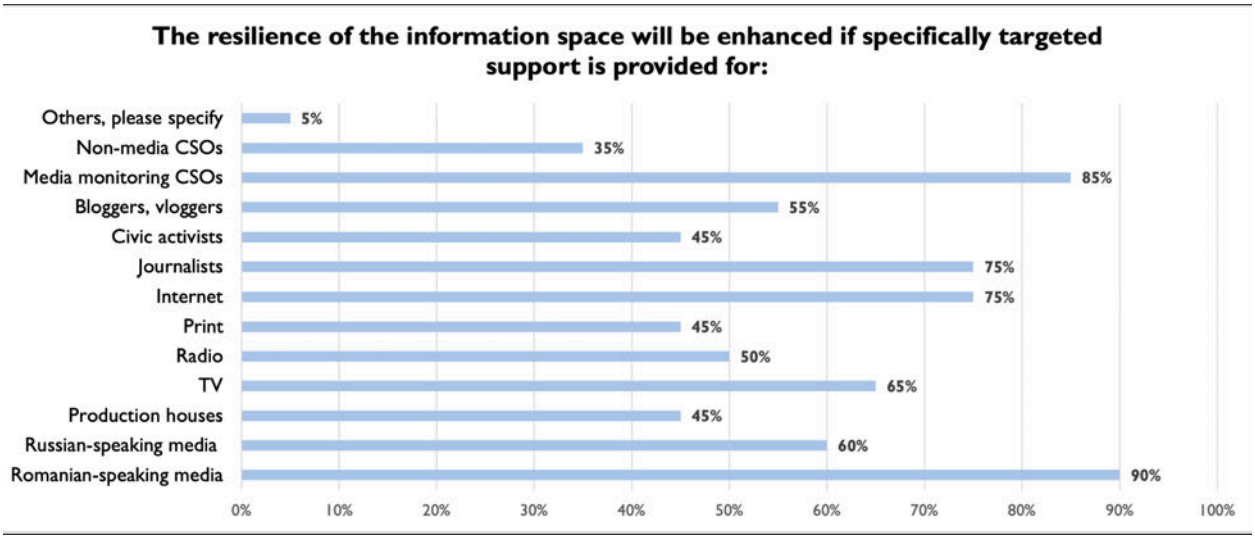


FIGURE 4: ENHANCING THE RESILIENCE OF THE INFORMATION SPACE BASED ON TARGETED SUPPORT

4.2 EVALUATION QUESTION 2[10]

To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?

4.2.1 PHASE A: EXISTING EVIDENCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION (DESK REVIEW FINDINGS)

FINDING 1: *MEDIA-M contributed to enhancing the capability of individuals, constituencies, and organizations to shape public agendas, change public policies and influence processes that impact their lives, as evidenced from desk review and monitoring, evaluation, and learning data.*

MEDIA-M's advocacy initiatives have made significant progress, with a remarkable 549 advocacy activities conducted by September 2022, surpassing the initial target of 450 set for September 2023. This extensive effort has actively involved 20 civil society organizations, which received valuable technical assistance from MEDIA-M to undertake advocacy interventions.

[10] Contribution Story 2: the contribution story of the MEDIA-M program in achieving sub-ir-1.1.1: capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight strengthened.

As part of this endeavor, the program has provided around 178 pro bono consultations to media professionals, offering guidance on critical principles of transparency, free speech, and press freedom. Additionally, more than nine media organizations have benefited from pro bono representation in Moldovan judicial courts, ensuring their rights and interests are protected.

To help journalists and media outlets navigate complex legal matters with confidence, the "Media Lawyer" section on the *Cji.md* portal has proved to be a valuable resource, as it delivered approximately 175 responses in Romanian and Russian to inquiries raised by journalists and media representatives. These responses covered a wide range of legal aspects related to the media, enhancing knowledge and understanding within the industry.

In tandem with these activities, MEDIA-M has been vigilant in identifying and addressing infringements on journalists' rights, issuing around 76 statements to highlight and advocate for cases where these rights have been violated. This comprehensive approach reflects the program's dedication to upholding and promoting media freedom and integrity.

The comprehensive training initiatives further exemplify MEDIA-M's commitment to bolstering media freedom and supporting media professionals. Notably, 24 journalists and 15 lawyers have undergone specialized training in areas crucial to their work: access to information and personal data protection. This effort significantly exceeded the original targets, which aimed to train 20 journalists and ten lawyers.

In parallel, the program has had a substantial impact on the public sector. Approximately 268 civil servants received training on access to information law through the Academy of Public Administration. This number reflects a substantial increase of around 80% compared with the initially proposed targets. These well-trained civil servants are essential in facilitating access to information for journalists. Many of them frequently collaborate with the IJC's legal coordinator to address journalists' requests for information, contributing to transparency and openness in the media landscape. This concerted effort ensures that the media can effectively serve its vital role in society while adhering to the principles of access to information and data protection.

4.2.2 PHASE B: OTHER CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS (DESK REVIEW AND FIELDWORK FINDINGS)

FINDING 2: *Commitment to European Union Standards uplifts inclusivity and diversity*

Moldova's association with the European Union, combined with the Visa Liberalization process, has been instrumental in reshaping its media landscape. This association prompted the Republic of Moldova to commit to significant legislative and procedural reforms. These reforms are not just administrative; they indicate a shift in values, emphasizing a strong drive towards inclusivity and diversity. Through this alignment with the European Union, Moldova has signified its intent to mold its media space in a manner that resonates with European principles and values. This not only establishes a benchmark for media quality but also elevates the standards for representation and diversity within the sector.

FINDING 3: *Donor projects empower marginalized voices and strengthen journalism*

Various donor-driven projects have acted as catalysts in amplifying marginalized voices and enhancing the professional capabilities of Moldovan journalists. Media Literacy and Countering Misinformation (SIMML III) project[11], funded by the US Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), spearheaded efforts in media literacy. Its distinct focus on combating misinformation, propaganda, and media manipulation positioned budding journalists at the forefront of improved reporting, especially regarding women's rights.

With the backing of USAID and UNICEF, the Independent Press Association implemented a project[12] geared towards empowering journalists and journalism students. By concentrating on the prevalent challenge of COVID-19 and vaccination-related misinformation, the initiative bolstered the media sector's resilience by enabling professionals to identify and dispel fake news.

The project undertaken by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)[13] cast a spotlight on the crucial aspect of transparency during elections. Monitoring social media during Moldova's early parliamentary elections provided valuable insights into the strategies of electoral contestants and the sentiments of the Moldovan electorate.

The Council of Europe's initiative took on the challenge of addressing discriminatory rhetoric, especially in the context of sexism. Training sessions were organized for librarians and journalists to identify and counteract instances of hate speech and discrimination, reinforcing the media's role in fostering a balanced and inclusive discourse.

IREX Europe's project[14] endeavored to bring young individuals closer to their local media outlets. This not only enhanced media outreach to the youth demographic but also fostered a collaborative environment where young people actively participated in content creation.

Collectively, these donor projects have considerably expanded the horizons of Moldova's media sector, ensuring that it is not only more diverse but also more resilient and capable of representing a more comprehensive array of voices.

4.2.3 PHASE C: EVIDENCE SUPPORTING THE RE-EXAMINED CONTRIBUTION STORY (FIELDWORK FINDINGS)

[11] Strengthening Independent Media and Media Literacy in Moldova, ERIM - Equal Rights Independent Media (SIMML III), https://erim.ngo/simml-iii/

[12] Media and public institutions in Moldova are more resilient to disinformation, UNICEF, September 8, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/stories/media-and-public-institutions-moldova-are-more-resilient-disinformation

[13] Preliminary Report on social media monitoring in Moldova highlights the need to regulate online political campaigning, September 6, 2021, https://www.idea.int/news/preliminary-report-social-media-monitoring-moldova-highlights-need-regulate-online-political

[14] Building citizen engagement: Moldovan youth work with local media, June 5, 2018, https://www.civic.md/stiri/42638-building-citizen-engagement-moldovan-youth-work-with-local-media.html

FINDING 4: *MEDIA-M supported media outlets, CSOs and media practitioners reported enhanced capabilities for fostering and advocating for diversity*

Of media outlets, grant beneficiaries, and monitoring CSOs that participated in the online survey, 43% believe that the media environment has improved in terms of openness concerning the representation of diverse voices, including marginalized groups, compared with six years ago. This result is confirmed by multiple KII respondents, highlighting that the media landscape today covers a variety of topics, including topics once considered taboo, such as critical coverage of prominent political figures, domestic violence, and LGBT rights.

During the interview phase, one out of three respondents shared success stories related to holding authorities accountable and advocating for policy reviews regarding the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups. One KII respondent singled out the advocacy effort as a core activity of the media. To respond more efficiently to citizens' requests, ZdG, for example, has hired a person dedicated to working with the audience who usually reports on human rights violations.

By addressing diverse audiences and various beneficiaries, the MEDIA-M program significantly expanded the range of accessible content to a larger population, including those with special needs. For example, the Media Information Gaps Grants program allowed the Association of Visually Impaired of Moldova to translate, adapt, and publish media literacy textbooks into braille for all three levels of education: primary, middle, and high school. This groundbreaking effort made media literacy resources accessible to people with visual impairments for the first time.

FINDING 5: *Respondents noted enhanced accessibility in news broadcasting for individuals with hearing impairments.*

As the feedback from our respondents highlights, the program made significant strides in addressing the information needs of individuals with hearing impairments. These individuals gained consistent access to content specially curated for them, with Cimislia TV pioneering the effort. This TV channel broadcasted 25 weekly weekend prime-time news programs in which sign language took precedence as the communication medium. The importance of such broadcasts became glaringly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. With these programs, critical healthcare information was effectively communicated, ensuring that this key audience was not left in the dark during such challenging times.

FINDING 6: *MEDIA-M has created safer spaces for discussions and advocacy in favor of a more secure and resilient information space.*

In response to the adequacy of MEDIA-M media advocacy and oversight activities to maintain a resilient information space in Moldova, 52% of respondents in the online survey found these activities to be insufficient or were uncertain about their sufficiency. The main obstacles identified in conducting media advocacy and oversight activities align with the broader challenges faced by the media environment, namely, the lack of financial resources and a shortage of qualified staff. Looking ahead, 40% of

respondents in the online survey expressed their willingness to continue advocacy and oversight activities to significant extents, even without external funding. In comparison, 30% would either limit or cease these activities.

A KII respondent mentioned the positive impact of collaborating with an influencer to attract an audience. The partnership was seen as beneficial, leading to customized content and a 30% increase in the audience. However, some respondents categorized bloggers, vloggers, and influencers as content creators rather than journalists or media professionals. Furthermore, one KII respondent noted a disrupted collaboration with a prominent blogger and influencer due to ethical concerns.

FINDING 7: *Respondents noted a significant enhancement in professional development and a safer working environment for journalists under the MEDIA-M program.*

The MEDIA-M program has been instrumental in ensuring that journalists feel safer and more secure in executing their duties. Up to ten KII respondents from both the capital city and regional areas echoed this sentiment. Journalists and MOs often find themselves in peril, especially in relation to their advocacy and oversight activities. The MEDIA-M program's interventions have been pivotal, like those introducing advanced security measures like surveillance systems. One regional media outlet even shared the tangible impact of these efforts, stating how they "managed basically to install a proper door with a surveillance system, and now we feel safer."

FINDING 8: *Respondents value the flexibility and innovation fostered by MEDIA-M.*

More than 60% of KII respondents and FGD participants emphasized the inherent flexibility of the MEDIA-M program as a significant benefit. This flexibility permitted media outlets to delve into various topics, employ varying perspectives, and utilize the most suitable tools for audience engagement. One KII respondent noted: "Under MEDIA-M, we were able to access paid information to support our investigations. The more accurate the information is, the fewer legal issues emerge." The majority of KII respondents pointed out that the key advantage of the MEDIA-M program resides in openness to innovations. Nevertheless, at least four KII respondents also noted the need to adapt more quickly to emerging needs due to unpredicted socioeconomic and political events of national or international importance.

4.2.4 PHASE D: CHALLENGES RESTRAINING OUTCOMES UNDER THE RE-EXAMINED CONTRIBUTION STORY (FIELDWORK FINDINGS)

FINDING 9: *Evidence suggests that while there's an increase in media products addressing inclusiveness and diversity, their quality and approach remain a concern.*

Over the past six years, there's been a noticeable growth in media products and information that discuss inclusiveness and diversity, marking a significant shift from the past landscape.

However, a key informant respondent highlighted concerns regarding the quality of these resources. Specifically, improper approaches in delivering the information, defining and explaining terminologies, and describing processes may lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and mystification of existing societal stereotypes.

FINDING 10: *A consolidated advocacy core on media issues remains elusive.*

Though the MEDIA-M program undertakes initiatives focused on advocating for media policies and improving the legal and regulatory framework, the ET could not identify a sustainable and consolidated advocacy core focused on media issues. The participation of media outlets, media CSOs' representatives, and media practitioners in national thematic working groups is unstructured and sporadic. Hence, representativeness and inclusiveness remain a work in progress.

At least three KII respondents mentioned the need for the Press Council to acquire legal entity status and become a self-regulatory structure for the media landscape. This is expected to grant the Press Council more leverage in overseeing the media environment and fostering respect for journalistic deontology. The ET noted that well-established MOs' representatives were unaware of the Press Council's activity or expressed a lack of cooperation with the institution.

Finding 11: *MOs rely to a great extent on donor support to produce socially driven content, which leads to project-based editorial agendas.*

While the media today is more sensitive to socially driven content, a lack of financial and human resources still jeopardizes the sustainability of particular media products. More than 50% of the MOs and CSOs in the FGDs reiterated this statement. Socially driven content, despite its importance, is often less attractive to advertisers, making it highly reliant on donors' support and priorities of the donors' agendas.

One of five KII respondents underlined that MOs, in their quest for survival, produce content at donors' requests that does not always align with their editorial agenda or usual type of content. At least three KII respondents consider the information space saturated with a specific project-based kind of content, while other topics of social importance remain uncovered. Justice, anti-corruption, and disinformation dominate the informational space in terms of content, leaving no room for healthcare, ecology, and other niche topics.

Up to 70% of the KII respondents and FGD participants mentioned that the MEDIA-M program enabled beneficiaries' editorial staff to follow their own editorial agenda by covering socially driven content, even if it is less commercial or popular. The core support has encouraged the production of solution journalism materials and investigation reports that often require time, resources, and editorial flexibility.

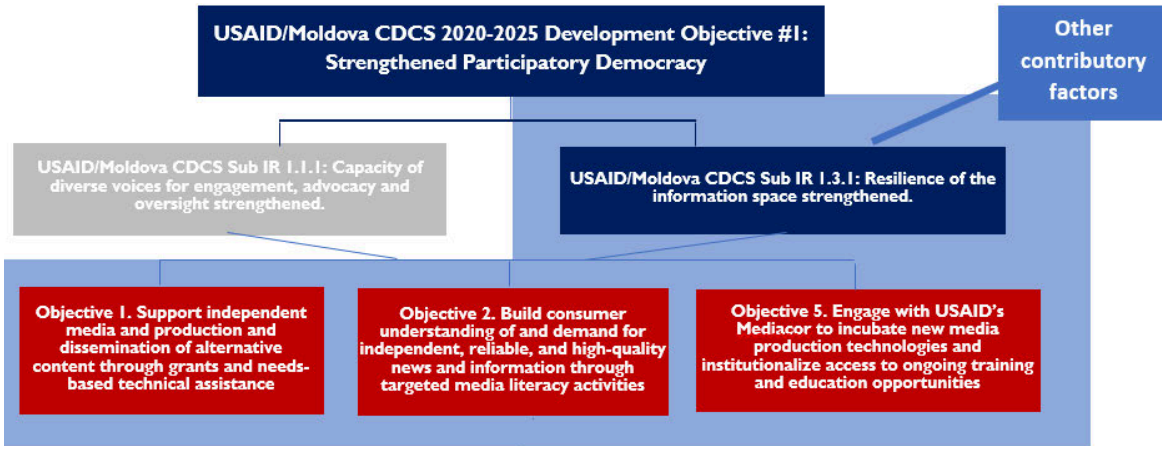
FINDING 12: *Challenges persist, especially in ensuring consistent access to information, despite the program's efforts.*

While the MEDIA-M Program has facilitated numerous advances, some challenges remain unresolved. Legal safeguards, such as providing free legal assistance by Lawyers for Human Rights and IJC, were initiated to counter these challenges. By 2017, these entities had drafted and represented 15 applications defending the right of access to information. However, subsequent progress reports of the program indicated that accessing information remained a substantial hurdle in later years, highlighting the ever-present need for such legal support, especially in a volatile political landscape.

4.2.5 EQ 2 CONCLUSION

Through the outcomes generated under objectives 1, 2, and 5, the MEDIA-M program made a ***relatively strong contribution*** *to achieving USAID CDCS Sub-IR 1.1.1: Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight strengthened.*

FIGURE 5: USAID/MOLDOVA CDCS DO 1: STRENGTHENED PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY



The latter is evidenced by the findings indicated under Phase C (findings 3 to 7) and are established through a rigorous triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative data, including KIIs, FGDs, online surveys, and site visits, juxtaposed with expert opinions.

In addressing the query on how the activity outputs have been instrumental in enhancing the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight, the contribution story underscores that MEDIA-M has strongly contributed to strengthening the capacity of various actors. By actively collaborating with various MOs, CSOs, media practitioners, and audiences, MEDIA-M has not only instilled confidence but has also empowered and elevated the voices of the less experienced and more vulnerable societal participants.

This perception is consistent with data from the online survey, where 35% of respondents representing media institutions, grant recipients, and media-monitoring CSOs mentioned that they significantly diversified their content and supported media advocacy and oversight activities.

As noted by several prominent KII respondents, addressing, producing, and consuming alternative and diverse types of content leads in the medium and long term to changing consumer behavior.

4.2.5 EQ 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. USAID should continue supporting education programs, particularly targeting marginalized and underserved communities.

   USAID should prioritize people with visual and hearing impairments and advocate for legally binding provisions. Access to information for people with visual and hearing impairments is a fundamental human right and should not be left to self-regulate.

2. Continuous support should be provided for the production of socially-driven quality content, allowing editorial flexibility and ensuring quick accommodation to emerging needs as a result of unpredicted socioeconomic and political events of national or international importance (domestic or regional crisis, humanitarian assistance/war).

3. MEDIA-M should focus on providing assistance and tailored training and consultancy to MOs and CSOs in the regions targeting the development of advocacy and oversight capacities.

4. USAID should consider supporting mechanisms for independent media monitoring and self-regulation, to hold media organizations accountable for ethical breaches and to provide a platform for addressing audience concerns.

   Support should also be provided for the existing Press Council in enhancing its legitimacy as an overarching independent legal entity and resource among Moldova's media community.

5. USAID should continue to facilitate forums, dialogues, and community discussions that foster dialogue between media organizations and their audiences. It should encourage media outlets to actively seek input and feedback from the communities they serve.

4.3 EVALUATION QUESTION 3

How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

FINDING 1: *MEDIA-M beneficiaries are now operating within an evolved and more digitized media landscape.*

Over the past six years, a transformative shift has taken place in the media landscape. One CSO commented on how media, traditionally associated with television, has expanded its horizon to encompass various digital platforms. Feedback from KII respondents described a media environment

increasingly shaped by digital trends. This transformation is evident in changing audience consumption patterns, where a notable drift has moved from conventional outlets such as television, radio, and newspapers to digital platforms, prominently social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and the emerging TikTok.

FINDING 2: *Trust in media has shifted from traditional outlets to individual opinion leaders on digital platforms.*

Another compelling insight emerged from a KII respondent discussing the evolving trust dynamics. Today, audience trust leans more toward local digital opinion leaders, such as YouTubers, bloggers, and vloggers, irrespective of the content's veracity. This potentially perilous trend signifies that individuals may sometimes prioritize trust in a familiar face over the factual accuracy of content, making them vulnerable to misinformation. Data further substantiate the shift in trust. According to the public opinion barometer from August 2023, 53.6% of the Moldovan audience identified the Internet as their primary information source, marking a surge of 26.6 percentage points from 2017. Concurrently, 38.5% of the audience identified the Internet as the most trusted source of information, showing a significant 14.9 percentage point increase since 2017. In contrast, television's popularity declined, with only 30.1% favoring it as their primary source, indicating a sharp decrease of 26 percentage points since 2017.[15]

FINDING 3: *MOs and CSOs are increasingly prioritizing video content over traditional text-based formats, recognizing the visual and interactive appeal of multimedia content in capturing and retaining audience attention.*

"People are no longer interested in long reads. The media had to become technically savvy and incorporate multimedia in all of its content," one respondent noted. A similar sentiment was echoed by all interviewed media organizations that embraced social media to improve audience engagement. This is also corroborated by the findings of the online survey for grantees, where all respondents confirmed using a combination of traditional and online media sources, or exclusively social media and other web-based platforms, to reach their audience.

