Acknowledgements
The findings presented in this report are based on the strategies developed by the sml4change schools during the project. We would like to thank all participants for their enthusiastic and relentless work in developing and implementing their strategies and for sharing their experiences with us. Their insights have been invaluable for the success of the pilot project and can certainly guide and inspire schools across Europe to enhance their strategic efforts to improve social media literacy.
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Executive summary

The Social Media Literacy for Change (sml4change) project supported teachers and school leaders to reflect on the individual social media landscape of their school and guided them to develop medium and long-term strategies (three to five years) to enhance the social media literacy of their school community. Twenty-two of the twenty-five participating schools succeeded in developing a social media literacy (SML) strategic plan. An analysis of these strategies showed that although schools share common interests and challenges related to social media literacy, their priorities differ substantially depending on the schools’ unique working environments, the school climate, school policies, the curriculum and the staff’s interest and competences, among others. This diversity was reflected in the social media literacy strategies developed, which featured areas of interest as diverse as school staff training, educating parents about social media or co-developing social media school policies with students.

During this pilot project it became clear that the challenges for social media literacy at European schools are manifold. Solid guidance that helps schools to make informed decisions about social media and social media education is lacking. Serious efforts to increase social media literacy should go beyond individual teacher-driven initiatives. As we learned during this pilot project, a coherent and strategic approach towards (social) media literacy that is built by the members of the school community is more necessary than ever. By having a clear vision about what they want to achieve, schools will be better able to meaningfully incorporate social media literacy efforts in the curriculum, across subjects and in extracurricular activities or projects. This will help them to prioritise their usually limited resources by investing time and effort in those aspects that truly matter to their school community.
The sml4change project: context and background

Social media have become an important part of children and young people’s everyday lives. On the one hand, they provide different avenues for communication, learning, self-expression, entertainment, creativity and participation, but on the other, they also pose some risks (e.g. cyberbullying, hate speech, fake news, privacy and commercial risks). Although parents and educators wish to offer children enough opportunities for learning, participation and personal growth, they often struggle to strike the right balance between providing them with opportunities and protecting them from risks. Therefore, it has become increasingly difficult for schools, teachers, and families to appropriately address the challenges that social media present for youth.

School professionals are uniquely positioned to reach and help potentially all children and their families to better understand the challenges related to the use of social media, to encourage their healthy and positive use as well as to prevent and monitor potential problems. Nevertheless, as research also shows, few schools and educational professionals feel well-equipped to support children in developing their digital and social media literacy competences. For this reason, it is essential to continue supporting efforts that aim at enhancing the social media literacy skills - not only of children and young people, but also of educators, parents and the general population.

Social Media Literacy for Change (sml4change) was a one-year pilot project coordinated by European Schoolnet and co-funded by the European Commission under the Media Literacy for All pilot programme, which aimed to support European school leaders and teachers, particularly those working with young people at risk of being socially marginalised, to foster social media literacy (SML) in both their school and local community, thus reaching out to citizens at large. Together with representatives of the school community, the project aimed at developing tools to guide schools to produce appropriate social media literacy strategies to deal with current and future social media-related challenges.

One of the most innovative aspects of this project probably was its fundamental bottom-up and school-centric approach. Sml4change school participants actively contributed to the whole project development cycle not only by providing their expert views from the field, but above all by supporting the project coordination team to ensure that all materials and tools developed within the project were truly useful for schools. In this sense, the sml4change participants did not only have an important say in the project, but they became project co-creators from its inception.

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Introducing the sml4change project participants

25 project participants from 13 EU countries

25 teachers, of which 2 IT coordinators 2 deputy heads of school

Participating schools’ locations

Of our 25 schools...

- 7 offer pre-primary education
- 10 offer primary education
- 23 offer secondary education
- 7 have a technical, vocational, or artistic specialisation
- 23 are public
- 2 are private
In the sml4change project, 22 of the 25 participating schools succeeded in developing a social media literacy strategy for their school. This process included several meetings in which the schools had the opportunity to ask questions, exchange experiences, and receive advice from the project team. Since each school faced different challenges along the way, due to their unique school context, the schools also received individual feedback and guidance throughout the whole project. The main milestones of this process are outlined below.
Social media literacy strategies plan in a nutshell

The main aim of the social media literacy strategies was to provide a framework and act as a compass that would guide the schools’ journey towards a better understanding of social media and their potential to enrich school practices in meaningful ways. In total, 22 SML strategies were submitted. The box below summarises the core elements of such a strategy.

Core elements of the SML strategy

**MISSION** - a short statement of the school's purpose.

**SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS** - helps schools document the current landscape of social media literacy in the school community.