Based on the review of organizational capacity assessments, corroborated with the KIIs, the ET determined that in working with KPs, MEDIA-M had strongly contributed to allowing KPs to integrate new technologies, enabling the grantees to enhance their content creation and diversify capabilities. While the subsequent support was tailored to each organization's unique needs, it can be categorized into four key areas: (1) hardware enhancement, which facilitated the acquisition of various equipment, exemplified by the establishment or upgrading of studio facilities; (2) software access, which streamlined the content creation process with enhanced video- and audio-editing capabilities; (3) capacity building for individuals involved in filming, editing, and training in behavior, speech, and attire during video content production; and (4) social media support to employ dedicated specialists to manage content creation across various platforms and enhance audience interactions.

[15] Public Opinion Barometer. Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved on 07 October 2023. http://bop.ipp.md/en

The strong contribution of MEDIA-M is also reflected in the comparison of the technology scores at the beginning of the project and the latest organizational capacity assessments, revealing a weighted average improvement of 16%, with one KP improving its scores by 73% and two others registering improvements of 16% and 21%.

This finding also aligns with the feedback received through the online survey conducted with program grantees, where 52% of respondents deemed the technological assistance provided by MEDIA-M as contributing to their activity to a significant or great extent, with 10% deeming the contribution as moderate.

Two respondents highlighted using artificial intelligence (AI) in their operations, although these initiatives were not part of the MEDIA-M program. One regional MO relied on a computer-generated news anchor to deliver its news bulletin (see picture to the right), noting that "this allowed us to save on studio costs and employing a dedicated anchor. Unfortunately, we couldn't continue given the lack of financial resources." Another respondent, a regional CSO, implemented a virtual assistant to interact with two local communities and collect data on matters of key interest to the community.

FINDING 4: *Crowdfunding and subscription-based models have not been efficient in improving the financial position of media organizations*

"We cannot afford to hire a dedicated social media specialist," one MO noted, adding that "while multimedia content allowed us to increase audience size, which in turn required expanding multi-media offering. More technology means higher expenditures." These statements also underscore the growing apprehension among the respondents regarding the lack of overall financial sustainability and its adverse effects on their capacity to employ skilled personnel in their activity, including for purposes of content creation across various social media platforms and in effectively engaging their audience.[16]

For the KPs, MEDIA-M made available experts who worked with the organizations to analyze the opportunity and identify the most appropriate financial tools to raise additional sources of revenues to support their activities. These strategies encompassed the establishment of crowdfunding campaigns, the enhancement of subscription models, and the creation of patronage systems, among others. With the exception of one media organization, the remaining five KPs implemented such financial tools and acknowledged their importance yet expressed reservations about their impact on overall financial sustainability.

Two respondents conveyed that the main contributing factor to the limited adoption and its low impact is rooted in the absence of a local culture that values paying for quality content. Instead, people tend to favor free information, even if it is often of subpar quality and may contain disinformation. One KP specifically emphasized the challenge of managing expenses related to these tools, pointing out, "We've maintained a subscription model for several years, but we've only reached 35% of our intended subscriber target. At present, subscriptions contribute a mere 2% toward our total costs, and it's costing us more to employ a dedicated person than the actual revenues we are able to generate." An

[16] See EQ1, finding 3 for more details.

additional point brought to light during discussions with the ET centers on the absence of clear-cut regulations concerning crowdfunding and the insufficient guidance on the tax implications associated with such transactions. Though only two respondents articulated this concern, it underscores specific regulatory challenges that could potentially curtail the adoption of these financial tools.

These findings were also corroborated by the results of the online survey conducted among the grantees, revealing that only 21% fully implemented such tools, and 31% did so partially. Furthermore, 67% of respondents perceived these structures as having limited or no impact on their financial sustainability.

FINDING 5: *Data security will likely be a significant concern for media organizations going forward.*

Except for three respondents, data security emerged as a relatively underemphasized concern among the KIIs. Nevertheless, two respondents shed light on aspects that may render data security increasingly critical for the future.

One KP expressed concern about the low level of data management skills within the journalism community. Many journalists struggle with ensuring such basic processes as data encryption and decryption. The respondent specifically drew attention to impending legislation regarding the handling of personal data (GDPR) and stressed the importance of journalists' ability to process, manage, and disseminate such data without inadvertently facilitating unlawful access.

A second respondent, representing a national media organization, shared its experience involving malicious actors attempting to commandeer its YouTube channel, a crisis narrowly averted. Furthermore, the organization presented instances of website cloning and disseminating fake posts designed to spread disinformation online. The respondent expressed apprehension about the possibility of these actions recurring in the future.

4.3.1 EQ 3 CONCLUSION

The evidence generated through robust, mixed-method data collection processes triangulated with available research, assessments, and studies enabled the ET to conclude that MEDIA-M ***strongly contributed*** *to assisting supported beneficiaries adapt to a rapidly changing media landscape.*

Approximately 62% of the grantees indicated that the technological assistance provided by the program contributed to their operations, with 52% deeming it as contributing to a significant or great extent. These findings were also corroborated during the KIIs, where the KPs provided practical examples of the specific assistance provided by MEDIA-M and how the program allowed the organizations to provide content that reflects the change in the way audiences consume information.

The ET assesses the contribution of MEDIA-M in ensuring financial sustainability based on specific financial tools to be **weak**. Crowdfunding and subscription-based models, though supported by MEDIA-M, have not proven to be viable solutions for improving the financial positions of media organizations. Only 21% of grantees have implemented such tools in full, and 67% of survey participants deem these as having limited or no impact on their financial sustainability. During the KIIs, while

acknowledging the importance of the support provided by MEDIA-M, the respondents highlighted the following external factors as contributing to the limited impact of these tools: the absence of a local culture that values paying for quality content, high operating costs, and the absence of clear-cut regulations.

Overall, MEDIA-M's contribution is deemed relatively strong, with a strong impact on building the technological capability of the supported beneficiaries and a weak contribution to ensuring financial sustainability based on financial tools.

4.3.2 EQ 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. USAID should continue supporting media organizations in further developing their technical capabilities to match evolving media consumption trends. Support for building technical acumen of journalists in data management and strengthening cybersecurity measures should be prioritized.
2. USAID should consider supporting the skills development of supported media organizations in using AI to improve their activity, automate daily tasks, and make the best use of available resources.
3. USAID should work together with supported beneficiaries in improving the impact of financial tools, which may include awareness campaigns and initiatives aimed at fostering a culture of supporting media through subscriptions and contributions, diversifying revenue streams (e.g., sponsorships, merchandise), engaging in advocacy activities to improve the regulatory framework, and engaging the community (both local and expatriates) to build a sense of belongingness.

4.4 EVALUATION QUESTION 4

To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?

FINDING 1: *Respondents noted the transformative impact of the MEDIA-M program on media outlets catering to the Russian-speaking audience, supported by tangible data.*

Evidence from the MEDIA-M program, coupled with feedback from 50% of grant recipients, MOs, and media-monitoring CSOs, demonstrates a significant transformation in the media landscape for the Russian-speaking audience in Moldova. A telling statement from a national MO focused on Russian-language content illuminated the dramatic before-and-after picture: "Before starting the cooperation with the MEDIA-M program, we were in a complete disaster. For more than six months, the team worked without being paid. With the program's support, everything was built from scratch." This testimony, backed by the fact that 50% of respondents affirm the MEDIA-M program's pivotal role, underscores the importance of the program in providing alternative, high-quality Russian-language content.

Moreover, the desk review suggests that MEDIA-M support has been instrumental for outlets like Newsmaker, *Tuk.md*, *Nokta.md*, and SP in offering quality content in Russian at both national and regional levels.

FINDING 2: *Evidence demonstrates a surge in the demand for Russian-language content based on feedback from KII respondents and tangible audience metrics.*

Of survey respondents, 55% mentioned that due to the MEDIA-M program, they have implemented activities targeting exclusively Russian-language media/content production, ensuring access to Russian-language alternative information, and reaching out to Russian-language audiences by offering unbiased content.

However, the survey results show that the level of outreach to the Russian-speaking public has increased only slightly; 55% of respondents share this opinion. Only 30% of program beneficiaries taking the survey managed to enhance their outreach to Russian speakers and to ensure the growth of this particular audience segment to a moderate extent.

KII respondents, especially those producing Russian language content, have reported significant increases in their audience, suggesting a strong appetite for alternative information sources. One respondent from a national MO producing Russian language content highlighted this sentiment: "When our audience increased, people who became our readers did not necessarily share our values. They just wanted to read alternative information."

These anecdotal findings are corroborated by data points suggesting that the Russian-speaking audience, particularly in certain Moldovan regions, predominantly consumes content in Russian. Additionally, an independent Russian-language MO KII respondent noted an uptick in their audience during events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Some Romanian content creators have also observed increased interest from Russian speakers, particularly in content related to societal or health issues, indicating a broader trend.

Regarding barriers hindering Russian-speaking audience engagement, 75% of survey respondents identified refusal to consult alternative sources of information as the main one, 55% invoke the habit and nostalgia for the past, and 35% single out the low quality of Russian-language media outlets. The results are in line with the data collected during the KII phase.

FINDING 3: *Ignoring the Russian language audience hinders the resilience of the information space in Moldova, but not much.*

Online MO & CSO, national highlighted a significant concern, stating, "If we ignore the need of the Russian-speaking audience to be informed, they will inform themselves from sources which provide Russian-language content. Usually, in Moldova these are propagandistic outlets or sources obscurely financed." This viewpoint finds support in the statistical data: 35% of grant beneficiaries, MOs, and media monitoring CSOs feel that the Russian-speaking public in Moldova has decent access to alternative data. Notably, this figure spikes to 73% when we consider the opinions of teachers and librarians.

However, there's a notable quality concern. Some KII respondents voiced concerns that while Russian speakers can access content in their language, the reliability and origins of these sources are often questionable. The landscape of trustworthy Russian-language MOs is notably lacking in breadth. This deficit underscores the ongoing need for reliable alternative information in Russian. A particular respondent summed up this sentiment, saying, "Russian speakers require independent and impartial Russian-language content that provides them with alternatives to make different choices or support alternative values."

On the flip side, a differing perspective emerged from other KII respondents. They emphasized that Romanian-language content producers often exhibit reluctance towards amplifying Russian-language content output. Given the vast availability of Russian content, both local and rebroadcasted, they see a compelling argument for safeguarding the Romanian information space. As Online MO national puts it, "Demographically speaking, 80% of the population is Romanian-speaking, so it may seem too much attention is paid to Russian speakers."

The geographical spread of independent Russian-language MOs was another point of discussion. One KII respondent recognized a need for a more geographically dispersed presence of these MOs across Moldova. Yet, this shouldn't come at the expense of Romanian language content. A proposed solution involved nudging Russian speakers towards consuming more Romanian content, even if concrete strategies were not outlined.

Is resilience of the information space connected directly to engaging more with the Russian-speaking audience? The opinions presented during the KII phase did not reveal a major connection though some elements related to disinformation, diversity of opinions, and inclusiveness are emphasized. Several KII respondents link the resilience of the information space to the demand to cover specific regions of Moldova, which are predominantly Russian-speaking. The same trend is observed in the survey, where 55% of respondents consider the impact of Russian speakers' engagement in increasing the resilience of the information space in Moldova to be moderate, limited, or nonexistent.

FINDING 4: *Quality Russian-language content attracts a considerable Romanian-speaking audience, which is substantiated by data from national studies and feedback from KII respondents.*

Evidence from the National Study conducted by Internews in 2022 on people's perception of mass media and media skills in the Republic of Moldova highlights that a significant proportion of Romanian-speaking respondents (67%) consume news in Russian. An insight from a national MO producing Russian-language content further underscores this trend: "Though we are primarily a Russian-language media outlet, in surveys, half of our audience indicated that their native language is Romanian." Such inclinations suggest that quality content, regardless of language, can attract diverse audience segments.

Furthermore, when considering media consumption habits, the Analytical Report by Internews in 2023 showcases that newspapers like Komsomolskaya Pravda and Argumenty i Fakty, which are primarily in Russian, topped the most-read list in 2022. However, the ET observed a decline of 2–3% when these

results were compared with surveys from 2020 and 2018, hinting at evolving media consumption patterns.

FINDING 5: *Despite the allure of quality content, the Russian-speaking audience predominantly consumes content in their native language, influenced by various factors, including language barriers and deeply rooted habits.*

Data from the 2022 National Study by Internews reveals that the vast majority of Russian-speaking respondents (83%) prefer to consume news in Russian, with 39% citing a lack of proficiency in the Romanian language as a significant factor. During the interviews, multiple KII respondents emphasized that the preference for exclusively Russian content might be attributed to well-established habits, lack of Romanian-language knowledge, and greater trust in Russian-language content.

Elucidating these habits, the National Study highlighted a noticeable trend among those who do not consume TV programs from Russia. Yet, approximately one in three respondents who watch TV at least once a week continue to engage with TV programs produced in Russia. A telling statistic is that nearly one in four respondents claimed they would stop watching TV if Russian TV channels were taken off the air.

Feedback from an online MO and CSO representative provided an insight into the challenges of attracting the Russian-speaking audience: "To attract the Russian-speaking audience, we need to educate opinion leaders who are native Russian speakers... I am not aware of such a person today."

A recurring theme in feedback from at least four KII respondents was the paramount importance of content quality. Whether the content is in Romanian or Russian, both audience segments prioritize the quality of the information. This preference, as one respondent put it, is a "clear indication that the quality of the content that informs the public drives the audience."

4.4.1 EQ 4 CONCLUSION

The evidence mentioned above, coupled with the expert opinion of the ET, suggests that MEDIA-M made a ***relatively strong contribution*** *to supporting Russian-language MOs and other MOs providing Russian-language content.*

As emphasized by several KII respondents, the main success of the MEDIA-M program consisted in supporting Russian media outlets in restructuring their institutional framework, assisting in professionalizing the staff, and, most importantly, offering editorial independence. The core assistance enabled the Russian-language media outlets to provide content for their audiences, including increasing the audience, covering a specific segment of the Moldovan population, and informing the public in regions where information is scarce. Newsmaker, *Tuk.md*, *Nokta.md*, and SP were among the MOs frequently mentioned as success stories.

Though opinions differ regarding the necessity of producing Russian-language content and reaching out to the Russian audience, one idea dominated during the KII phase: the need for alternative information in Russian available not only for residents of the capital city but most importantly for people residing in

Russian-speaking regions of Moldova. Alternative information provided to Russian speakers in a manner that appeals to them is connected to the fight against disinformation and propaganda, changes in consumer behavior, and, most of all, the right to access information.

4.4.2 EQ 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide ongoing support to independent MOs and media-monitoring CSOs to help them adapt their institutional structures to evolving requirements. This support should focus on professionalizing their staff and fostering the production of high-quality, impartial content that caters to both Russian- and Romanian-speaking audiences at both national and regional levels.
2. Enhance collaboration among independent MOs and media-monitoring CSOs, academia, and media practitioners to identify and educate native Russian-speaking professionals and opinion leaders at both national and regional levels.
3. Encourage and assist regional Russian-language MOs to establish cooperation with national MOs and ensure a regular flow of information, verification of data, and coverage of local events with a national impact.

4.5 EVALUATION QUESTION 5

To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?

FINDING 1: *Respondents noted the effective multilayer approach of the MEDIA-M program in collaboration with Internews and CJI to meet the diverse needs of varied audiences.*

The feedback from KII respondents revealed a significant recognition for both Internews and CJI in their support for media literacy activities, leading to successful results in reaching diverse audiences. This was supplemented by the MEDIA-M program's pivotal role in addressing disinformation and tailoring media literacy projects according to specific needs.

A national MO representative shared the following notable perspective: "Educational content is not popular; thus, we try to educate our audience by offering tailored media products—storytelling, explainers." At least five other KII respondents echoed this sentiment, advocating for the upholding of journalistic standards and promoting quality media products.

Additionally, feedback from teachers and librarians during the FGDs highlighted the importance of media literacy for students in today's information age. One teacher remarked: "Students today have access and digital skills, yet they need guidance in processing the information and support to avoid online related risks." On self-assessments, the findings were promising: 92.5% of teachers felt their students are confident in identifying and verifying information sources; 96.2% felt their students are equipped to assess media products critically; 89.2% believed their students can safely navigate the online environment, including social media platforms; and 96.4% of students utilized media technologies for personal development. However, critically, these figures are subjective and based on teachers' perceptions.

From an online survey of teachers and librarians, appreciation for the skills acquired through the MEDIA-M program was unanimous: 100% found the media literacy skills gained as beneficial. The consensus was also unanimous regarding the efficiency and relevance of the training sessions. Yet, 59.5% felt the need for further training, with 75.6% emphasizing the importance of continuous learning programs.

FINDING 2: *Respondents highlighted the inclusive nature of the MEDIA-M Program, emphasizing the need for quality trainers to ensure comprehensive media literacy across all demographic groups.*

The MEDIA-M program's initiative to include marginalized groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups like the Roma community, emphasizes the program's commitment to bridging information gaps and enhancing resilience against disinformation.

However, some concerns arose regarding the quality and relevance of the training provided. A KII respondent voiced the need for closer monitoring, especially in specific regions, stating, "There is a need to thoroughly monitor who is delivering the training and what information is delivered because sometimes more harm is done."

A teacher in the FGDs provided a solution: the involvement of professional journalists or media practitioners in teaching. The perspective was that today's students—aspiring content creators—would benefit more from seasoned professionals who can share practical knowledge and experience.

Reinforcing these points, up to 50% of KII respondents emphasized the multilayer approach of the MEDIA-M program. They either had first-hand experience with training or were involved in delivering it, underscoring the program's comprehensive strategy for enhancing media literacy across the board.

FINDING 3: *Respondents acknowledge the successful institutionalization of media literacy but emphasize its evolution to meet the digital era's demands.*

Survey responses from grant recipients, MOs, and media-monitoring CSOs painted a picture of the perceived importance of media literacy. Specifically, 42% sought support for media literacy activities, and another 26.3% gave it partial attention in their applications. Meanwhile, 88.3% of teachers and librarians were proactive in understanding media literacy, although a smaller subset (7%) was initially hesitant. The responsiveness to these surveys underscores an overarching sentiment: recognition of the challenges presented by the new media age is growing.

A significant stride in media literacy's institutionalization was its integration into the Republic of Moldova's educational system. Collaborating with the Ministry of Education and Research, a Media Literacy curriculum emerged as an optional course. Since its inception in 2017, data reveals that 647 teachers underwent media literacy training, 18,100 textbooks were distributed to educators and students, and media literacy is now taught in 105 schools, with 4,319 students enrolled in 2023 alone.

Territory-wise, Internews' 2022 data indicate 551 trained teachers, reaching 11,800 students, and training 7,735 participants through the efforts of 30 librarians nationwide.

Yet, for all its advances, feedback from KII respondents and FGD participants suggests the curriculum might lag behind the digital age's dynamic challenges. As one high-level public authority representative put it: "Irrespective of the strategy, media literacy should be integrated into other fields of study."

FINDING 4: *The debate on the course structure emphasizes a broader integration within the educational system.*

While institutionalizing media literacy is a commendable feat, its format remains a topic of discussion. An almost equal split is observed among educators: 59.2% advocate making media literacy compulsory, while 40.7% believe it should be optional. This division extends into the course's execution, with several KII respondents emphasizing a more integrated approach. Rather than being a standalone subject, there is a push for media literacy to be interspersed across various courses at all educational levels. The aim is to encourage critical thinking as a daily practice rather than an occasional exercise.

FINDING 5: *Quantitative and qualitative data reflect the need to further expand media literacy activities to regions of Moldova and pay attention to linguistic particularities.*

Of teachers and librarians taking the survey, 26.3% stated using distinctive teaching techniques when addressing the Russian- or Romanian-language public. One survey respondent mentioned the need "to customize the approach, taking into account cultural and linguistic specificities, as well as the social and political context." Several KII respondents pointed out the diverse and distinctive sources the two audiences are exposed to as the main reason for differentiation. The Russian-speaking public still prefers Russian-language MOs and social media platforms. For example, they use Telegram, Odnoklassniki, and VKontakte more than Romanian speakers, thus strengthening the argument mentioned above.

Furthermore, underlining the territorial approach, 83.3% of teachers and librarians taking the survey opted for the MEDIA-M program to expand its media literacy activities to the regions of Moldova. The main arguments invoked refer to the increased threat of disinformation and fake news to which people in the regions are exposed compared with the capital city and the need to cover the entire territory of Moldova with vital media literacy skills in the digital age. Additionally, one survey respondent touched upon the issue of teachers and librarians being multipliers of disinformation if not trained or, if properly skilled, multipliers of media literacy.

4.5.1 EQ 5 CONCLUSION

*Overall, the MEDIA-M program has **strongly contributed** to raising awareness and promoting media literacy at the national level.*

Public authorities and prominent figures have recognized the value of media literacy activities and encouraged their continuation. KII respondents widely acknowledge the program's significant contribution to media literacy, emphasizing its role in fostering critical thinking among beneficiaries. Considering the complexity of the media literacy domain, a need exists to adapt and further increase donor support to maintain the sustainability of the achieved results.

During the KII phase, several respondents addressed the topic of local journalists' capacities to promote media literacy and serve as role models for the community in this sense. Investing in

community journalism and local media practitioners is directly linked to increased community media literacy knowledge and trust in local journalism.

Fostering innovative and customized approaches in producing media literacy products, MEDIA-M contributed significantly to both diversifying the alternative type of content and embedding media literacy education into the core practices of its beneficiaries.

4.5.2 EQ 5 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Maintain and enhance the cooperation with public institutions that are considering national programs and strategies to expand media literacy education and awareness. (These include the Ministry of Education and Research, Parliament, Presidential Office, and the Audiovisual Council.)
2. Envisage a program framework for continuous learning and training activities designed for media literacy trainers adapted to emerging needs and information space evolutions. Develop self-learning tools and offer tutorials based on needs assessments.
3. Look into the media literacy needs of the vulnerable and marginalized groups. Continue supporting media literacy education activities for people with visual and hearing impairments and vulnerable societal groups (linguistic and ethnic minorities, Roma communities, children placed in orphanages, or students pursuing vocational training).
4. Support activities aimed at designing and producing media literacy educational tools and their dissemination among beneficiaries throughout Moldova.
5. Expand the cooperation network to local public authorities and engage in a media literacy partnership with smaller regional entities and villages.
6. Invest in local journalists and local media as a hub for disseminating media literacy education in local communities.
7. Attract famous journalists, influencers, bloggers, and vloggers as change agents in mainstreaming critical thinking and information safeness.

4.6 EVALUATION QUESTION 6

Would value be added to the sub-IR-level results this activity seeks to contribute to if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If not, why not?

FINDING 1: *Both qualitative and quantitative data highlight the vital role of local media in strengthening the resilience of Moldova's information space*

"Regional media development is a must. The question lies in the exact mechanism," one KII respondent noted. This statement effectively summarizes the consensus of 77% of KII and FGD respondents regarding the need for further developing national and regional media. According to them, local media is more diverse and contributes to creating a sense of community and belonging, which leads to greater trust in the media and more informed citizens throughout the country. The ET was offered the example

of several local media outlets—SP (Balti), Observatorul de Nord (Soroca), Primaria Mea (Chisinau), and Nokta (Comrat)—that have evolved as organizations due to the support of MEDIA-M. These outlets now serve as platforms for diverse voices and perspectives, helping to counteract the spread of misinformation and propaganda at regional and local levels and serving as watchdogs holding decision-makers accountable for their actions and ensuring transparency in local governance.

In the online survey conducted among MOs, grantees, and media-monitoring CSOs, 84% consider that regional and local media enhance the resilience of Moldova's information space, of which 37% do so to a significant or great extent. Additionally, 47% noted an increased level of involvement of the local and regional media in maintaining the sustainability of the information space compared with 2017.

More than 50% of the respondents perceive local and regional media outlets as having higher credibility levels than six years ago. This marks a substantial shift in public trust toward local outlets. Local audiences tend to trust local media more as they develop a long-standing relationship, three regional MOs noted.

FINDING 2: *Local communities demand locally produced content.*

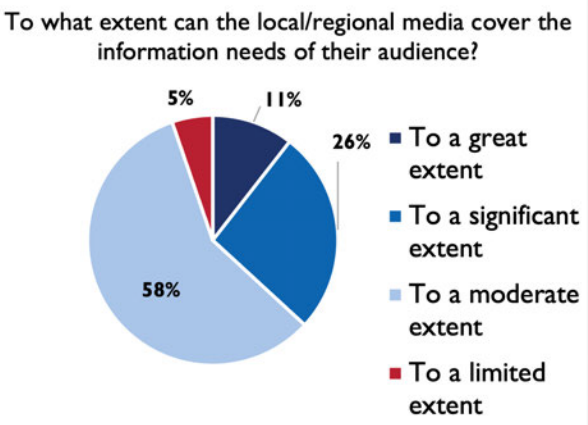
"Moldova's media landscape, particularly at the local level, is facing an 'information famine,'" a regional MO noted. "National media cannot adequately cover all matters affecting regions. In the absence of regional/local media, there will be a significant knowledge gap on matters affecting local communities," a key informant emphasized.

To bring regional news to the national level, MEDIA-M and PROTV and TV8, two MEDIA-M IPs, have established partnerships with individual journalists or regional or local media to produce local content to cover the whole country geographically, including in the south of the country (i.e., Comrat) and most recent in Transnistria region.

However, in some regions, no media outlets exist, or media coverage is inconsistent. The ET site visits revealed that in several areas, the absence of local media outlets has left communities without reliable sources of news and information. The vast majority of KII respondents emphasized the pressing need to create local content tailored to their communities. Nevertheless, just 37% of online survey respondents confirmed their capacity to meet the information needs of their audience to a significant or great extent (Figure 43). This deficit underscores the importance of local media as both sources of information and trusted pillars of the community.

Local media serves as an essential source of information for national outlets. Due to the insufficiency of regional and local outlets, significant developments that impact local communities receive insufficient coverage at national and local levels. A key informant provided the ET with the example of Gagauzia and Taraclia, where the lack of visibility of the support provided by international donors at the local level maintains a predominantly pro-Russian sentiment among the population. "Taraclia lacks independent media outlets; instead, there are only private ones that tend to represent their own viewpoints. While there is an online portal, it's important to note that no*t everyone has easy access to online content,"* highlighted a local official.

FIGURE 6: LOCAL/REGIONAL MEDIA'S CAPACITY TO COVER INFORMATION NEEDS OF THEIR AUDIENCE



FINDING 3: *Local media outlets encounter challenges similar to those faced by national ones, but these challenges often have a more pronounced impact on local MOs.*

Building a skilled and professional workforce remains a considerable hurdle for local media. Of respondents in the online survey, 90% highlighted that the scarcity of professional journalists and low pay hampers the activity of local and regional media organizations (Figure 4). Local media outlets' limited financial resources restrict their ability to invest in content development, equipment upgrades, and staff training. This financial strain leads to a reliance on donor funding.

The economic viability of local media organizations is a pressing concern. Achieving a satisfactory return on investment in the media industry is challenging, especially in regions with smaller markets, three KII respondents noted. Factors such as declining advertising revenues, absorption capacity, and the need for sustained investment in quality journalism exacerbate this issue. National media outlets often prioritize producing content independently, without relying on local or regional media support, in their pursuit of ensuring content quality.

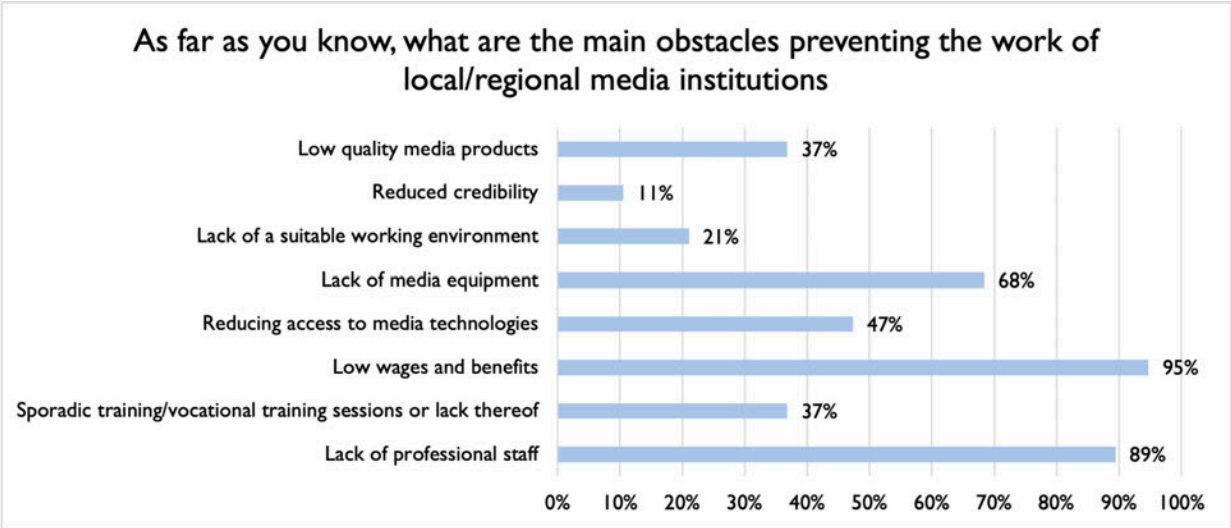


FIGURE 7: OBSTACLES PREVENTING THE WORK OF LOCAL/REGIONAL MEDIA INSTITUTIONS

The field visits allowed the ET to collect evidence of some solutions found to address these challenges. A regional school of journalism has proven to be a viable solution for attracting staff, even for those

without a journalistic background, regional MOs highlighted. Additionally, another direction explored by a local media outlet involved using AI to produce media content (see EQ3 for details). Non-journalists use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram to inform the local community about local events. These channels are witnessing constant growth in their audience. For example, in 2015, a local enthusiast from Ialoveni created a Facebook page for news distribution. This initiative, which allows both residents and local administration to share updates, has garnered considerable popularity with 27,000 followers.[17]

4.6.1 EQ 6 CONCLUSION

The consistent emphasis on the production of local content for local communities by the vast majority of respondents reaffirms the intrinsic value of grassroots journalism. Local media outlets are uniquely positioned to cater to the specific needs, concerns, and interests of their communities. Developing local and regional media would strengthen the overall resilience of the information landscape, ensuring diverse voices are heard, and local issues are addressed. Media content should be diversified for a broader audience, including those who speak Romanian, Russian, or other national minority languages. This diversification can help ensure that media outlets reach and engage with a wide range of people, respecting linguistic and cultural diversity.

The absence of local media presence in several regions is a concern, but it also highlights the demand for local content and the trust placed in community-oriented journalism. By fostering partnerships, supporting local media initiatives, and recognizing the added value of grassroots reporting, Moldova can work toward addressing the information famine at the local level and enhancing the role of local media in building strong, informed, and accountable communities.

4.6.2 EQ 6 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Foster partnerships between major media outlets and individual journalists and regional or local media to bridge the information gaps but also foster a sense of inclusivity by bringing diverse voices to the forefront. Provide guidance to small newsrooms in the regions on communication standards through initiatives such as mentoring support.
2. Assess the feasibility of establishing regional informational hubs in the North and South parts of the country that would serve as vital sources of regional social, economic, and political news, enabling its dissemination to the national level[18].

[17] https://www.facebook.com/groups/375967599271804/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalinks=2224428561092356

[18] These centers can take the form of multidisciplinary communities gathering media practitioners and organizations, researchers, fact-checkers, digital literacy experts, and other relevant actors to produce regional or local media content, organize media literacy activities, and actively detect, analyze, and expose disinformation. An alternative option could be to support the National Public Broadcaster or other independent media in establishing a regional structure and producing local news content in addition to national broadcasts.

3. Support regional journalism schools to attract new and motivated staff with diverse skills, even without journalistic backgrounds. There should be investment in local content creators and opinion leaders.
4. Establish partnerships with regional universities to attract students interested in pursuing a career in journalism. Consider offering grants to universities that collaborate with local media outlets to establish journalism programs and provide scholarships for aspiring journalists.
5. Enhance local media's fact-checking and investigative journalism capabilities to ensure the debunking of false information and verifying the accuracy of local news, thereby contributing to informed and accountable communities.
6. Consider enhancing the technical capabilities of regional and local media outlets to align with evolving media consumption trends, including using AI to optimize their operations.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: EVALUATION STATEMENT OF WORK

USAID EE/MELDS TASKING REQUEST:
Tasking 003: USAID/Moldova MEDIA-M Performance Evaluation

Date of Request: February 17, 2023

Type of Task:
Performance Evaluation

Statement of Work (SOW):
This is a Statement of Work (SOW) for a Performance Evaluation of the MEDIA-M activity, implemented by Internews under Award number AID-117-A-17-00001, running from April 3, 2017 through September 30, 2026. The USAID contribution is $14,301,728. This evaluation will focus on the period starting from April 2017 through the present.

Activity Description:
The Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) activity aims to promote the development of an independent, professional media in Moldova that gives citizens access to a variety of perspectives and create a media sector that is more resilient to political and financial pressures.

By focusing on the supply of and demand for objective information, MEDIA-M strengthens the ability of independent media to fulfill its role as a watchdog over the government and serve as space for citizens to engage in public policy dialogue. Moreover, MEDIA-M's focus on the legal enabling environment reinforces existing protections for freedom of speech, facilitates better implementation of laws, and advocates for media sector regulation in accordance with international norms.

Activity Objectives:

1. Objective 1: Support independent media and production and dissemination of alternative content through grants and needs-based technical assistance;
2. Objective 2: Build consumer understanding of and demand for independent, reliable, and high-quality news and information through targeted media literacy activities;
3. Objective 3: Improve the enabling legal and regulatory environment for independent media by strengthening the capacity of media support organizations;
4. Objective 4: Nurture organizational capacity of local media institutions for transition to direct local award (Crosscutting objective); and

5. Objective 5: Engage with USAID's MEDIACOR to incubate new media production technologies and institutionalize access to ongoing training and education opportunities.

Evaluation Purpose:

The purpose of this evaluation is to assist USAID/Moldova in understanding to what extent the activity is on track to contribute to the Mission's relevant Sub-IR-level results, namely:

- Sub-IR-1.1.1, *Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight strengthened*;

- Sub-IR-1.3.1, *Resilience of the information space strengthened*. The Mission will use the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation to determine if any adjustments should be made to the activity moving forward in order to maximize development outcomes.

Evaluation Questions:

1. To what extent are activity outputs strengthening resilience of the information space?
2. To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight?
3. How did the use of technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?
4. To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?
5. To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?
6. Would there be value added to the sub-IR level results to which this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how; if not, why not?

Deliverables:

- Initial Kick-Off call: Following the receipt of the Tasking, the evaluation team will connect with the Mission to discuss in detail the expectations for the evaluation, clarify the evaluation questions and other important elements before preparing the full scope and budget.
- Evaluation kick-off call: Within two weeks of the evaluation start date, the contractor will arrange a phone call or video conference with USAID/Moldova and other involved parties. The introductory discussion will cover the work plan, methodology, and inputs from each side.
- Evaluation Work Plan and Design: Within three weeks of the kick-off, but not less than two weeks prior to arrival in Chisinau, a draft work plan for the evaluation shall be presented to the Activity Manager. The work plan will include:
    1. The anticipated schedule and logistical arrangements, including a list of potential interviewees, sites to be visited, proposed selection criteria and/or sampling plan;
    2. Evaluation design and methodology and data collection instruments. A final

Evaluation workplan will be submitted within a week after receiving comments from the Mission.

- In-Briefing: Within five days of arrival in Chisinau, the evaluation team will have an in-briefing with the USAID Mission for introductions and to discuss the assignment, initial assumptions, methodology, and work plan.
- Exit Briefing: The evaluation team is expected to hold an exit briefing with the Mission prior to leaving the country to discuss the status of data collection and preliminary findings and conclusions.
- Draft Evaluation Report: The draft evaluation report must be submitted to the Activity Manager within five weeks of the evaluation team's departure from Moldova. The evaluation report structure must correspond to the "USAID Evaluation Report Requirements", a Mandatory Reference for ADS Chapter 201. Once the initial draft evaluation report is submitted, USAID/Moldova will have 14 business days in which to review and comment on the initial draft, after which point the Activity Manager will submit the consolidated relevant comments to the evaluation team. The evaluation team will submit a revised final draft report in 10 business days hence.
- A recommendations workshop can be organized between the evaluation team and USAID project team to work on the evaluation recommendations.
- Final Evaluation Report: The evaluation team will, no later than 10 days after receiving final comments on the draft report, respond/incorporate the comments and resubmit the final report to the Activity Manager. As part of the Final Evaluation Report, the contractor will produce a user-friendly synthesis or summary of the evaluation in a format that is attractive and understandable for public use. All project data and records will be submitted in full and should be in electronic form in easily readable format, organized and documented for use by those not fully familiar with the intervention or evaluation. The final evaluation report must be uploaded to the Development Experience Clearinghouse at dec.usaid.gov.
- Post-Evaluation Action Plan (draft only) (Google Sheets Format)

Tentative Dates of performance and timeline:
May 2023 – start date June 2023 – field work July 2023 – draft report Sept. 2023 – final report
Budget: Not to exceed $350,000.
Submission Instructions: You will have fourteen (14) calendar days to submit a brief concept note and budget.

ANNEX II: EVALUATION WORK PLAN

1. BACKGROUND

The Government of Moldova (GOM) has prioritized media development over the last five years. Acknowledging the significant role mass media plays in informing the general public about issues of public interest, in shaping public opinion, and in the development of democratic society, the Parliament of

Moldova adopted the National Concept for Media Development in the Republic of Moldova for 2018-2025. A new Audio-Visual Media Services Code was adopted in 2018 and amended in 2022 to enable freedom of expression and editorial independence, increase the transparency of media outlets' property, protect journalists, and prevent disinformation.

The media sector in Moldova is diverse. However, the increased distribution of media products on nontraditional platforms presents new opportunities and challenges, especially in the current environment, which is heavily influenced by mis-, mal- and disinformation. Russia's war in Ukraine created new challenges and raised the stakes for Moldova's media community. Fostering a media sector that is more resilient to political and financial pressures is among the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s and Moldova's priorities to ensure a democratic society and catalyze citizen engagement.

To this end, USAID, Freedom House (FH), and United Kingdom Aid (UK Aid) designed the Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) to strengthen the ability of independent media to fulfill its role as a watchdog over the government and serve as a space for citizens to engage in public policy dialogue. The MEDIA-M program aims to promote the development of an independent, professional media in Moldova that gives citizens access to a variety of perspectives and is more resilient to political and financial pressures. Moreover, MEDIA-M's focus on Moldova's legal environment aims to reinforce existing protections for freedom of speech, improve the implementation of laws, and advocate for media sector regulation in accordance with international norms.

Initially a five-year program, MEDIA-M received a time and cost extension for 18 months in June 2021, pushing the activity end date to September 30, 2023. On May 5, 2023, USAID and UK Aid awarded the activity another time and cost extension through September 30, 2026. The U.S. and U.K. Governments fund MEDIA-M, with contributions to program objectives from the Swedish Foreign Ministry, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Open Society Foundation (OSF), and the Kingdom of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

MEDIA-M focuses on three programmatic and one cross-cutting objective to be achieved with implementing partners (IPs), the Independent Journalism Centre (IJC), and Freedom House (FH)[19]:

- **Objective 1**. Support independent media and production and dissemination of alternative content through grants and needs-based technical assistance.
- **Objective 2**. Build consumer understanding of and demand for independent, reliable, and high-quality news and information through targeted media literacy activities.
- **Objective 3**. Improve the enabling legal and regulatory environment for independent media by strengthening the capacity of media support organizations.

[19] The objectives below are presented based on the Technical Narrative as of March 2023

- **Objective 4.** Engage with USAID's Mediacor to incubate new media production technologies and institutionalize access to ongoing training and education opportunities.

The Evaluation Team (ET) consists of a Senior Team Lead, Subject Matter Expert (SME) on Media and Civil Society, Data Analyst, and a Local Coordinator. Integra's EE/MELDS key personnel, including the Technical Director, MEL Advisor, and Associate, will also support the ET. Full details on the team's background and experience can be found in Annex 4.

This Evaluation Work Plan (EWP) provides what the team has learned thus far through project documents and discussions during the intake and kick-off calls. This EWP details the planned evaluation methodology, expands upon the evaluation questions (EQs), lists targeted stakeholders, and provides sample survey questionnaires and instruments for review. This EWP also provides an updated deliverables tracker and timeline for consideration.

2. EVALUATION PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, AND QUESTIONS

2.1 PURPOSE OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Moldova has requested the EE/MELDS team conduct a performance evaluation of the Media Enabling Democracy, Inclusion, and Accountability in Moldova (MEDIA-M) activity implemented by Internews. This evaluation will focus on the period starting from April 2017 through the present.

The purpose of this evaluation is to assist USAID/Moldova in understanding the extent to which the activity is on track to contribute to the Mission's relevant Sub-IR-level results, namely: *Sub-IR-1.1.1 Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight strengthened*; and *Sub-IR-1.3.1 Resilience of the information space strengthened*. The Mission will use the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this evaluation to determine if the activity should make any adjustments moving forward in order to maximize development outcomes.

As per USAID's Resilience Policy, *resilience* refers to the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.[20] As per the context of the MEDIA-M program, *resilience* refers to the capacity of individuals, communities, and societies to effectively navigate and respond to challenges related to disinformation, fake news, and the influence of malign actors. It encompasses their ability to critically analyze information, identify and mitigate the risks of misinformation and disinformation, and actively participate in shaping a media landscape that promotes democratic values, transparency, and accountability. *Resilience* in this context involves building knowledge, skills, and awareness to counteract harmful narratives, safeguard media integrity, and foster a resilient information ecosystem that empowers individuals and protects societies from the negative impacts of malign influence.

[20] https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/Resilience-Policy-Revision-Jan-2023.pdf

2.2 AUDIENCE

The primary audience of this evaluation will be the USAID/Moldova team; the prime implementing partner, Internews; and the activity's media partners. USAID/Moldova may also share the results of this evaluation with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other donors working in this area. Additionally, the results of the MEDIA-M evaluation may be shared with the relevant government authorities. The evaluation will be posted to the DEC, per Agency guidelines[21].

2.3 EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation will address the following evaluation questions (EQs):

1. **To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?**

Under this EQ, the ET will gauge the ability of MEDIA-M supported media outlets to respond to increased malign influence and reduce their vulnerability to such pressures. *To what extent did the collaboration with the MEDIA-M program contribute to improving their resilience?* The Evaluation Team will also seek to measure the ability of MEDIA-M beneficiaries (grant recipients, teachers, librarians) to identify disinformation and their self-reported critical thinking skills to be able to recognize it. *How has the role of media evolved in the last six years from being an information conveyor to being an educator, and what was the contribution of the MEDIA-M program to any progress?*

2. **To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?**

Under this EQ, the ET will assess the extent to which the MEDIA-M created the opportunities and empowered media, influencers, and civic groups to make their voices heard. Moreover, the performance assessment will look into media capacity and practices to be more inclusive of those with disabilities, members of ethnic minority groups, and other marginalized communities. In addition, the evaluation team will gauge the degree of change in the ability of diverse voices (media, influencers, vloggers, and civic groups) to manifest their engagement, advocacy, and oversight and the contribution and sufficiency of the MEDIA-M program's support in this change process.

3. **How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?**

Under this EQ, the ET will gauge the awareness of new tools (such as crowdfunding and subscriptions), as well as digital media among MEDIA-M supported beneficiaries. Moreover, the ET will assess the degree of usage of these tools and MEDIA-M's role in increasing the scale of the activity and improving the sustainability of the beneficiaries (media outlets, media influencers).

[21] The ET will avoid attribution of sources that would lead the Evaluation Report to be sensitive but unclassified (SBU). The team will only use open sources.

4. **To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?**

Under this EQ, the ET will assess the effectiveness and sufficiency of current MEDIA-M support efforts to Russian- speaking media outlets. Moreover, the ET will gather evidence on factors influencing audience engagement (quality/language/etc.). The ET will assess what worked, what did not work, and what could have been done differently to yield better results.

5. **To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?**

Under this EQ, the ET will assess the strategy MEDIA-M implemented to enhance media literacy at both the national and local levels. The team will also evaluate the extent to which the MEDIA-M program contributed to improving the media literacy capacity of its participants (self-assessment). Furthermore, the ET will analyze how the MEDIA-M program's media literacy activities addressed the specific needs of the Russian-speaking population in Moldova and compare the findings to those targeting the Romanian-speaking population. Lastly, the evaluation will identify the success factors, lessons learned from the program, and recommend further actions to enhance media literacy among program participants.

6. **Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?**

Under this EQ, the ET will seek to collect relevant evidence of the added value of local media support and identify entry points for potential donor funding to target the reduction of disinformation spread at local levels. In addition, the ET will provide recommendations on potential ways of engaging with local and national players to increase the breadth and diversity of beneficiary groups.

3. EVALUATION DESIGN

3.1. OVERARCHING APPROACH

The performance evaluation of the MEDIA-M program will employ a mixed-method approach, by leveraging qualitative data collection and analysis methods, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), alongside quantitative data collection and analysis through online surveys. In addition, the ET will conduct an extensive desk review of relevant program documents, reports, and secondary sources. This approach will be complemented by various analytical techniques such as contribution analysis (a primary analytical framework to address the EQs), logic model analysis (a complementary analytical framework to address EQ3), and comparative analysis (a complementary analytical framework to address EQ6), as well as data-specific analytical techniques discussed further Section 4 of this EWP (frequency distribution and cross tabulations specifically for data collected through online surveys). Finally, the evaluation will hinge on a utilization-focused consultative and iterative method, targeted to enhance the significance and acceptance of suggestions by stakeholders and solidify coordination with USAID to articulate the goals and requirements of the evaluation. It will allow the ET to probe into expectations and targets concerning the quality, content, and application of the evaluation.

This approach does not decrease evaluation impartiality and independence, as the ET maintains command over the content of the evaluation report, which is solely evidence-based, while also incorporating USAID's viewpoints on the applicability of learning and advice.

3.2. CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

The evaluation will primarily utilize contribution analysis as the underlying design framework, in line with USAID guidance on Contribution Analysis (CA)[22]. Through the CA, the evaluation will examine the causal links between program activities and observed changes in media resilience, media literacy, and responses to malign influence. The CA will guide the design of survey instruments, data collection, analysis, and reporting processes. By employing CA as an overarching framework, the evaluation team aims to assess the program's specific contribution to observed results and understand the causal pathways that connect program activities to outcomes.

During the data collection phase, the team will ensure that they collect relevant data to support the CA framework. After this phase, the analysis will focus on the examination of the relationships between program activities, observed outcomes, and external factors. The team will use various techniques to analyze qualitative and quantitative data (discussed further in *Section 4: Data Collection and Analysis Methods*) to explore these connections and verify the contribution made by the program.

Finally, the reporting of the evaluation findings will be structured to present the contribution story of the program. The results will be synthesized and communicated in a manner that effectively demonstrates the program's impact, supported by evidence from the CA framework.

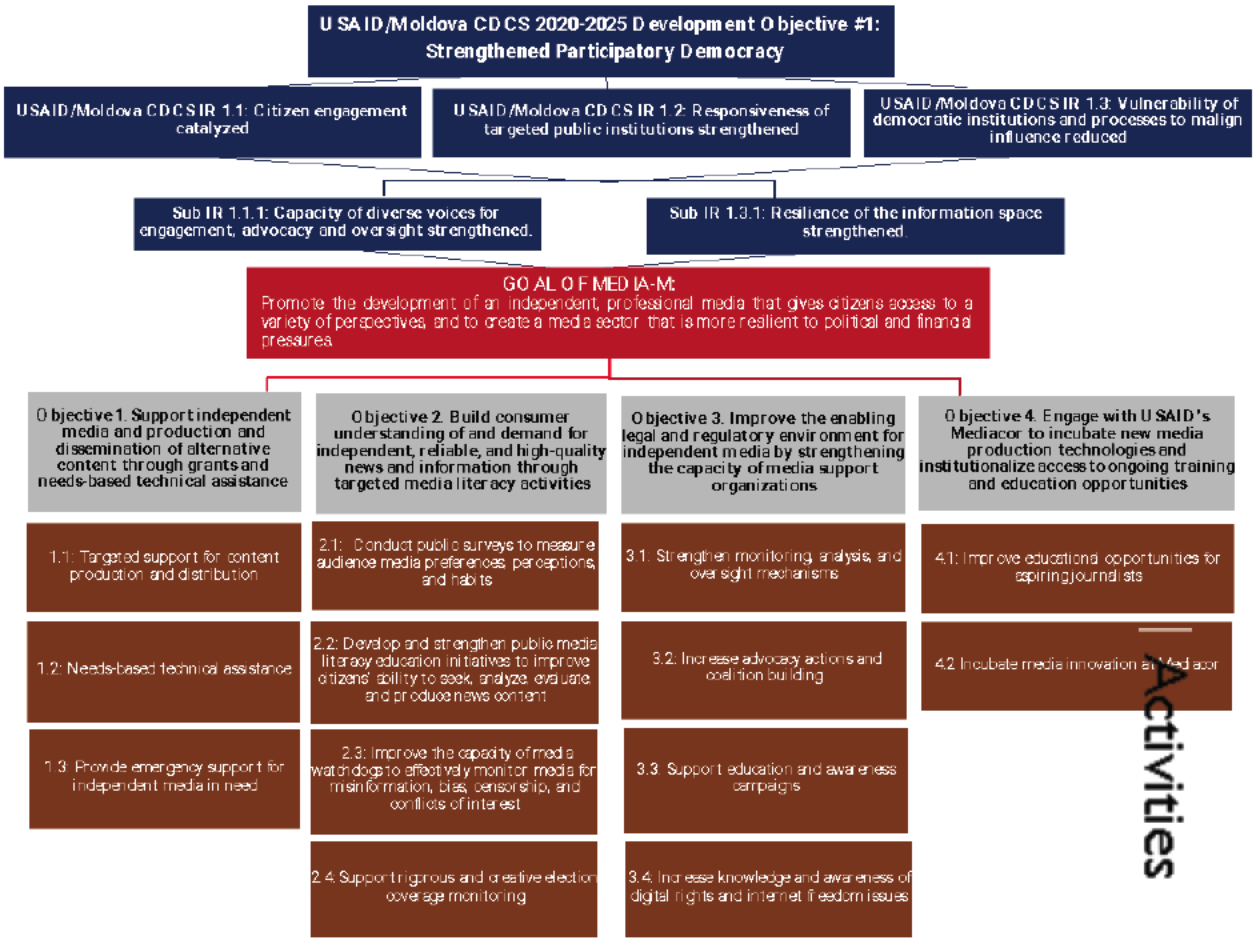
By using CA as the framework throughout the evaluation process, the team aims to provide a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the program's contribution. This approach ensures that the evaluation findings and recommendations are grounded in a rigorous analysis of the program's impact and consider the complexity of causal pathways and external factors.

While applying the contribution analysis design framework, the Evaluation Team will leverage the contribution story presented below in the form of a Logic Model to provide a neutral and evidence-based assessment of MEDIA-M's effectiveness in strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight (CDCS IR 1.1.1) and enhancing the resilience of the information space (CDCS sub-IR 1.3.1), along with the four objectives outlined above[23].

Through the lens of a contribution analysis, this evaluation will look into the sequence of activities outlined in the Logic Model to understand how MEDIA-M has sought to achieve its intended outcomes.

[22] https://usaidlearninglab.org/community/blog/decision-points-contribution-analysis

[23] The Logic Model was developed based on the final technical project description updated as of March 2023. A new Objective 4 replaced the previous Objective 4: Cross-cutting objective: Nurture organizational capacity of local media institutions for transition to direct local awards. The ET will evaluate the whole MEDIA-M lifecycle.



Moreover, to establish inferred linkages between the causal Evaluation Questions, USAID/Moldova mission's CDCS sub-IR, and MEDIA-M objectives[24], the Evaluation Team (ET) has developed the table below. This table will serve as a valuable reference in designing appropriate evaluation instruments and ensuring the alignment of data collection and analysis with the program's intended outcomes and USAID's strategic priorities.

TABLE 1: CAUSAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND INFERRED LINKAGES

[24] www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/contribution-analysis

CAUSAL EVALUATION QUESTION	INFERRED LINKAGES WITH THE MISSION SUB-IRs OR MEDIA-M OBJECTIVES
1. To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?	**Sub-IR-1.3.1:** Resilience of the information space strengthened[25]. **Sub-IR-1.1.1:** Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight strengthened
2. To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight?	**Sub-IR-1.1.1:** Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight strengthened.
3. How did the use of technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?[26]	**Objective 1:** Support independent media and production and dissemination of alternative content through grants and needs-based technical assistance. **Objective 4:** Engage with USAID's MEDIACOR to incubate new media production technologies and institutionalize access to ongoing training and education opportunities.
4. To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?	**Objective 1:** Support independent media and production and dissemination of alternative content through grants and needs-based technical assistance. **Objective 4:** Engage with USAID's MEDIACOR to incubate new media production technologies and institutionalize access to ongoing training and education opportunities.
5. To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?	**Objective 1:** Support independent media and production and dissemination of alternative content through grants and needs-based technical assistance.

[25] As discussed during the online meeting with USAID on June 19, 2023, there is also inferred linkage between EQ 1 and Media M Objective 3: Improve the enabling legal and regulatory environment for independent media by strengthening the capacity of media support organizations.

[26] In addition to contribution analysis, the ET will conduct the logic model analysis to identify and present additional details about the Program Logic Model as it applies to EQ #3.

CAUSAL EVALUATION QUESTION	INFERRED LINKAGES WITH THE MISSION SUB-IRs OR MEDIA-M OBJECTIVES
	Objective 2: Build consumer understanding of and demand for independent, reliable, and high-quality news and information through targeted media literacy activities.
6. Would there be value added to the sub-IR level results to which this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how; if not, why not?[27]	**Sub-IR-1.3.1:** Resilience of the information space strengthened. **Sub-IR-1.1.1:** Capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy and oversight strengthened.

3.3. USE OF BEST PRACTICES

The evaluation will use methods that generate quality data and credible evidence that correspond to the questions being asked, taking into consideration time, budget, and other practical considerations. The evaluation will use sound social science methods and include the following basic features:

1. Establish a team with the appropriate methodological and subject matter expertise to conduct an excellent performance evaluation;
2. Ensure transparency and dissemination of the evaluation design and methodology, as well as the final report, including briefings and presentations to the Mission and the preparation of a draft of the report that will be made available to the general public with the removal of information the Mission deems sensitive. The team will upload the report to the Development Experience Clearinghouse at dec.usaid.gov upon finalization and approval;
3. Use data collection and analysis methods that ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that if a different, well-qualified evaluator were to undertake the same evaluation, they would arrive at the same or similar findings and conclusions; and
4. Communicate and present the credible findings, conclusions, and recommendations separately so the progression is clear and easy to follow in relation to each of the EQs included in the Evaluation Purpose, Audience, and Questions section.

3.4. GETTING TO THE ANSWERS TABLE

[27] In addition to contribution analysis, the ET will utilize comparative analysis tools to address EQ # 6.

The data collection plan includes a *Getting to the Answers Table* (see below) that maps the EQs to the data sources and methods. Data sources include primary and secondary data derived from desk reviews, electronic surveys, KIIs and/or FGDs, and relevant activity reports. Data analysis methods will include comparative analysis and data disaggregation by geographical region, language, and other indicators if relevant.

TABLE 2: GETTING TO ANSWERS

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION, E.G., RECORDS, KIIS, SURVEYS [1]	SAMPLING OR SELECTION APPROACH
1. To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?	Key Performance Indicators Desk review KIIs and/or FGDs Surveys	Desk review of relevant international/local surveys around information space in Moldova, specifically of public surveys conducted within the MEDIA-M Program Online survey of MEDIA-M supported media outlets and grant recipients (Module B) Online survey of MEDIA-M supported librarians and teachers (Module B) Key Informant Interviews with USAID and IPs (specific questions around their ability to identify and respond to mis/mal/disinformation) FGDs with media outlets, grant recipients and media monitoring CSOs FGDs with researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers and vloggers

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION, E.G., RECORDS, KIIS, SURVEYS [1]	SAMPLING OR SELECTION APPROACH
2. To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?	Key Performance Indicators Desk review KIIs and/or FGDs Surveys	Desk review of program documents, work plans, quarterly and annual reports, program deliverables, and AMELP Online survey of MEDIA-M supported media outlets and grantees (Module C) Online survey of MEDIA-M supported teachers and librarians (Module C) KIIs and/or FGDs with selected staff from USAID, IP, grant recipients, media monitoring organizations, researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers and vloggers,Press Council representatives, and other donor partners

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION, E.G., RECORDS, KIIS, SURVEYS [1]	SAMPLING OR SELECTION APPROACH
3. How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?	Key Performance Indicators Desk review KIIs and/or FGDs Surveys	Desk review of program documents, work plans, quarterly and annual reports, program deliverables, and AMELP Online survey of MEDIA-M supported media outlets and grantees (Module D) Online survey of MEDIA-M supported teachers and librarians (Module D) KIIs and/or FGDs with selected staff from USAID, IP, grant recipients, media monitoring organizations, researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers and vloggers,Press Council representatives, and other donor partners
4. To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?	Key Performance Indicators Desk review KIIs and/or FGDs Surveys	Desk review of program documents, work plans, quarterly and annual reports, and program deliverables Online survey of MEDIA-M supported media outlets and grantees (Module E) Online survey of MEDIA-M supported teachers and librarians (Module E) KIIs and/or FGDs with selected staff from USAID, IP, grant recipients, policymakers, researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers and vloggers, and other donors

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION, E.G., RECORDS, KIIS, SURVEYS [1]	SAMPLING OR SELECTION APPROACH
5. To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?	Key Performance Indicators Desk review KIIs and/or FGDs Surveys	Desk review of program documents, work plans, quarterly and annual reports, and program deliverables Online survey of MEDIA-M supported media outlets and grantees (Module F) Online survey of MEDIA-M supported teachers and librarians (Module F) KIIs and/or FGDs with selected staff from USAID, IP, grant recipients, teachers and librarians, media monitoring CSOs, policymakers, researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers and vloggers, and other donors
6. Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute to if it engaged more with regional	Key Performance Indicators Desk review KIIs and/or FGDs Surveys	Desk review of program documents, work plans, quarterly and annual reports, and program deliverables Online survey of MEDIA-M supported media outlets and grantees (Module G) Online survey of MEDIA-M supported teachers and librarians (Module G) KIIs and/or FGDs with selected staff from USAID, IP, grant recipients, media monitoring CSOs, local media outlets,

EVALUATION QUESTIONS	METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION, E.G., RECORDS, KIIS, SURVEYS [1]	SAMPLING OR SELECTION APPROACH
media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?		policymakers, researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers and vloggers, Press Council representatives, and other donors

4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHODS

The evaluation will employ a complementary blend of qualitative and quantitative methods along with varied analytical approaches to address the EQs and tell a contribution story comprehensively. To this end, the evaluation team designed a series of activities, including desk reviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and online surveys. These multiple approaches will enable the ET to triangulate the data collected, thus providing a more robust and nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. The desk review will synthesize and analyze relevant documentation and reports, while key informant interviews and FGDs will allow for an in-depth exploration of the issues and perspectives of the various stakeholders involved in the program. The online surveys will also provide quantitative data on program outcomes and impact. The application of these diverse methodologies will provide a comprehensive and detailed analysis, helping to ensure the evaluation delivers reliable, valid, and valuable results.

DOCUMENT REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE INDICATOR DATA

The ET will conduct an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary information sources, including activity design and planning documents, concept notes, annual and quarterly progress reports, activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan (AMELP), and existing surveys, reports, studies, etc., as well as activity-level and aggregated performance indicator data provided by USAID. The team will also incorporate applicable policy documents from USAID and the United States Government (USG). The team acknowledges that the availability and quality of documentation and data may vary across program activities and will consider these discrepancies when analyzing the findings. By carefully examining these documents, the team can gain valuable insights into the program's design, implementation, and outcomes and make informed recommendations for future improvements. These documents will be stored on a team shared drive, accessible to USAID, as requested.

Data sources will include but are not limited to:

- Annual Work Plans
- Activity MEL Plan (AMELP)
- Annual and Quarterly Reports
- Market and Sector Assessment Reports
- Calls for Proposals and selected applications
- Grants manual
- Subcontractor contact list
- Key partners' contact list
- Documentation of SOW changes and technical direction
- Original and modified Theory of Change (if applicable)

- Information on program Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach and efforts to date, and
- Existing surveys, reports, studies, etc.

PRIMARY DATA: SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

Primary data collection will be based on electronic surveys, KIIs, and/or FGDs. Data collection will be conducted mainly in Romanian and Russian languages. The English language will be used as needed. The evaluation instruments are presented in English in Annex 1 and 2 but will be translated into Romanian and Russian prior to dissemination upon approval, as needed.

ELECTRONIC SURVEYS

The ET will create and execute two online surveys presented in Annex 1, designed to serve as a pre-screening and data collection tool before conducting KIIs and/or FGDs. Informed by the desk review, conversations with USAID personnel, and initial consultations with the implementing partner (IP), these surveys are intended to engage media outlets, grant recipients, media monitoring CSOs, librarians, and teachers who have benefitted from the program. The electronic surveys are expected to yield valuable insights into the program's implementation and outcomes, thereby facilitating the ET's ability to conduct a comprehensive assessment. By gathering input from a diverse group of stakeholders, the surveys will provide the ET with essential data and perspectives to enhance its understanding of the program's effectiveness. The insights from these surveys will be critical in guiding the evaluation process. The ET will administer two online surveys to the following groups:

- MEDIA-M supported media outlets, grantees, and media monitoring CSOs (*Note: the number of recipients will be defined once the IP shares the list of beneficiaries*)
- Teachers and librarians (*Note: the number of recipients will be defined once the IP shares the list of beneficiaries*)

As the nature of activities differed per stakeholder group, the ET designed two sets of questionnaires to reflect the diversity of results. These surveys are structured and utilize a combination of dichotomous questions, i.e., Yes/No/Don't Know, Likert scale (using a 5-point rating scale), and open-ended responses. The online surveys will be hosted using the online platform *Survey Monkey*. Respondents will be requested to complete the survey within one week of receipt, and reminder emails will be sent to those who do not complete the survey.

Each survey questionnaire is divided into several modules. Each module contains questions designed to generate data that will help the ET address the corresponding evaluation question.

The piloting phase of the electronic surveys will involve conducting a trial run with a select group of media outlets, grantees, librarians, and teachers. This pilot group will be carefully chosen to represent diverse perspectives and experiences relevant to the survey objectives. The surveys will be distributed

to these participants through an online platform, allowing for easy accessibility and efficient data collection.

During the pilot phase, the survey implementation process will be closely monitored to identify potential issues or areas requiring improvement. This includes evaluating the clarity of survey questions, the user-friendliness of the online platform, and the overall experience of participants. Feedback from the pilot group will be actively sought and considered to refine and enhance the survey instrument.

Adjustments to the survey instrument may be necessary based on the insights gained during the piloting process. This could involve rephrasing or restructuring questions, modifying response options, or clarifying instructions to ensure participants can provide accurate and meaningful responses.

Regarding incomplete surveys, the team will carefully evaluate the extent of incompleteness and its potential impact on the overall data quality. While the goal is to encourage participants to complete the survey in its entirety, specific circumstances, such as technical difficulties or time constraints, may lead to incomplete responses. The team will assess the feasibility of accepting incomplete surveys while taking into account the implications for data analysis and the overall objectives of the survey.

By piloting the electronic surveys, the team can fine-tune the survey instrument, address potential challenges, and optimize the data collection process. This iterative approach will ultimately enhance the reliability and validity of the survey findings, providing valuable insights to inform decision-making and program improvements.

The online survey questionnaires will be disseminated to all grantees, media outlets, media monitoring CSOs, and teachers/librarians participating in MEDIA-M supported activities, whose emails will be shared by the Implementing Partner. Based on previous Integra experience, the ET anticipates an estimated 30 percent response rate, depending on the quality of beneficiary datasets provided by the Implementing Partner.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND/OR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

To provide complementary and supplementary qualitative data focused on processes and results, the ET will also conduct at least 40 stakeholder interviews using KIIs and/or FGDs. Upon receiving the list of stakeholders from USAID, the ET will determine the specific type of interview to be conducted, whether KII or FGD. These interviews will take place over two weeks in Chisinau and various regions of Moldova, including Gagauzia, Taraclia, and the North of Moldova. USAID/Moldova will have the opportunity to approve the in-country schedule before it is finalized.

The ET will use stratified sampling for selecting participants for KIIs and/or FGDs who will be chosen specifically for their relationship to the program and clustered for interview and electronic survey

purposes. These will include IP staff, USAID staff, grant recipients, policymakers, targeted elements of the Moldovan public and other donors (see Table 2). The ET will conduct qualitative KIIs and/or FGDs with the participants. If some participants prefer online interviews, these will be conducted via video conferencing using Google Meet (for all USAID staff), Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp.

All travel and interview schedules will be centralized and managed by the local coordinator to ensure all team members have access and can plan each day accordingly. Throughout data collection, the ET will have frequent check-in meetings to discuss preliminary findings and lessons learned from each day, as well as plan for the days ahead (i.e., addressing schedule changes, coordinating meetings, organizing updated stakeholder lists, etc.) The team will conduct two weeks of KIIs and FGDs in Chisinau and other parts of Moldova as described above to better understand program impact at the level of the operating environments of target beneficiaries. If requested, the ET can check-in with USAID/Moldova throughout the fieldwork by email prior to the out brief.

SAMPLING APPROACH

For Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and/or Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the Evaluation Team (ET) will implement a stratified random sampling approach. This involves segregating the pool of informants into distinct strata based on their affiliations. These groups are as follows:

- USAID
- Implementing Partner(s)
- Media outlets (national and local/regional)
- Teachers and Librarians
- Grant recipients
- Media monitoring CSOs
- Researchers, journalists, influencers, bloggers, and vloggers
- Policymakers (Government officials, Members of Parliament, Audio-visual Regulatory Agency)
- Press Council
- MEDIACOR
- Targeted segment of the Moldovan public
- Other donor-funded programs

Post-stratification, the ET will use random sampling within each stratum to select informants for interviews. This method will ensure representation from each stakeholder group in the sample. The ET aims to conduct up to 40 interviews; it should be noted that the actual number of respondents will be higher than this figure due to the group nature of FGDs.

For the collection of quantitative data, the ET will employ online survey questionnaires which will be disseminated to all the grantees, media outlets, media monitoring CSOs, and teachers/librarians participating in MEDIA-M supported activities. The Implementing Partner will provide contact information (emails). Response rates for online surveys can vary. However, based on experience, the ET estimates a response rate of approximately 30 percent. This estimation is contingent upon the quality of the beneficiary datasets provided by the Implementing Partner. The ET will perform subsequent data analysis based on the received responses.

It is important to note that the reliability and validity of the evaluation results will heavily rely on sampling quality. The ET will ensure this by maintaining the impartiality of the selection process, assuring representation across all strata, and actively addressing potential non-response bias.

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, AND INTERPRETATIVE PROCESS

At a macro level, data analysis and synthesis will be guided by an abductive reasoning approach[28]. Unlike inductive and/or deductive modes of inquiry, which typically follow a more linear logic, abductive reasoning entails a more circular or spiraling process and represents a simultaneously puzzling out of insight from data gained through the desk review, survey, FGDs, and KIIs. Potential limitations will be highlighted.

The evaluation team will employ rigorous analysis protocols to make sense of the collected data and derive meaningful insights. The qualitative data gathered from KII, Focus Group Discussions, and online surveys will undergo a coding process, wherein the team will systematically categorize and label the information based on key themes, concepts, and/or patterns that emerge from the data. This coding process will help identify commonalities, differences, and significant trends within the qualitative data.

Following the coding process, the evaluation team will engage in a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involves the identification and exploration of recurring themes or patterns across the data set. The team will analyze the coded data to identify overarching themes, sub-themes, and relationships between them. This analysis will provide a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data, allowing for the identification of key findings and the generation of insightful conclusions.

For the quantitative data collected through the online survey, the evaluation team will utilize appropriate statistical techniques to analyze the data and identify patterns, trends, and relationships between variables. This may involve conducting cross tabulations, calculating frequencies and percentages, and applying statistical tests to assess the significance of relationships between variables.

[28] Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora. Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012)

The analysis process will also involve integrating findings from the qualitative and quantitative data sources. By triangulating and cross-referencing the different data sets, the evaluation team will gain a holistic perspective and ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

The ET will present the findings in a clear and organized manner, providing a comprehensive overview of the evaluation results while highlighting the key themes and patterns identified during the analysis process.

4.3 POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS

Selection bias: As some key informants may decline to be interviewed, there is a possibility of selection bias. Those respondents who choose to be interviewed might differ from those who do not in terms of their attitudes and perceptions, affiliation with government/non-government structures, and socio-demographic characteristics and experience. The ET will mitigate this by developing a stratified sampling of key informants.

Instrumental Bias: Guarding against instrumental bias is a consideration because many beneficiaries and in-country partners were exposed to or participated in more than one intervention and their responses may be influenced by participation in those varying interventions. The ET will note if key stakeholders participated in multiple activities.

Recall bias: Given that the program started in 2017, respondents may find it difficult to accurately recall efforts related to particular activities or changes over time. A challenge of qualitative data is that responses rely on the interviewee's recollection or perspectives. The ET will overcome this by incorporating best practices for qualitative data collection when a recall is required, such as framing questions to anchor respondents to memorable points in time to ease recall or by asking questions that rely less on recall of specific activities and more on the currently perceived implications of those activities.

Difficulty assessing progress in addressing gaps: The evaluation will be conducted while the MEDIA-M implementation and capacity building interventions are ongoing, and the influences on the relevant value chain may take a few years to deliver the intended results. The ET will assess progress to date and highlight potential gaps that should be addressed in end-line evaluations.

5. COLLABORATION, LEARNING AND ADAPTING

The ET will work closely with USAID/Moldova to present its preliminary findings and recommendations to USAID mission staff. The ET proposes one in-briefing, one exit briefing, and one recommendations and validation workshop be held after the data analysis has been completed and prior to report writing. More details on each can be found below:

In-Briefing: The field team, composed of the ET Leader, Subject Matter Expert (SME), Data Analyst and Coordinator, is set to commence fieldwork in Moldova on September 4, 2023. To facilitate this process, the ET will organize an in-brief session either on September 4 or September 5th, depending on the availability of USAID Mission personnel. The date will be reconfirmed with USAID/Moldova in advance upon final approval of this document. The in-brief will set the stage for fieldwork, including a walkthrough of the final plans for data collection, a discussion of the schedule for the following two weeks, and the solicitation of feedback from USAID/Moldova for any changes that may be needed. Prior to the in-brief, the ET will consult with the USAID/Moldova Evaluation Activity Manager and USAID's Activity Contracting Officer's Representatives (CORs) to determine the final structure of the session and identify the appropriate participants. This collaborative approach will ensure that the in-brief is informative, relevant, and productive, laying the groundwork for a successful evaluation.

The in-brief will feature a structured PowerPoint presentation of the Evaluation Work Plan (EWP), focusing on the data collection plan and including a question-and-answer session for the performance evaluation. The updated list of KIIs will also be provided.

Exit Briefing: Following the completion of fieldwork on September 15th, 2023, the ET will deliver an exit briefing to report on its initial findings, preliminary conclusions, and recommendations. The briefing is tentatively scheduled for September 21st or 22nd, 2023, with the final date to be confirmed with the Mission. During the exit briefing, the ET will present its general findings, conclusions, and anticipated recommendations on the MEDIA-M program. This will provide USAID/Moldova with an early understanding of the evaluation's key takeaways and inform the subsequent stages of the assessment. The exit briefing will be an essential opportunity for the ET to engage with USAID/Moldova and other relevant parties, ensuring that the evaluation's results are relevant and applicable. It is important to note that the participants for the exit briefing will be predefined in consultation with the USAID/Moldova team. Including relevant parties in the briefing will also ensure that the ET's recommendations are tailored to the program's specific needs, facilitating a more successful outcome.

Recommendations Workshop: The ET will conduct a 90-minute recommendations workshop with select staff from USAID/Moldova and implementing partner representatives to enhance learning and utilization of the evaluation outcomes. The workshop aims to encourage group discussion and shared understanding of the findings, pre-elaborated recommendations, and key learning points. The workshop

format will be determined two weeks before the delivery date to enable preparation for in-person or virtual discussion, depending on the prevailing circumstances. The ET will consider any feedback provided during the workshop and incorporate it into the final evaluation report, as appropriate. In addition to validating the evaluation outcomes, the workshop will also serve as an opportunity to generate thoughts and recommendations for a post-evaluation action plan. Through interactive discussion and engagement with key stakeholders, the ET aims to develop an action plan to ensure that the evaluation's recommendations are acted upon and the program's strengths are further reinforced. By collaborating with USAID/Moldova and the implementing partner, the ET seeks to develop a realistic and actionable plan that will contribute to the program's future work.

Post-Evaluation Action Plan: The ET will support the USAID Evaluation Manager and COR in developing a post-evaluation action plan. The ET will utilize and populate the Post-Evaluation Action, Dissemination, and Utilization Template with the appropriate evaluation recommendations. The ET will be available to co-facilitate a group discussion to ensure a shared understanding of the potential action items, management decisions, and key learning points.

6. DELIVERABLES

Under this evaluation, the ET will submit the following deliverables:

DELIVERABLES	TENTATIVE DUE DATE
Evaluation Work Plan: This document outlines the methodology, limitations, timeline, and logistics for USAID/Moldova's review and approval.	July 31, 2023
Fieldwork – In-Brief and Data Collection: The ET will start fieldwork with an in-brief planned for September 4, 2023 with USAID/Moldova (date to be confirmed). The team will work on the availability in advance of the trip. The ET will utilize electronic surveys and in-person or online meetings to conduct KIIs and/or FGDs.	Planned for September 4 – 15, 2023
Exit Briefing: After fieldwork, the team will meet with USAID/Moldova to review preliminary findings and solicit initial thoughts and feedback. As the team is based in-country, this will occur in the third week after fieldwork (anticipated during the week of September 18). The availability of USAID/Moldova will be discussed in advance.	Exact date TBD ~ Week of September 18-22, 2023

DELIVERABLES	TENTATIVE DUE DATE
Draft Evaluation Report: The draft evaluation report will adhere to USAID Evaluation Policy guidelines. Within five weeks of the departure of the ET from the fieldwork, the ET will provide USAID/Moldova with a draft of the report. Pending holiday and travel schedules for USAID/Moldova, the ET can work around review schedules and update the date for finalizing the draft report.	October 20, 2023
Recommendations Validation Workshop: Pending holiday and travel schedules for USAID/Moldova, the ET will schedule a Recommendations Validation Workshop as soon as possible, when the draft report is being written. These dates will depend on schedules and will be determined later.	Exact date TBD ~ Week of November 6-10, 2023
Final Evaluation Report: Upon the receipt of the Mission's comments on the draft report, the ET will finalize the report for submission.	November 17, 2023
Post-Evaluation Action Plan: Once the report has been finalized, the ET will work on the Post-Evaluation Action Plan, using the Dissemination and Utilization Template to go alongside the evaluation recommendations.	December 1, 2023

7. TIMELINE

Task	Mar 20-24	Mar-Apr	May 15-19	June	July	August	Sep 4-8	Sep 11-15	Sep 18–22	Sep 25-29	Oct 2-6	Oct 9-13	Oct 16-20	Oct 23-27	Nov 1-3	Nov 6-10	Nov 13-17	Nov 20-24	Dec 1
USAID AAR approval																			
Evaluation Desk Review																			
Evaluation Kick-Off Call																			
Draft EWP Developed /Submitted for feedback																			
EWP finalized																			
Field Logistics Validation / Instrument Prep Surveys piloting and implementation KII schedule and list of interviewees																			
In-country Fieldwork, in-briefing, and exit briefing																			
Draft Evaluation Report																			
USAID draft report comment period																			
Recommendation Workshop																			

Task	Mar 20-24	Mar-Apr	May 15-19	June	July	August	Sep 4-8	Sep 11-15	Sep 18–22	Sep 25-29	Oct 2-6	Oct 9-13	Oct 16-20	Oct 23-27	Nov 1-3	Nov 6-10	Nov 13-17	Nov 20-24	Dec 1
Final Evaluation Report																			
USAID final report comment period																			
Post-Evaluation Action Plan																			

ANNEX II.A. ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

The questionnaires below will be developed and translated into the Romanian language for distribution.

ANNEX II.A.I. ELECTRONIC SURVEY OF MEDIA – M SUPPORTED MEDIA OUTLETS AND GRANT BENEFICIARIES

Integra, a US-based company, has been commissioned by USAID/Moldova to conduct an evaluation of the MEDIA-M Program. This online survey targets organizations and individuals collaborating with the USAID-MEDIA-M program. The survey aims to gather valuable feedback from the program's partners to help USAID improve the program and make it more effective.

We have received your contact information from the MEDIA-M team and would like to invite you to participate in this survey. Your input is important to us, as it will help us understand the impact of the program and identify areas for improvement. The survey will take approximately 20 min to complete.

Please note that your participation in the survey is voluntary and your responses will not affect your relationship with the USAID-MEDIA-M program or USAID. Your responses will be used solely for research purposes and kept strictly confidential. The survey results will be reported in the aggregate and will not be attributable to any individual or organization.

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Maia Giorbelidze at the following email address: mgiorbelidze@integrallc.com.

Thank you in advance for your participation and valuable feedback.

1. **Do you agree to participate?**
    a. Yes
    b. No (Move to end of the form)

MODULE A: PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

We'd like some information about your involvement with the MEDIA-M program.

2. **For how long have you been engaged in MEDIA-M supported activities?**
    a. Less than a year
    b. 1-2 years
    c. 2-3 years
    d. 3-6 years

3. **What type of grant support has your media outlet received over the implementation period of the MEDIA-M program?** (You may choose several options, if applicable)
    a. Media Implementation Gaps Grants (MIGG)
    b. Media Misinformation Campaign Grants (MMCGs)
    c. "Media Freedom Matters" advocacy grants scheme

d. Grants to procure needed software and equipment
e. Other sub-grants, please specify: _____
f. Not applicable

MODULE B: RESILIENCE OF THE INFORMATIONAL SPACE

4. **Compared to any point over the last six years, how would you assess the current information space in terms of resilience?**

   (*Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals, communities, and societies to effectively navigate and respond to challenges related to disinformation, fake news and the influence of malign actors. It encompasses their ability to critically analyze information, identify and mitigate the risks of misinformation and disinformation, and actively participate in shaping a media landscape that promotes democratic values, transparency, and accountability*)

   a. Significantly more resilient
   b. Slightly more resilient
   c. About the same
   d. Slightly less resilient
   e. Significantly less resilient

If Slightly less resilient or significantly less resilient, please specify: _____

5. **Which of the following statements aligns most closely with your assessment of the current informational space in Moldova in terms of resiliency?**

   a. The informational space appears relatively weak in resilience, with many media consumers susceptible to false narratives and the rapid spread of misinformation. Strengthening media literacy programs and promoting responsible journalism is essential for improvement.
   b. The resiliency of the informational space is mixed, with some people displaying commendable media literacy, but others struggle to identify reliable information from disinformation. Enhancing media literacy initiatives could bolster overall resiliency.
   c. The informational space seems moderately resilient, with a growing emphasis on fact-checking and critical analysis among media consumers. However, challenges persist in countering disinformation, particularly on digital platforms, necessitating more efforts to bolster media literacy.
   d. The informational space is quite resilient, as media consumers and professionals demonstrate strong critical thinking skills, effectively identifying disinformation and prioritizing fact-checking.
   e. The current informational space in Moldova is highly resilient, with media outlets actively responding to disinformation campaigns and the public showing excellent discernment in identifying reliable sources. Widespread critical thinking skills

contribute to a healthy information landscape capable of withstanding disinformation challenges.

6. **To what extent has your media organization/institution's activity implemented within the MEDIA-M program included components/activities targeting the following areas?**

a. Increasing financial independence				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
b. Strengthening editorial independence				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
c. Providing training opportunities for professional development				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
d. Technical equipment procurement and access to technologies				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
e. Fostering open dialogue with respective authorities on media-related legislation				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*

7. **To what extent has your media organization/institution's activity implemented within the MEDIA-M program addressed the increased foreign malign influence and vulnerabilities of the information space in Moldova? (Foreign malign influence means any hostile effort undertaken by, at the direction of, on behalf of, or with the substantial support of the government of a covered foreign country with the objective of influencing, through overt or covert means – a. the political, military, economic, or other policies or activities of the Republic of Moldova; b. the public opinion within the Republic of Moldova)**
   a. To a great extent
   b. To a significant extent
   c. To a moderate extent
   d. To a limited extent
   e. Not at all

8. **To what extent do you consider that the activity implemented by your media organization/institution within the MEDIA-M program contributed to the resilience of the information space?**
   a. To a great extent

b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

Please explain how? _____

9. **What type of support would be effective in increasing the resilience of the information space in Moldova?**

	Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very effective	Extremely Effective
Training					
Provision of specialized equipment and software					
Support in research and policy dialogue					
On-the-job training					
Internships/study visits					
Improving the regulatory framework					
Expanding the area of intervention from the capital city to the regions					

10. **The resilience of the information space will be enhanced if tailor-made support is provided to: (Please select all that apply)**
    a. Romanian language outlets
    b. Russian language outlets
    c. Production houses
    d. Media planform: TV
    e. Media planform: Radio
    f. Media planform: Print

g. Media planform: Internet
h. Journalists
i. Civic Activists
j. Bloggers, vloggers
k. Media CSOs
l. Non-media CSOs
m. Other, please specify: _____

MODULE C: DIVERSE VOICES, ADVOCACY AND OVERSIGHT

11. Compared to any point over the last six years, how do you assess the openness of the media environment concerning the representation of diverse voices, including marginalized groups?

a. Not open at all - The media environment is not open to representing/covering diverse voices.
b. Slightly open - The media environment is slightly open to representing/covering diverse voices.
c. Moderately open - The media environment is moderately open to representing/covering diverse voices.
d. Very open - The media environment is very open to representing/covering diverse voices.
e. Entirely open - The media environment is entirely open to representing/covering diverse voices.

12. To what extent did your organization/institution enhance the participation and representation of diverse voices, including marginalized groups, with the support of the MEDIA-M program?

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

13. To what extent did your organization/media outlet view 'diversity of voices' as a central objective of the MEDIA-M grants?

a. Not at all
b. To a limited extent
c. Moderately
d. To a great extent
e. Completely

14. Please rate the extent to which your media organization/institution managed to diversify the content and support media advocacy and oversight activities.

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

15. Please rate the extent to which your media organization/institution will continue addressing media advocacy and oversight activities without funding.

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

16. What are the main barriers to pursuing media advocacy and oversight activities?

a. Insufficient financial resources
b. Lack of qualified staff
c. Lack of unity and diverse agendas of media stakeholders
d. Disconnection between regions and the capital city
e. Other, please specify: _____

17. Do you consider the current media advocacy and oversight activities/initiatives implemented within the MEDIA-M program sufficient to maintain a resilient information space in Moldova?

a. Sufficient
b. Slightly sufficient
c. Insufficient
d. I don't know

18. What type of support would increase the efficiency of media advocacy and oversight activities?

	Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very effective	Extremely Effective
Training					

	Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very effective	Extremely Effective
Provision of specialized equipment and software					
Support in research and policy dialogue					
On-the-job training					
Internships/study visits					
Improving the regulatory framework					
Expanding the area of intervention from the capital city to the regions					

MODULE D: USING TECHNOLOGY (MEDIA TECHNOLOGY[29] INCLUDING MULTIPLE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS)

16. What type of media technology do you use in your daily work? (Please select all the options that apply)

a. Digital media outlets (TV & Radio, Websites, social media, podcasts and blogs, email, mobile apps.)

b. Only social media (ex. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and others)

c. Only web media (ex. podcasts, websites, blog posts, videos and others)

d. Other, please specify: _____

e. None

17. Your media outlet applied for support within the MEDIA-M program to:

a. Develop media technologies capabilities of your staff. (Move to question 18)

b. Get assistance with technical equipment procurement. (Move to question 19)

[29] Media technology is technology which disseminates, stores or produces media content.

c. Develop media technologies capabilities of your staff and get assistance with technical equipment procurement. (Move to question 18)
d. Use technologies to increase financial sustainability and outreach. (Move to question 19)
e. None of the above (move to to MODULE E)

18. If you selected option a. or c. to Q 17, to what extent has the Media – M program increased your staff skills in the following areas:

a. Access media technology				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*
b. Use media technology for professional and personal purposes daily				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*
c. Respond timely to increased malign influence, detect fake news using media technology (content-wise)				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*

19. Please indicate to what extent did the MEDIA-M program manage to help you:

a. Ensuring assistance with technical equipment, software procurement, and access to technologies				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
b. Assisting in strengthening editorial independence				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
c. Providing tailor-made training opportunities for your staff				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
d. Using technologies to strengthen financial sustainability and outreach (crowdfunding and subscription				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
e. Fostering open dialogue with respective authorities on media related legislation				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*

20. Did your media outlet apply crowdfunding and subscription to ensure financial sustainability?

a. Yes
b. No (Move to MODULE E)
c. Partially
d. I don't know

21. **If you answer yes or partially to Q20, please rate the extent to which crowdfunding and subscription contribute to ensuring the financial sustainability of your media outlet.**
    a. To a great extent
    b. To a significant extent
    c. To a moderate extent
    d. To a limited extent
    e. Not at all

MODULE E: REACHING RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AUDIENCES

22. **Which of the following activities, specifically targeting the Russian-speaking audience, did your media outlet get support under the MEDIA-M program? (Please select all the options that apply):**

a. Russian language media/content production
b. Providing Russian language alternative information
c. Reaching out to Russian language audiences and providing unbiased content
d. Other, please specify: _____
e. None of the above (Move to MODULE F)

23. **Please rate the extent to which you think the Russian-speaking audience in Moldova has access to alternative information:**
    a. Very limited access
    b. Limited access
    c. Moderate access
    d. Good access
    e. Very good access

24. **How would you rate the level of outreach to the Russian-speaking audience compared to six years ago?**
    a. Significantly decreased - The outreach to the Russian-speaking audience has significantly decreased.
    b. Slightly decreased - The outreach to the Russian-speaking audience has slightly decreased.
    c. No change - There has been no change in the level of outreach to the Russian-speaking audience.
    d. Slightly increased - The outreach to the Russian-speaking audience has slightly increased.

e. Significantly increased - The outreach to the Russian-speaking audience has significantly increased.

25. From your point of view, to what extent would the engagement of the Russian-speaking audience contribute to increasing the level of resilience of the information space in Moldova?

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

26. **Please indicate your opinion on each provided statement below:**

a. With the MEDIA-M program support, our media outlet provided high-quality media content/alternative information in the Russian language.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
b. With the MEDIA-M program support, our media outlet developed a network of Russian-speaking journalists, experts, bloggers, vloggers and media professionals.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
c. With the MEDIA-M program support, our media outlet ensured Russian-speaking audience outreach.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
d. With the MEDIA-M program support, our media outlet increased the number of Russian-speaking audience.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
e. With the MEDIA-M program support, our media outlet increases the sustainability of Russian language content production.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*

27. From your point of view, which of the following factors make the Russian speaking audience a more engaged information consumer?

a. Providing Russian language content.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*

b. Providing high-quality Russian language content				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
c. Reaching out to the Russian speaking audience using digital media, including social media.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*
d. Providing alternative information in the Russian language and ensuring diversification.				
To a great extent	*To a significant extent*	*To a moderate extent*	*To a limited extent*	*Not at all*

28. From your point of view, did the MEDIA – M program provide sufficient support to fulfill the information needs of the Russian speaking audience?

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

29. From your perspective, what barriers are still hindering Russian speaking audience engagement?

a. Insufficient Russian language media outlets
b. Quality of the Russian language media outlets
c. Unwillingness to consult alternative sources of information
d. Lack of knowledge of Russian language media outlets
e. Habits and nostalgia for the past
f. Other, please specify: _____

MODULE F: MEDIA LITERACY

30. Did your activity in the MEDIA-M program target media literacy activities?

a. Yes
b. No (Move to Module G)
c. Partially

31. Please indicate the area and language your media outlet is operating in: (multiple choices allowed)

a. National level
b. Regional level
c. Both national and regional level

d. Romanian language
e. Russian language
f. Both Romanian and Russian languages

32. If your media outlet addresses both national and regional levels, are there different needs in terms of information consumption and media literacy skills between the respective audiences?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Partially
d. I don't know

If yes or partially, please specify: _____

33. If your media outlet addresses Romanian and Russian language audiences, are there different needs between the two regarding information consumption and media literacy skills?

a. Yes
b. No
c. Partially
d. I don't know

If yes or partially, please specify: _____

34. Compared to any point over the last six years, how would you rate the level of media literacy?

a. Significantly lower - Media literacy has noticeably decreased over the past six years.
b. Slightly lower - There has been a slight decline in media literacy compared to six years ago.
c. About the same - Media literacy remains relatively consistent compared to the past six years.
d. Slightly higher - There has been a slight improvement in media literacy compared to six years ago.
e. Significantly higher - Media literacy has significantly increased over the past six years.

35. To your knowledge, is the Russian speaking audience more vulnerable to malign influence or is the threat equal for both Romanian and Russian-speaking audiences?

a. The Russian-speaking audience is more vulnerable to malign influence compared to the Romanian-speaking audience.
b. The Romanian-speaking audience is more vulnerable to malign influence compared to the Russian speaking audience.
c. Both Romanian and Russian-speaking audiences are vulnerable to the malign influence.

36. **To your knowledge, which are the main barriers media outlets face in producing Russian language content (multiple choices allowed):**
    a. Insufficient Russian-speaking professionals
    b. Reduced consumption of Russian language content
    c. Lack of financial resources and sustainable funding
    d. Other, please specify

37. **What type of support would be effective in increasing media literacy?**

	Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very effective	Extremely Effective
Training					
Provision of specialized equipment and software					
On-the-job training					
Internships/study visits					
Improving the regulatory framework					
Expanding the area of intervention from the capital city to the regions					

MODULE G: ENGAGING REGIONAL MEDIA

38. **To what extent do the regional/local media outlets serve to strengthen the resilience of the information space in Moldova?**
    a. To a great extent
    b. To a significant extent
    c. To a moderate extent
    d. To a limited extent
    e. Not at all

39. **Please rate the level of engagement of local/regional media outlets in preserving the sustainability of the information space resilience in Moldova compared to six years ago.**
    a. Much less engaged
    b. Slightly less engaged
    c. About the same level of engagement
    d. Slightly more engaged
    e. Much more engaged

40. **How would you rate the credibility of regional media outlets now compared to any point over the last six years?**
    a. Significantly lower credibility
    b. Slightly lower credibility
    c. About the same level of credibility
    d. Slightly higher credibility
    e. Significantly higher credibility

41. **To what extent the local/regional media outlets can cover the information needs of their audiences?**
    a. To a great extent
    b. To a significant extent
    c. To a moderate extent
    d. To a limited extent
    e. Not at all

42. **To your knowledge, what are the main barriers hindering the activity of the local/regional media outlets** (multiple choices allowed)**:**
    a. Shortage of professional staff
    b. Sporadic or lack of professional development training sessions
    c. Low salaries and benefits
    d. Reduced access to media technologies
    e. Shortage of media equipment
    f. Lack of appropriate working environment
    g. Reduced credibility
    h. Low-quality media products

43. **What are the main strengths of the local/regional media outlets (multiple choices allowed)?**
    a. The local/regional audience tends to trust their local/regional media outlets more.

b. The local/regional media outlets tend to cover more local/regional subjects.
c. Local/regional media serve as knowledge and information providers, opinion makers and shapers.
d. Local/regional media serve as the first bastion in preventing the spread of disinformation, fake news and malign influence to the local audience.
e. Local/regional media engages professionals from respective local/regional communities.

44. What type of support would be effective in increasing the credibility of local/regional media?

	Not Effective	Slightly Effective	Moderately Effective	Very effective	Extremely Effective
Training					
Provision of specialized equipment and software					
On-the-job training					
Internships/study visits					
Improving the regulatory framework					

DEMOGRAPHICS:

45. Please indicate your primary working language.

a. Romanian
b. Russian
c. English
d. Another language, please specify: _____

46. Which gender do you identify yourself with?

a. Female
b. Male
c. Other

47. Please indicate your service area at the time you received MEDIA-M assistance:

a. Town

b. City
c. Region

48. Please indicate which option best describes your current occupation[30]:

a. Journalist
b. Blogger, vlogger
c. Civic activist
d. Media related professional
e. Media Civil Society Organization (CSO) representative or expert
f. Other (please indicate)

49. Please indicate which option best describes your affiliation[31]:

a. National media outlet
b. National media CSO
c. Regional media outlet
d. Regional media CSO
e. Local media outlet
f. Local media CSO
g. None of the above, please specify: _____

[30] The list might be modified as we receive the list of beneficiaries from the IP
[31] The list might be modified as we receive the list of beneficiaries from the IP

ANNEX II.A.II. ELECTRONIC SURVEY OF TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

Integra, a US-based company, has been commissioned by USAID/Moldova to conduct the evaluation of the MEDIA-M Program. This specific online survey targets teachers and librarians that have participated in USAID-MEDIA-M-supported activities. The survey aims to gather valuable feedback from the program's partners to help USAID improve the program and make it more effective.

We have received your contact information from the MEDIA-M team and would like to invite you to participate in this survey. Your input is important to us, as it will help us understand the impact of the program and identify areas for improvement. The survey will take approximately 15 min to complete.
Please note that your participation in the survey is voluntary and your responses will not affect your relationship with the USAID-MEDIA-M program or USAID. Your responses will be used solely for research purposes and kept strictly confidential. The survey results will be reported in the aggregate and will not be attributable to any individual or organization.

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Maia Giorbelidze at the following email address: mgiorbelidze@integrallc.com.

Thank you in advance for your participation and valuable feedback.

1. **Do you agree to participate?**
   a. Yes
   b. No (Move to end of the form)

MODULE A: PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

We'd like some information about your involvement with the MEDIA-M program.

2. **For how long have you been engaged in MEDIA-M supported activities?**
   a. Less than a year
   b. 1-2 years
   c. 2-3 years
   d. 3-6 years

3. **Please indicate which option best describes your current occupation:**
   a. Teacher
   b. Librarian

MODULE B: RESILIENCE OF THE INFORMATIONAL SPACE

4. **Compared to any point over the last six years, how would you assess the current information space in terms of resilience?**

   (*Resilience* refers to the capacity of individuals, communities, and societies to effectively navigate and respond to challenges related to disinformation, fake news and the influence of malign actors. It encompasses their ability to critically analyze information, identify and mitigate the risks of misinformation and disinformation, and actively participate in shaping a media landscape that promotes democratic values, transparency, and accountability)

   a. Significantly more resilient
   b. Slightly more resilient
   c. About the same
   d. Slightly less resilient
   e. Significantly less resilient

If Slightly less resilient or significantly less resilient, please specify: _____

5. **How often do you come across news or information that you believe misrepresents reality or is even false?**
   a. Everyday/almost everyday
   b. At least once a week
   c. Several times a month
   d. Seldom
   e. Never *(Move to question 6)*
   f. Don't know *(Move to question 6)*

6. **Where do you see most of this type of news and information?**
   a. Television
   b. Websites
   c. Print media (i.e., newspapers, magazines)
   d. Word of mouth
   e. Social media
   f. Radio
   g. Other, Specify
   h. Do not know

7. **Imagine you come across important or surprising news that you think might be fake and want to determine if the information is accurate. What steps would you take to verify this information? (select all that apply)**
   a. I wouldn't verify the information
   b. Ask friends/family for their opinion
   c. Check alternative news sources

d. See how many times the piece has been "liked" or shared on social media
e. Check a fact-checking, debunking site
f. Think about whether I agree with the information
g. Check the sources that are cited in the article
h. Other(specify)
i. Don't know

8. **How confident do you feel in identifying news or information that misrepresents reality or is even false?**
   a. Not confident at all
   b. Slightly confident
   c. Moderately confident
   d. Quite confident
   e. Extremely confident

9. **To what extent has the MEDIA-M program helped you develop critical thinking skills to identify news or information that misrepresents reality or is false?**
   a. Not at all
   b. To a limited extent
   c. Moderately
   d. To a great extent
   e. Completely

10. **Please rate the need for media literacy skills in becoming a protected information consumer:**
    a. Not needed at all
    b. Slightly needed
    c. Moderately needed
    d. Very needed
    e. Extremely needed

MODULE C: DIVERSE VOICES, ADVOCACY AND OVERSIGHT

11. **To what extent does your media literacy course consider the specific needs of your students or community members?**

a. Language				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*

b. Age				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*
c. Ethnicity (specifically: Roma)				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*

d. Visual and hearing impairment				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*

12. **To what extent do your students/community feel more inclusive and able to engage after completing the media literacy training?**
    a. To a great extent
    b. To a significant extent
    c. To a moderate extent
    d. To a limited extent
    e. Not at all

MODULE D: USING TECHNOLOGY (MEDIA TECHNOLOGY[32] INCLUDING MULTIPLE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS)

13. **What type of media technology do you use in your daily work? (Please select all the options that apply)**
    a. Digital media outlets (TV & Radio, Websites, social media, podcasts and blogs, email, mobile apps.)
    b. Only social media (ex. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and others)
    c. Only web media (ex. podcasts, websites, blog posts, videos and others)
    d. Other, please specify: _____
    e. None

14. **To what extent has the Media – M program increased your abilities in the following areas:**

a. Access media technology				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*
b. Use media technology for professional and personal purposes				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*
c. Distinguish misinformation and critically assess information using media technology				
Not at all	*Slightly*	*Moderately*	*Significantly*	*Very Significantly*

[32] Media technology is technology which disseminates, stores or produces media content.

15. **To what extent are the acquired media technology capacities sufficient for you to teach others in your class/community?**
    a. Not at all sufficient
    b. Insufficient
    c. Slightly sufficient
    d. Sufficient
    e. Highly sufficient

    If the selected answer is a., b. or c., please specify the topics you would need additional training_____

16. **Do you feel more confident using media technology (digital media, including social media & web media)?**
    a. Yes, I feel confident. I have all the necessary guiding tools and support documents.
    b. No, it is still difficult to assimilate information on online safety and the multitude of media technology.
    c. Partially, I am still learning how to use media technology and be protected online.
    d. I don't know.

17. **Do your students/community members feel more confident using media technology (digital media, including social media & web media)?**
    a. Yes, they feel confident and use the provided guiding tools and support documents.
    b. No, they feel the need for additional learning sessions.
    c. I don't know/I can't assess.

18. **Do you think media technology (digital media, including social media & web media) should be regulated?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Partially
    d. I don't know.

    If yes or partially, please specify why: _____

MODULE E: REACHING RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AUDIENCES

13. **On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the extent to which you think the Russian-speaking audience in Moldova has access to alternative information:**
    a. Very good access

b. Good access
c. Moderate access
d. Limited access
e. Very limited access

14. **Did your activity in the MEDIA-M program include targeting Russian speaking audience:**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Partially

15. **(Only if you answered Yes or partially to Q14) Did you employ different strategies when working with the Russian-speaking audience than Romanian speakers?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Partially
    d. I don't know.
    If yes or partially, please specify: _____

16. *(Only if you answered Yes or partially to Q15)* **Are the needs of Russian speakers different from those of Romanian speakers when it comes to using media technology and accessing information?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Partially
    d. I don't know.
    If yes or partially, please specify: _____

MODULE F: MEDIA LITERACY

17. **Please rate your initial desire to learn about media literacy:**
    a. I was eager to learn.
    b. I was slightly eager to learn.
    c. I was reticent at first.
    d. I was not at all eager to learn.

18. **Do you consider the acquired media literacy skills useful and valuable?**

a. Not useful at all
b. Slightly useful
c. Useful
d. Very useful
e. Extremely useful

19. **To what extent the Training of Trainers (ToT) activity was usefulness and tailoring to your needs:**

a. The ToT was conducted efficiently and enough to be practically useful				
Disagree	*Slightly agree*	*Moderately agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
b. The ToT covered relevant and interesting topics				
Disagree	*Slightly agree*	*Moderately agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
c. The ToT allowed modules tailored to our needs				
Disagree	*Slightly agree*	*Moderately agree*	*Agree*	*agree*

20. *(For teachers only)* **On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate how important it was for the resilience of the information space in Moldova to develop a media literacy curriculum.**
a. Not at all important
b. Slightly important
c. Moderately important
d. Very important
e. Extremely important

21. *(For teachers only)* **Please rate the extent to which your students increased their skills after taking the media literacy optional course:**

a. Identify and verify sources of information, including online				
Not capable at all	*Slightly capable*	*Moderately capable*	*Very capable*	*Extremely capable*
b. Analyze and critically assess media products				
Not capable at all	*Slightly capable*	*Moderately capable*	*Very capable*	*Extremely capable*
c. Use safety techniques while online (including when using social media platforms)				
Not capable at all	*Slightly capable*	*Moderately capable*	*Very capable*	*Extremely capable*

d. Use media technologies for personal development				
Not capable at all	*Slightly capable*	*Moderately capable*	*Very capable*	*Extremely capable*

22. *(For teachers only)* **Do you find it relevant to include media literacy as a compulsory course or should it remain optional?**
    a. Yes, media literacy should become a compulsory course.
    b. Media literacy should be an optional course.
    c. There is no need for a media literacy course.

23. *(For librarians only)* **Please rate your confidence in teaching others to:**

a. Identify and verify sources of information, including online				
Not confident at all	*Slightly confident*	*Moderately confident*	*Very confident*	*Extremely confident*
b. Analyze and critically assess media products				
Not confident at all	*Slightly confident*	*Moderately confident*	*Very confident*	*Extremely confident*
c. Use safety techniques while online (including when using social media platforms)				
Not confident at all	*Slightly confident*	*Moderately confident*	*Very confident*	*Extremely confident*
d. Use media technologies for personal development				
Not confident at all	*Slightly confident*	*Moderately confident*	*Very confident*	*Extremely confident*

24. Do you need to further enhance your media literacy knowledge as a trainer?
    a. Yes, I have enough knowledge.
    b. Partially, I have acquired knowledge, but I still need additional training.
    c. No, the ToT training sessions were not sufficient.

If yes or partially, please specify the type of knowledge: _____

25. Is there a need for continuous guided learning programs (ToTs) for teachers and librarians?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. I don't know.

    If yes or no, please specify: _____

26. **Should the MEDIA-M program expand its media literacy activities more in the regions of Moldova?**
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Partially
    d. I don't know.

    If yes or no, please specify: _____

MODULE G: ENGAGING REGIONAL MEDIA

27. **To what extent does conducting media literacy courses at the local/regional level increase the topic's attractiveness among the local/regional audience?**

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

28. **To what extent should the modules of the media literacy training course be approached differently (content and practice-wise) depending on the region?**

a. To a great extent
b. To a significant extent
c. To a moderate extent
d. To a limited extent
e. Not at all

If to a great or significant extent, please specify: _____

DEMOGRAPHICS:

29. **Please indicate your primary working language.**
    a. Romanian
    b. Russian
    c. English
    d. Another language, please specify: _____

30. **Which gender do you identify yourself with?**
    a. Female
    b. Male

c. Other

31. Group age

a. Up to 30
b. 31-45
c. 46-55
d. 55

32. Please indicate your service area at the time you received MEDIA-M assistance:

a. Town
b. City
c. Region

ANNEX II.B. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

ANNEX 11.B.I INTERVIEW TRACKING DATA

The ET will complete this section prior to conducting the KII:

Date of Interview	
Location of Interview	
Name of Data Collector	
Name of Respondent	
Role or Position/Title of Respondent	
Male/Female/Other	
Region	
Respondent Affiliation	

SCRIPT FOR THE START OF THE INTERVIEW

Hello, _____. My name is _____and I am working with Integra to conduct an evaluation of USAID's MEDIA-M Program. The purpose of this evaluation is to help USAID/Moldova gain a better understanding of how the Activity has worked, what results have been achieved to date, and how it might be improved going forward.

You have the right to participate in the interview without being recorded. Would you be willing to allow the interview to be recorded?

☐ Yes / ☐ No

☐ Consent to the Interview

☐ Consent to Recording the Interview

Your participation is voluntary. No one will know your responses to the questions. Let me know if you want to pause or stop the interview anytime.

Do you have any questions?

Thank you.

ANNEX 11.B.11 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS FOR USAID RELEVANT STAFF

DISCUSSION GUIDE
EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?
1. What were the main constraints hindering the resilience of the information space in Moldova 6 years ago, and did these constraints change over time? **2.** How has the MEDIA-M program contributed to enhancing the resilience of the information space in Moldova, and what battles remain to ensure its long-term sustainability? *(Probe: the main area of intervention, addressing specific needs, ability to respond to malign influence)* **3.** To what extent can Moldovan society, encompassing both the media and its audiences, effectively identify disinformation? How well-equipped are they with critical thinking skills to discern mis/dis information, and what role does the media play in facilitating this process?
EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?
4. Media inclusiveness and making the voice of marginalized groups heard was one of the main areas of intervention. What was the strategy behind the MEDIA-M program in empowering media, influencers, and civic groups to be more vocal? Can you provide examples of initiatives or programs that have successfully supported diverse voices and made the broader public aware of the challenges faced by these groups? **5.** Did geography matter in selecting the area of program implementation and how important was it to go regionally? *(Probe: program planning, addressing specific needs)* **6.** What factors hindered or still hinder media inclusiveness and openness to those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable and/or marginalized groups? To what extent did the MEDIA–M program support the change process?
7. To what extent did the MEDIA–M program manage to foster advocacy and oversight initiatives as well as develop sustainable advocacy and oversight practical tools and skills? **8.** How would you assess the capacities of the media today in pursuing advocacy and oversight activities? Is it essential to continue supporting this type of initiative? *(Probe: resilience of the information space, media as a watchdog)*
EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?
9. To what extent did the MEDIA–M program manage to improve the institutional/financial sustainability and audience outreach of its beneficiaries by encouraging the use of media technology, including building capacity?

10. How have the tools, such as crowdfunding and subscriptions, been utilized to increase the audience and promote accurate information for media outlets? Have these tools helped reach a broader audience and foster financial sustainability for the media outlets? *(Probe: COVID–19 mobility restrictions, lack of training and media technology knowledge, scarcity of financial resources, capital/regions, crowdfunding, and subscription)*
11. To what extent did the program incubate "new media" production? What would you consider as further potential areas of intervention? *(Probe: media outlets delivered digitally; content adjusted to social media, artificial intelligence)*
EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?
12. Why was it important for the MEDIA-M program to address and engage the Russian speaking audience? What implementation strategy was applied, and do you consider it sufficient and successful? What could be done differently? **13.** What are the main achievements and lessons learned in the attempt of the MEDIA-M program to support activities aiming at reaching out to the Russian speaking audience? **14.** What overall effect has the activity had on media outlets and influencers regarding their ability to multiply high-quality information and engage with various language-speaking audiences? Can you provide specific examples of success stories or challenges faced during the process?
EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?
15. What specific strategies were implemented by the MEDIA-M program to improve media literacy at national and local levels? How were these strategies tailored to address the distinct needs and challenges of different target groups? **16.** To what extent have the various approaches employed by the MEDIA-M program proven effective in the short- and long-term in developing media literacy among specific target groups? Have there been measurable improvements in the participants' ability to recognize and disregard disinformation and misinformation? **17.** How do you assess the sustainability of the results, and would you see further expanding activities? What areas of intervention could be further exploited?
EQ6 Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?
18. How did going regional help to strengthen the resilience of information space in Moldova? Did the territorial approach contribute to better achieving the program's goals? *(Probe: potential political risks, financial sustainability, foreign malign influence, sustainable media environment)*
Concluding questions

19. In what areas, if any, has progress fallen short of expectations and what key lessons learned can be drawn for future programming?

20. To what extent did the cooperation with other donors contribute to the success of the MEDIA – M program implementation and how do you see this collaboration moving forward?

ANNEX 11.B.III KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS FOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?

1. What are the top three challenges that Moldova faces with regard to developing a more effective and accountable media sector?
2. Compared to six years ago, has the resilience of the information space in Moldova improved? What changes have you seen in terms of the media outlets' capacity and practices in recent times? What are the reasons for these changes? What role could the program have played?
3. What are the most significant contributions your organization/activities have made to address this challenge?
4. In what ways does the USAID activity help Moldovan independent media become more effective, professional and sustainable – e.g., stronger capacity, increased sustainability, stronger engagement and oversight of citizens and greater reach? [if not aware of USAID activity, ask in general about the state of development of independent media outlets and operation environment]
5. What other international donors [the EU, UN, etc.] and/or USAID projects has your organization collaborated with?

EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?

6. To what extent do you think the MEDIA-M work increased citizen engagement and oversight in governmental decision-making?
7. Do you think the Program managed to reach out to less engaged categories of the population (rural areas, youth, women, marginalized/vulnerable groups) both as an audience and as beneficiaries? What were the main constraints? Do you see a need for new areas of engagement?

(Probe: education/training, societal stereotypes, COVID-19)

8. Has the USAID-sponsored activity you implement(ed) helped to address the specific needs of women, youth, minorities and any other relevant vulnerable groups? If yes, please elaborate and provide an example. [if not aware of USAID activity, ask in general about vulnerable groups]

9. How did the Program tackle the strengthening of advocacy and oversight capacities and what were the main areas of intervention? What are the achievements, and which were the barriers? Are the barriers overcome? Have there been any practical innovations introduced? What would you consider as further steps to increase the sustainability of achieved results?
(Probe: political limitations, lack of knowledge, lack of equipment access to media technology)

EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

10. Did the support your organization received from MEDIA-M include any investments in information technology? Have you received: financial support for the procurement of needed software and equipment, app, website or other online platform upgrades to allow for the posting of more engaging multimedia content, and has this helped you achieve your goals?
(Probe: COVID–19 mobility restrictions, lack of training and media technology knowledge, scarcity of financial resources, capital/regions)

11. To what degree are your or other media organizations supporting the ongoing use of these technological solutions? Can you provide specific examples of how these technologies are employed in the media industry?

12. Has your media outlet utilized crowdfunding and subscription models to ensure financial sustainability? To what degree do crowdfunding and subscription approaches contribute to securing the financial sustainability of your media outlet?

EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?

13. How important was it for you to reach out to the Russian speaking audience? Do you consider that the Program was successful in reaching out to the Russian speaking audience and what are the main achievements?

14. What were the main constraints in reaching out to the Russian speaking audience and what would you consider as further steps to strengthen the achieved results?
(Probe: enabling or discouraging legal and regulatory tools/environments, lack of knowledge, financial and technical assistance)

EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?

15. What were the most significant achievements of media literacy activities? To what extent did media literacy activity contribute to a mindset change and build-up of media literacy skills and how do you assess the sustainability of the result?

16. Did the media literacy activities envisage a multiplier effect? Did you foresee the potential for a quantitative/qualitative assessment or evolution over time?

17. What would you consider the next steps in further strengthening the results achieved under the media literacy component? Are there any important priorities, issues, or needs the Program has not addressed?

EQ6 Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?

18. Does engaging regional/local media make a difference? What are the potential risks or challenges associated with engaging more actively with regional media outlets, and how can these be addressed or mitigated?

19. How can the program engage more effectively with regional media outlets, and what strategies or approaches could enhance this engagement and address missed opportunities?

ANNEX 11.B.IV KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS FOR OTHER DONOR REPRESENTATIVES (UK Aid, Swedish Gov, Dutch Gov)

DISCUSSION GUIDE

EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?

1. How would you assess the level of development of the Moldovan media? Do they become more effective, professional and sustainable – e.g., stronger capacity, diversification of funding sources and increased engagement with citizens?

2. Compared to six years ago, has the resilience of the information space in Moldova improved? What changes have you seen in terms of the media outlets' capacity and practices in recent times? What are the reasons for these changes? What role could the program have played?

3. What were the areas of collaboration or partnership within the USAID-MEDIA-M?

EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?

4. Compared to any point over the last six years, to what extent have media outlets become more responsive to the needs of women, youth, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable groups? Are there any constraints or challenges in this regard?

(Probe: education/training, societal stereotypes, COVID-19)

EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

5. Did the support provided by you include any investments in information technology? Have you offered financial assistance for procuring necessary software, equipment, apps, websites, or other online platforms, as well as upgrades to enable posting more engaging multimedia content? And has this helped the beneficiaries achieve their goals?

6. To what extent has the financial viability of media outlets improved? To what degree do crowdfunding and subscription approaches contribute to securing the financial sustainability of media outlets?

EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?
7. Do you consider it important to reach out to the Russian speaking audience in Moldova? What are the main achievements and constraints?
EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?
8. Media literacy activities were a strong component of the MEDIA – M program. How would you assess the results and see further expanding activities? **9.** What are the major challenges and opportunities faced by the GRM with regard to improving media literacy?
10. EQ6 Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?
11. Does engaging regional/local media make a difference? How can the program engage more effectively with regional media outlets?
Concluding Questions
12. What are the main achievements of the MEDIA-M program and lessons learned? In what areas, if any, has progress fallen short of expectations? Why? **13.** Has the collaboration with MEDIA-M increased your activity's impact? *(Probe: seeking to test the need for further collaboration)* **14.** What are the areas that require further improvement and engagement within MEDIA-M?

ANNEX 11.B.V KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS FOR STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS (GOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS, MPS, LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, AUDIO-VISUAL REGULATORY AGENCY, MEDIACOR, MEDIA MONITORING CSOs)

DISCUSSION GUIDE
EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?
1. Is the information space more resilient now compared to 6 years ago?

2. Please state the first three major challenges hindering the resilience of the information space in Moldova nowadays. How can these challenges be addressed and what would be the main triggers for progress?
3. To what extent do authorities play a role in strengthening the media environment by providing fair conditions to sustain media outlets institutionally and regulations to ensure quality of the media product?
4. Have you heard about the MEDIA – M program? If yes, what was your role in implementing the Program or in connection with the Program? (e.g., participation at program events, co-partners in specific activities, etc.)

EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?

5. Do authorities generally support media advocacy and oversight activities? If yes, what type of support are you providing? Do advocacy and oversight matter, and could you provide successful and unsuccessful cases?
6. Are you aware of any advocacy and oversight initiatives conducted with the support of the MEDIA – M program?

(Probe: political limitations, lack of knowledge, lack of equipment & access to media technology)

7. Does inclusiveness (engaging with rural area communities, youth, women, and marginalized/vulnerable groups) play a role in strengthening the resilience of the information space? What are the main barriers impeding media inclusiveness and lack of engagement, and how are they addressed at the institutional level? To your knowledge, to what extent did the MEDIA-M program contribute to overcoming these barriers?

(Probe: education/training, societal stereotypes, COVID-19)

EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

8. How important is media technology today, including diverse social media platforms, in reaching diverse audiences? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using media technology?
9. To your knowledge, what are the main challenges associated with media technology? How are state institutions addressing these challenges and what role do the donor community and the civil society environment, including media outlets, play?

(Probe: COVID–19 mobility restrictions, lack of training and media technology knowledge, scarcity of financial resources, capital/regions, specific media technology regulations)

10. Are you aware of any MEDIA – M program initiatives tackling media technology, including incubating new media production? If yes, please specify.

EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?

11. Should reaching out to the Russian speaking audience be a priority in safeguarding the Moldovan information space?

12. Is the Russian language content regulated? If yes, please refer to the most important Laws. Governmental Decisions, etc.?

13. What are the main constraints in reaching out to the Russian speaking audience and potential entry points?

14. To your knowledge, what would increase the willingness of the Russian speaking audience to engage and consult alternative sources of information?

EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?

15. To what extent have you been engaged in media literacy training and awareness activities?

16. (Ministry of Education) What role did the MEDIA-M program play in designing and supporting the media literacy curricula and the media literacy course?

17. How popular is the media literacy course among students? Should the media literacy course be a compulsory one?

18. To your knowledge, what works, what is missing, and what should be improved?

19. To your knowledge, to what extent does the media literacy course safeguard students when using media technology and consulting information?

20. To your knowledge, to what extent the media literacy course has a spillover effect and contributes to safer information consumption by secondary beneficiaries?

21. How would you assess the cooperation with the MEDIA-M program and program beneficiaries?

22. What more can be explored?

Concluding Questions

23. Do you engage with local/regional media outlets and how important is it to keep the focus on regions?

24. To your knowledge, what are the main areas where support to media outlets should be provided?

25. How could the relationship between institutions and media outlets be further enhanced and what key entry points should be considered?

ANNEX 11.B.VI KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

DISCUSSION GUIDE: GROUP DISCUSSION
EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?
1. How did you learn about the MEDIA-M program, and what motivated you to apply for grants or participate in their activities? **2.** From your personal and professional experience, what are the most pressing issues related to information consumption? *(Probe: an influx of information and diverse sources, lack of critical thinking skills, lack of media technology knowledge)* **3.** From your point of view, how well does Moldovan society, including both the media and its audiences, effectively identify disinformation? To what extent are they equipped with critical thinking skills to discern deceptive information? **4.** Did the Media-M program address your professional needs and contribute to strengthening your confidence in using diverse sources of information?
EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?
5. Within the MEDIA-M program, have you been promoting diverse voices and engaging with various audiences, including vulnerable and/or marginalized groups? Did you find it helpful? What are the lessons learned and potential entry points for further consideration?
EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?
6. Do you and your beneficiaries feel confident using technology, including various social media platforms? If not, what kind of support was necessary and to what extent did the MEDIA-M program support you? Would you and your communities require further support?

(Probe: COVID–19 mobility restrictions, lack of training and media technology knowledge, scarcity of financial resources)

EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?

7. How important is it to have media literacy activities tailored to diverse linguistic audiences, including Romanian and Russian speakers?
8. Are the media literacy needs of Russian speakers different compared to Romanian speakers? If yes, how should this difference be mitigated?

EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?

9. Does your activity focus primarily on media literacy training sessions?
10. What are the main challenges or barriers you face in conducting media literacy activities?
11. Based on your experience, which media literacy activity has proven to be most effective and what resulted to be ineffective?
12. How popular is the media literacy course among your students/community members?
13. Should a media literacy course be a compulsory one?
14. Did you receive enough technical support within the MEDIA – M program or beyond to conduct media literacy training regularly? If yes, who else is supporting you and what role do the national and regional authorities play?
15. To what extent do you feel confident that the knowledge acquired at the ToTs is sufficient to teach others? Would continuous learning be an advantage?
16. How important is it to continue media literacy activities and which groups do you identify as the most vulnerable?
17. To what extent has the MEDIA-M program contributed to raising media literacy awareness? Did it make a change in terms of strengthening the critical thinking skills of your beneficiaries and larger audiences?
18. How could media literacy activities become more attractive?

EQ6 Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?

19. Should media literacy activities be implemented throughout the country? What added value would it bring?
20. To what extent did the Media-M program contribute to your professional development by increasing your knowledge and skills as an information consumer and trainer?

ANNEX 11.B.VII KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH RESEARCHERS, JOURNALISTS, INFLUENCERS, BLOGGERS AND VLOGGERS

DISCUSSION GUIDE
EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?
1. What are the top three challenges that Moldova faces with regard to developing a more effective and accountable media sector?
2. Compared to six years ago, has the resilience of the information space in Moldova improved? What changes have you seen in terms of the media outlets' capacity and practices in recent times? What are the reasons for these changes?
3. Have you heard about the MEDIA – M program? If yes, what was your role in implementing the Program or in connection with the Program? (e.g., participation in program events, etc.)
4. What are the key interventions that you consider would result in a more resilient information space in Moldova? Who are the key beneficiaries to which such assistance should be provided?
5. From your point of view, how well does Moldovan society, including both the media and its audiences, effectively identify disinformation? To what extent are they equipped with critical thinking skills to discern deceptive information, and in your perspective, what role does the media play in facilitating this process?
EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?
6. Compared to six years ago, to what extent has the media environment become more open to covering diverse voices, including marginalized and/or vulnerable groups?
7. To what extent should media assistance programs focus on a diverse pool of media professionals and enhance their capacities to engage diverse voices, manage advocacy, and

conduct oversight activities? Are you familiar with any initiatives within the MEDIA-M program that aim to achieve these objectives and did you participate in such activities

8. Does inclusiveness play a role in strengthening the resilience of the information space, particularly in relation to the rural area audience, youth, women, and marginalized and/or vulnerable groups? What are the main barriers that hinder media inclusiveness and engagement? Did the MEDIA-M program make a significant contribution in overcoming these barriers? If so, how?

(Probe: education/training, societal stereotypes, COVID-19)

9. Are you familiar with any advocacy and oversight initiatives carried out by the MEDIA-M program? Do you believe that enhancing the advocacy and oversight capacities of the media is essential and should receive further support?

10. What are the key interventions that you consider would increase the efficiency of media advocacy and oversight activities? Who are the key beneficiaries to which such assistance should be provided?

11. Do advocacy and oversight activities hold significance in Moldova, and can you recall an example or success story that comes to mind?

(Probe: political limitations, lack of knowledge, lack of equipment access to media technology)

EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

12. How prevalent is the use of various technologies in your work and on which tools do you rely the most?

13. Do you rely on specific tools such as crowdfunding and subscription to ensure financial stability? If yes, to what extent do such tools ensure financial stability?

14. How do you assess the role of media technology, including diverse social media platforms, in reaching out to diverse audiences? Did COVID-19 have an impact on accelerating technological development in this regard? Additionally, what do you consider to be the main strengths and weaknesses in utilizing media technology?

(Probe: COVID–19 mobility restrictions, lack of training and media technology knowledge, scarcity of financial resources, capital/regions)

15. Are you familiar with Media-M program initiatives addressing media technology aspects, such as incubating new media production? If yes, where are you part of such activities and how did the program help you in your activities?

16. From your perspective, what do you consider to be the priority legal and regulatory initiatives that should be undertaken to address media technology shortages?

EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?
17. In general, how important is it to reach out to the Russian-speaking audience and would such engagement increase the level of resilience of the information space in Moldova? **18.** Compared to six years ago, how has the level of outreach to the Russian-speaking audience evolved? Are you familiar with any initiatives or activities within the MEDIA-M program that specifically aimed to engage the Russian-speaking audience, disseminate alternative information in Russian, or produce content in the Russian language? **19.** What activities increase the level of engagement of the Russian-speaking audience (e.g., producing Russian language content, using digital media to disseminate Russian language content, producing alternative Russian language content)? Are you engaged in such type of activities? **20.** What are the primary challenges or constraints in reaching out to the Russian-speaking audience, and are there any potential breakthroughs or strategies to overcome them? *(Probe: enabling or discouraging legal and regulatory tools/environments, lack of knowledge, financial and technical assistance)*
EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?
21. Do you consider media literacy a priority in efforts to strengthen the resilience of the information space and ensure informed consumers of information? **22.** Are you familiar with any Media-M activities or initiatives specifically addressing media literacy? Have you been a partner or beneficiary in any of these initiatives? If yes, please share your experience. What worked, what needs improvement and what new areas of intervention may be identified
Concluding Questions
23. Do you consider that engaging regional/local media makes a difference in strengthening the information space in Moldova? **24.** Do you believe the Media-M program has made a difference in strengthening the information space in Moldova? How can the program engage more effectively with regional media outlets, and what strategies or approaches could be applied to enhance this engagement and address missed opportunities?

ANNEX 11.B.2.7 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF MEDIA OUTLETS

DISCUSSION GUIDE: GROUP DISCUSSION

EQ1 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the resilience of the information space?

1. Compared to 6 years ago, how resilient is the information space to political and financial pressures? If resilient, what were the main triggers for progress? If not, what remains to be the main constraints?
2. How did you hear about the MEDIA – M program and what made you apply for support? How did MEDIA – M program support enhance the activity and sustainability of your media outlet?
3. What are the most pressing issues media professionals and/or media institutions face? To what extent did the MEDIA-M program address these issues?
4. Compared to capital city and/or national level media outlets, do local/regional media outlets have the same development opportunities? Do local/regional media outlets face similar or distinctive challenges?
5. From your point of view, how well does Moldovan society, including both the media and its audiences, effectively identify disinformation? To what extent are they equipped with critical thinking skills to discern deceptive information, and in your perspective, what role does the media play in facilitating this process?

EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?

6. How do you address the inclusiveness issue and consider it essential to engage and cover the needs of ethnic minorities, vulnerable and or marginalized groups (women, youth, people with disabilities, elderly)?
7. Have you ever conducted advocacy and oversight activities? If yes, can you present some examples?
8. To what extent did the MEDIA–M program create opportunities to strengthen your advocacy and oversight capacities as well as your ability to make diverse voices heard?

EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

9. To what extent does media technology play a role in reaching diverse audiences? Do you use media technology tools in your daily activity? To what extent did the MEDIA-M program contribute to strengthening your media technology capacity in terms of technical equipment and software and capacitating your staff?
10. Have you applied media technology tools like crowdfunding and subscription to increase your financial sustainability?

(Probe: COVID–19 mobility restrictions, lack of training and media technology knowledge, scarcity of financial resources) **11.** Are there any constraints related to using media technology? Did the MEDIA-M program contribute to overcoming these constraints? Could you indicate potential areas for further interventions? **12.** To what extent did the MEDIA-M program succeed in incubating new media production? Did it play a significant role in supporting the dissemination of alternative information and securing the information space?
EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?
13. How important is it to reach out to the Russian-speaking audience? **14.** Does your media outlet produce Russian language content? If yes, is it primarily Russian language content or Romanian too? What are the main barriers in producing Russian language content and disseminating it to reach out to the Russian-speaking audience, and are there any potential breakthroughs or strategies to overcome these constraints? **15.** Do the needs of the Russian speaking audience differ from the Romanian-speaking audience? If yes, how?
EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?
16. Within the MEDIA-M program, have you been engaged in media literacy activities? If yes, what did you find most worthwhile and what could be done better? **17.** Should media outlets engage in media literacy activities? If yes, in what way?
EQ6 Would value be added to the sub-IR level results this activity seeks to contribute if it engaged more with regional media outlets? If yes, how? If no, why not?
18. Does empowering regional/local media make a noticeable difference in achieving a more resilient information space in Moldova? **19.** Would capacitating the local/regional media outlets contribute to more inclusive and resilient communities, and offer a platform for diverse voices engagement? **20.** Do you consider that implementing the Media-M program has made a difference for your media outlet and/or the Moldovan media environment as a whole? If so, how? **21.** In terms of further programming, what are the main challenges media in Moldova continues to face and potential entry points?

2.8 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH PRESS COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

DISCUSSION GUIDE: GROUP DISCUSSION

1. **What are the top three challenges that Moldova faces concerning the development of a more resilient information space?**
2. **Compared to six years ago, has the resilience of the information space improved? What changes have you seen in terms of the media outlets' capacity and practices in recent times? What are the reasons for these changes? What role could the MEDIA-M program have played?**
3. What was the purpose behind the support granted to the Association of Independent Press (API) for establishing the Press Council?
4. What were the results of the Media misinformation campaign?
5. To what extent have the operations of media outlets in Moldova improved, and what factors have contributed to that improvement?

EQ2 To what extent are activity outputs strengthening the capacity of diverse voices for engagement, advocacy, and oversight?

6. To what extent did citizen engagement and oversight in governmental decision-making increase? What factors have contributed to that?
7. What is the role of the Press Council in relation to these aspects?

EQ3 How did using technology (including multiple social media platforms) help the activity and its beneficiaries achieve its aims?

8. What role does media technology play in reaching out to diverse audiences? Can you provide specific examples of how these technologies are employed in the media industry?
9. Have you received: financial support for the procurement of needed software and equipment, apps, website or other online platform upgrades to allow for the posting of more engaging multimedia content, and has this helped you achieve your goals?
10. To what degree do crowdfunding and subscription approaches contribute to securing the financial sustainability of your media outlet?

EQ4 To what extent was the activity successful in reaching Russian language audiences?

11. How important is it to reach out to the Russian-speaking audience? What main constraints hinder reaching out to the Russian-speaking audience, and are there potential breakthroughs to overcome these constraints? How does the Press Council address this issue?

(Probe: enabling or discouraging legal and regulatory tools/environments, lack of knowledge, financial and technical assistance)

EQ5 To what extent has the activity improved media literacy?

12. Is media literacy a priority in the Press Council, and what are the main barriers to conducting media literacy activities? Do you find media literacy relevant to Moldova? From your experience, which media literacy activities do you find most efficient? Should media literacy activities specifically target the Russian-speaking audience?

Concluding Questions

13. Looking back, what would you have done differently in addressing the emerging challenges? What are the most pressing needs of the Press Council at present?

14. Do you believe that adopting a regional approach is a beneficial strategy in striving to strengthen the resilience of the information space? Does engaging regional and local media outlets make a noticeable difference in achieving this goal?

15. Do you consider that the implementation of the Media-M program has made a difference in the media environment in Moldova? If so, in what ways has it had an impact?

16. What do you believe should be the next priorities in terms of assisting and engaging with the media in Moldova?

ANNEX III: EVALUATION METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

The performance evaluation of the MEDIA-M program employed a mixed-method approach, by leveraging qualitative data collection and analysis methods, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), alongside quantitative data collection and analysis through online surveys. In addition, the ET conducted an extensive desk review of relevant program documents, reports, and secondary sources. This approach was complemented by various analytical techniques such as contribution analysis (a primary analytical framework to address the EQs), logic model analysis (a complementary analytical framework to address EQ3), and comparative analysis (a complementary analytical framework to address EQ6), as well as data-specific analytical techniques (frequency distribution and cross tabulations specifically for data collected through online surveys). Finally, the evaluation hinged on a utilization-focused consultative and iterative method, targeted to enhance the significance and acceptance of suggestions by stakeholders and solidify coordination with USAID to articulate the goals and requirements of the evaluation. These multiple approaches enabled the ET to triangulate the data collected, thus providing a more robust and nuanced understanding of the issues at hand.

LIMITATIONS

SELECTION BIAS: As some key informants may decline to be interviewed, there is a possibility of selection bias. Those respondents who choose to be interviewed might differ from those who do not in terms of their attitudes and perceptions, affiliation with government/non-government structures, and socio-demographic characteristics and experience. The ET mitigated this by developing a stratified sampling of key informants.

INSTRUMENTAL BIAS: Guarding against instrumental bias was a consideration because many beneficiaries and in-country partners were exposed to or participated in more than one intervention, and their responses may have been influenced by participation in those varying interventions. The ET noted if key stakeholders participated in multiple activities.

RECALL BIAS: Given that the program started in 2017, respondents found it difficult to accurately recall efforts related to particular activities or changes over time. A challenge of qualitative data was that responses rely on the interviewee's recollection or perspectives. The ET overcame this by incorporating best practices for qualitative data collection when a recall is required, such as framing questions to anchor respondents to memorable points in time to ease recall or by asking questions that rely less on recall of specific activities and more on the currently perceived implications of those activities.

DIFFICULTY ASSESSING PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING GAPS: The evaluation was conducted while the MEDIA-M implementation and capacity building interventions are ongoing, and the influences on the

relevant value chain may take a few years to deliver the intended results. The ET assessed progress to date and highlighted potential gaps that should be addressed in subsequent evaluative efforts.

ANNEX IV: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TOOLS

The ET conducted an in-depth analysis of primary and secondary information sources, including activity design and planning documents, concept notes, annual and quarterly progress reports, activity monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan (AMELP), and existing surveys, reports, studies, etc., as well as activity-level and aggregated performance indicator data provided by USAID. The team also incorporated applicable policy documents from USAID and the United States Government (USG). The team acknowledged that the availability and quality of documentation and data may vary across program activities and considered these discrepancies when analyzing the findings. By carefully examining these documents, the team could gain valuable insights into the program's design, implementation, and outcomes and make informed recommendations for future improvements. These documents were stored on a team shared drive, accessible to USAID, as requested.

Data sources included were not limited to:

- Annual Work Plans
- Activity MEL Plan (AMELP)
- Annual and Quarterly Reports
- Market and Sector Assessment Reports
- Calls for Proposals and selected applications
- Grants manual
- Subcontractor contact list
- Key partners' contact list
- Documentation of SOW changes and technical direction
- Original and modified Theory of Change (if applicable)
- Information on program Collaboration, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) approach and efforts to date, and
- Existing surveys, reports, studies, etc.

PRIMARY DATA: SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

Primary data collection was based on electronic surveys, KIIs, and/or FGDs. Data collection has been conducted mainly in Romanian and Russian languages. The English language was used as needed. The evaluation instruments were translated into Romanian and Russian prior to dissemination.

ELECTRONIC SURVEYS

The ET created and executed two online surveys, designed to serve as a pre-screening and data collection tool before conducting KIIs and/or FGDs. Informed by the desk review, conversations with USAID personnel, and initial consultations with the implementing partner (IP), these surveys were intended to engage media outlets, grant recipients, media monitoring CSOs, librarians, and teachers who have benefitted from the program. The electronic surveys were expected to yield valuable insights into the program's implementation and outcomes, thereby facilitating the ET's ability to conduct a

comprehensive assessment. By gathering input from a diverse group of stakeholders, the surveys provided the ET with essential data and perspectives to enhance its understanding of the program's effectiveness. The insights from these surveys were critical in guiding the evaluation process. The ET administered two online surveys to the following groups:

- MEDIA-M supported media outlets, grantees, and media monitoring CSOs (*Note: the number of recipients will be defined once the IP shares the list of beneficiaries*)
- Teachers and librarians (*Note: the number of recipients will be defined once the IP shares the list of beneficiaries*)

As the nature of activities differed per stakeholder group, the ET designed two sets of questionnaires to reflect the diversity of results. These surveys were structured and utilized a combination of dichotomous questions, i.e., Yes/No/Don't Know, Likert scale (using a 5-point rating scale), and open-ended responses. The online surveys were hosted using the online platform *Survey Monkey*. Respondents were requested to complete the survey within one week of receipt, and reminder emails were sent to those who did not complete the survey.

Each survey questionnaire was divided into several modules. Each module contained questions designed to generate data that helped the ET address the corresponding evaluation question.

The piloting phase of the electronic surveys involved conducting a trial run with a select group of media outlets, grantees, librarians, and teachers. This pilot group was carefully chosen to represent diverse perspectives and experiences relevant to the survey objectives. The surveys were distributed to these participants through an online platform, allowing for easy accessibility and efficient data collection.

During the pilot phase, the survey implementation process was closely monitored to identify potential issues or areas requiring improvement. This includes evaluating the clarity of survey questions, the user-friendliness of the online platform, and the overall experience of participants. Feedback from the pilot group was actively sought and considered to refine and enhance the survey instrument.

By piloting the electronic surveys, the team fine-tuned the survey instrument, addressed potential challenges, and optimized the data collection process. This iterative approach ultimately enhanced the reliability and validity of the survey findings, providing valuable insights to inform decision-making and program improvements.

The online survey questionnaires were disseminated to all grantees, media outlets, media monitoring CSOs, and teachers/librarians participating in MEDIA-M supported activities, whose emails were shared by the Implementing Partner. Based on previous Integra experience, the ET anticipated an estimated 30 percent response rate, depending on the quality of beneficiary datasets provided by the Implementing Partner.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND/OR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

To provide complementary and supplementary qualitative data focused on processes and results, the ET conducted over 40 stakeholder interviews using KIIs and/or FGDs. Upon receiving the list of

stakeholders from USAID, the ET determined the specific type of interview to be conducted, whether KII or FGD. These interviews took place over two weeks in Chisinau and various regions of Moldova, including Gagauzia, Taraclia, and the North of Moldova (Balti, Soroca). USAID/Moldova had the opportunity to approve the in-country schedule before it was finalized.

The ET used stratified sampling for selecting participants for KIIs and/or FGDs who were chosen specifically for their relationship to the program and clustered for interview and electronic survey purposes. These included IP staff, USAID staff, grant recipients, policymakers, targeted elements of the Moldovan public and other donors. The ET conducted qualitative KIIs and/or FGDs with the participants. If some participants preferred online interviews, these were conducted via video conferencing using Google Meet.

All travel and interview schedules were centralized and managed by the local coordinator to ensure all team members have access and can plan each day accordingly. Throughout data collection, the ET had frequent check-in meetings to discuss preliminary findings and lessons learned from each day, as well as plan for the days ahead (i.e., addressing schedule changes, coordinating meetings, organizing updated stakeholder lists, etc.)

DATA ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, AND INTERPRETATIVE PROCESS

At a macro level, data analysis and synthesis were guided by an abductive reasoning approach[33]. Unlike inductive and/or deductive modes of inquiry, which typically follow a more linear logic, abductive reasoning entails a more circular or spiraling process and represents a simultaneously puzzling out of insight from data gained through the desk review, survey, FGDs, and KIIs.

The evaluation team employed rigorous analysis protocols to make sense of the collected data and derive meaningful insights. The qualitative data gathered from KII, Focus Group Discussions, and online surveys underwent a coding process, wherein the team systematically categorized and labeled the information based on key themes, concepts, and/or patterns that emerged from the data. This coding process helped identify commonalities, differences, and significant trends within the qualitative data.

Following the coding process, the evaluation team engaged in a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis involved the identification and exploration of recurring themes or patterns across the data set. The team analyzed the coded data to identify overarching themes, sub-themes, and relationships between them. This analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative data, allowing for the identification of key findings and the generation of insightful conclusions.

For the quantitative data collected through the online survey, the evaluation team utilized appropriate statistical techniques to analyze the data and identify patterns, trends, and relationships between

[33] Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora. Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012)

variables. This involved conducting cross tabulations, calculating frequencies and percentages, and applying statistical tests to assess the significance of relationships between variables.

The analysis process also involved integrating findings from the qualitative and quantitative data sources. By triangulating and cross-referencing the different data sets, the evaluation team gained a holistic perspective and ensured the reliability and validity of the findings. The ET presented the findings in a clear and organized manner, providing a comprehensive overview of the evaluation results while highlighting the key themes and patterns identified during the analysis process.

ANNEX V: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

DESK REVIEW BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. USAID/Moldova Country Development Cooperation Strategy (2020–2025)
2. MEDIA-M Program Description
3. MEDIA-M Initial Implementation Plan(s)
4. MEDIA-M Annual Narrative Reports for 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023
5. MEDIA-M Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan Indicators
6. Evaluation of Media Literacy Projects in Europe and Eurasia, Evaluation Report, produced by Social Impact, Inc., April 2022
7. Freedom of the Press, Moldova 2017, produced by Freedom House
8. The Independent Journalism Center, Advocacy Statements published in 2017
9. Press Council Capacity Needs Assessment Report, 2018
10. Media Literacy and The Challenge of Fake News, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.1, 2018
11. Seize the press, seize the day: The influence of politically affiliated media in Moldova's 2016 elections, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.2, 2018
12. Media Pluralism and the Concentration of Ownership in Moldova, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.3, 2018
13. Cultivating Information Resilience in Moldova's Media Sector, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.4, 2018
14. Draft Curricula for High School, Education for Media, prepared with MEDIA-M support, 2018
15. Draft Strategy for increasing the visibility of the Press Council, prepared with MEDIA-M support, 2018
16. MEDIA-M Success Stories, 2019
17. COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons for Media Freedom in Moldova, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.1, 2020
18. Why Access to Information Is Still a Problem in Moldova, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.10, 2020
19. The Fourth Estate in the Making: Regulation and Reform of Media in Moldova, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.11, 2020
20. Freedom of Expression and the Geopolitical Stalemate: Defending Digital Spaces in the Republic of Moldova, MEDIA-M Policy Brief, 2020
21. REPORT ON MEDIA FREEDOM IN MOLDOVA 2020, Freedom House, 2021
22. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION INDEX: Measuring Transparency of Public Institutions in Moldova, Freedom House, 2021

23. Regulation and Self-Regulation: Two Pieces of the Puzzle for a Healthy Media Landscape in Moldova, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.15, 2021
24. Designing Effective Online Regulation for Moldova: Lessons and Best Practices from Abroad, MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.16, 2021
25. Informational Space in the Transnistrian Region – Media that Divides or Unites? MEDIA-M Policy Brief no.17, 2022
26. "Media market in Moldova: realities and trends" (IJC), 2023
27. Public Opinion Barometer. Institute for Public Policy, October 2023
28. People's perception of mass media and media skills in the Republic of Moldova, March 2023
29. People's perception of mass media and media skills in the Republic of Moldova, March 2023
30. Internews Report on Mapping Local Media in the Republic of Moldova, 2023

LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS AND FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

	Name/Surname	Organization
1.	[redacted]	Internews
2.	[redacted]	Freedom House
3.	[redacted]	Independent Journalism Center
4.	[redacted]	Association of Independent Press
5.	[redacted]	USAID/Moldova
6.	[redacted]	Swedish Embassy
7.	[redacted]	Ziarul de Garda/Media Guard
8.	[redacted]	Agora
9.	[redacted]	RISE Moldova
10.	[redacted]	PRO TV Chisinau
11.	[redacted]	Media Center
12.	[redacted]	Moldova Association of Visually Impaired
13.	[redacted]	Independent Expert
14.	[redacted]	Moldova School of Journalism
15.	[redacted]	Moldova.org
16.	[redacted]	Diez.md
17.	[redacted]	Academy of Media Creation and Innovations
18.	[redacted]	NewsMaker
19.	[redacted]	Audiovisual Council

20.	[redacted]	UK Embassy
21.	[redacted]	Parliament of Moldova
22.	[redacted]	Primaria Mea
23.	[redacted]	Ca Lumea
24.	[redacted]	Unimedia
25.	[redacted]	ASIST
26.	[redacted]	AO„Agenția de Dezvoltare Rurală-CENTRU" Orhei
27.	[redacted]	Ministry of Education
28.	[redacted]	TV8
29.	[redacted]	TARSMI
30.	[redacted]	Deputy Head of Taraclia Local Council
31.	[redacted]	PR Department, Taraclia Local Council
32.	[redacted]	SP Balti
33.	[redacted]	Observatorul de Nord, Soroca
34.	[redacted]	Nokta
35.	[redacted]	Independent Expert
36.	[redacted]	President Office

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

37.	[redacted]	Public Association “Perspectiva”
38.	[redacted]	Lawyers for Human Rights
39.	[redacted]	Center for Health Policies and Studies
40.	[redacted]	Gimnaziul Ratuș
41.	[redacted]	Centrul de Excelență Energetică și Electronică
42.	[redacted]	Liceul Teoretic „Gheorghe Asachi”
43.	[redacted]	District Public Library
44.	[redacted]	D. Caracioban Theoretical High School
45.	[redacted]	Prospect
46.	[redacted]	A.O. “Șansa”
47.	[redacted]	Ager Media
48.	[redacted]	Pro Media
49.	[redacted]	Cu Sens

50.	[redacted]	Studio Creative Media
51.	[redacted]	Comunitatea Plus
52.	[redacted]	„Zdarova Natasha”
53.	[redacted]	Librarian, Balti
54.	[redacted]	Librarian, Balti
55.	[redacted]	Teacher, Balti
56.	[redacted]	Teacher, Balti
57.	[redacted]	Librarian, Teacher
58.	[redacted]	Librarian, Soroca
59.	[redacted]	Association of Environmental and Ecological Tourism Journalists from the Republic of Moldova (AJMTEM)

ANNEX VI: EVALUATION TEAM MEMBERS

SERGIU GALITCHI, TEAM LEAD

Mr. Sergiu Galitchi is a program evaluation expert with over 15 years of professional experience in institutional development and public administration reform at the national and international levels. He has demonstrated experience in overall design, management, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. He has demonstrated experience in the region, including projects in Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, and Armenia, as well as beyond the region in Jordan, Algeria, and Morocco. Sergiu has a Bachelor's degree in Law and Political Science from the State University of Moldova and a Master of Law from the Academy of Public Administration, Moldova. He is proficient in Romanian, Russian, and English.

The Team Leader will oversee activity progress, manage the ET, and contribute subject matter expertise/lead the technical development of all deliverables, including the final report. The Team Leader will work closely with USAID and Integra, conduct in-person data collection in Moldova, and lead the Recommendations Workshop.

VICTORIA ROȘA, SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT

Mrs. Victoria Roșa will serve as the local Subject Matter Expert. She is an expert in security & defense, conflict studies & gender issues, focusing on EaP countries, the European Union (EU), Transatlantic cooperation, NATO, and Russia. She served as Security and Defense / EU Affairs Adviser to the Moldovan Prime Minister Maia Sandu. Prior to that, she held the position of Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova. From April 2018 to July 2019, Mrs. Rosa moderated the daily evening political talk show "Punctul pe azi" on the National Romanian Television (TVR), Moldovan branch. During the last 17 years, Mrs. Roșa has provided expertise to national and international organizations in the framework of various thematic programs. She holds a BA and MA degree in International Relations, Political and Administrative Sciences from the Moldova State University. She is fluent in English, Russian, and Romanian. Victoria Rosa is a 2017 Alumni of the Marshall Memorial Fellowship of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

Ms. Roșa will offer expertise and experience with media-enabling programs and support the Team Leader in developing the technical deliverables. This will include developing the work plan, desk review, in-person data collection, and writing the evaluation report. She will provide a critical understanding of the local context and play a key role in key informant interviews.

PAVEL SARGHI, DATA ANALYST

Mr. Pavel Sarghi has more than 15 years of professional experience in working with both private clients, as well as government institutions. He has assisted various parties in matters related to process transformation and reengineering, data analysis, developing guidance and performing costing assessments, as well as capacity building. Mr. Sarghi has contributed to projects financed by the EU, World Bank, OECD/SIGMA, and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). Pavel holds degrees in Economics, Business, and Law.

Mr. Sarghi will play a key role in data collection and analysis for the evaluation. He will contribute to the work plan, draft materials, organize the data management plan, record data during interviews, and code and analyze afterward.

MAIA GIORBELIDZE, MEL EXPERT ADVISOR

Dr. Giorbelidze is a MEL expert with over ten years of experience in data collection and analysis, program design, and planning and implementation. Her experience includes serving as M&E Consultant for the Asian Development Bank; Capacity Assessment, M&E Specialist for UNDP; M&E Manager for Winrock International Georgia; and Data Analyst and Database Administrator at CARE Caucasus. Maia has considerable know-how in the areas of monitoring and evaluating grants, coordinating data collection processes from partners and service providers, building the capacity of staff in M&E, elaborating lessons learned for various types of international donors, including ADB, UN, DFID, USAID, European Union, and European Governmental Agencies. Dr. Giorbelidze holds an MBA in International Business and Ph.D. in Business Administration from Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. She is fluent in Georgian, English, and Russian and is a certified Project Management Professional (PMP).

Dr. Giorbelidze will support the AAR and work plan preparation, monitor evaluation progress, and review draft and final evaluation reports. Dr. Giorbelidze will also participate in the tail-end of data collection to advise on preliminary findings and be part of the final out-brief in-country.

MARIA MURSA, IN-COUNTRY LOGISTICS/ADMIN COORDINATOR

Ms. Mursa has experience in external assistance projects implemented in the public administration and justice systems. She has a thorough knowledge of administrative and financial foreign assistance procedures. Ms. Mursa has a Master of Arts in European Studies and finalized a project management course at the College of Europe.

She will be the in-country Logistics Coordinator and provide logistical and administrative organization during the fieldwork in Moldova. She will maintain a schedule and keep the team aware of all meetings throughout data collection.