**VISION** - describes what the school wants to achieve with their SML strategy at a high level.

**FOCUS AREAS** - the foundation stones of any strategy, based on a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis.

**STRATEGIC GOALS** - high-level, specific goals defined under each focus area.

**OBJECTIVES** - break up the strategic goals into smaller targets. They are the backbone of the strategy and require a metric and time frame. They are important to monitor the progress of the strategy.

**IMPLEMENTATION OR ACTION PLAN** - describes the steps, (human) resources and timelines necessary to achieve each of the goals and objectives set in the strategy.

**ASSESSMENT PLAN** - necessary for monitoring progress and for assessing the strategy's impact. It gives a clear indication of what elements of the strategy will be evaluated, how and when.

**BUDGET AND RESOURCES** - refers to all the resources (material, financial and/or human) that are needed.

**RISK ASSESSMENT** - a summary of the potential risks resulting from the strategy implementation and ways to mitigate them.
Involving the whole school community

Throughout the project, participants were encouraged to keep an open and self-reflective attitude to ensure that the SML strategy they developed was useful and meaningful for their school. This process was guided by a participatory, whole-school approach which demanded the consultation and involvement of the wider school community including school management, teachers, students, parents/families and other potentially relevant stakeholders such as the local police, non-profit organisations, experts and/or the local IT industry. Although many schools acknowledged the importance of establishing a strong collaboration among various educational stakeholders within and outside of school, several schools found it time-consuming and sometimes challenging to establish such collaboration and to design and develop social media literacy strategies which involved the whole school. In particular, the SWOT analysis carried out by each school to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to developing an SML strategy showed that the lack of cooperation from colleagues and the lack of involvement from parents were perceived as important threats to the successful implementation of the school strategies:

“What did you find most challenging when developing and implementing an SML strategy at your school?”

“Involving the whole school, especially other teachers [...] motivating people, especially senior teachers.”
(Teacher, Poland)

“The lack of collaboration among my colleagues [...] The lack of involvement from my colleagues.”
(Teacher, Italy)

Conversely, close collaboration with internal and external stakeholders such as colleagues, students and external partners, as well as establishing synergies with existing school or community-related projects were perceived as strategy facilitators:

“What helped you most to develop and implement an SML strategy at your school?”

“What helped me most was the collaboration with the police and the students’ engagement [...]. Teachers knew very well what they had to do. Maximising already existing resources at our school [also helped]. We did not ask something that was totally new, but we asked them to ‘adapt’ their own activities they were already doing. Our teachers are used to working in collaborative projects.”
(Teacher, Spain)

“The participation of parents and students was very active.”
(Teacher, Romania)

“Students were curious and enthusiastic. All of them were positive about the topic. I was surprised by their level of knowledge, but there is a gap between their theoretical knowledge and actual practice.”
(Teacher, Poland)
Perceived schools’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

The SWOT analyses carried out by each participating school revealed several trends which are summarised below in the form of a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to develop an SML strategy at school:

**INTERNAL FACTORS**

**STRENGTHS**
- Motivated and engaged staff
- Qualified staff
- Good technical infrastructure/equipment
- Support from school leadership or the digital team
- Parents’ support and engagement
- Students’ motivation

**WEAKNESSES**
- Generalised perception that colleagues are not able or knowledgeable enough to deal with social media (at school)
- Perception that colleagues are not interested and therefore do not collaborate with the SML strategy
- Fear that students may engage in risky behaviour
- Lack of coherent policies around the use of social media at school
- Limited financial resources and/or inadequate technical infrastructure

**EXTERNAL FACTORS**

**OPPORTUNITIES**
- Being part of complementary European initiatives and projects (e.g. eTwinning, eSafety Label)
- Existing cooperation/synergies with external stakeholders (e.g. Police, industry, NGOs, experts, industry)
- Higher socio-economic status of families
- Availability of good quality teacher training
- IT-driven local community can motivate students and schools to cooperate and drive innovation in schools

**THREATS**
- Restrictive educational policies or curriculum leaves little space for an SML strategy
- Regulations that (may) impact the use of social media at schools (e.g. GDPR, banning of mobile phones in some EU countries)
- Lack of (coherent) policies for the use of digital technologies in school at local and/or national level
- Equipment becomes quickly obsolete and schools lack resources to upgrade it
- Lack of SML materials and resources in national languages
- Children and youths’ risky online behaviour outside school which could negatively impact school climate
- Generalised feeling that parents are not prepared, willing or able to mediate their own children’s social media usage effectively
Key areas of interest in SML strategies

An analysis of the SML strategies submitted allowed us to observe that although schools share common interests and challenges related to social media literacy, their priorities can differ substantially depending on the schools’ unique working environments and several other factors such as the school climate, the school population, existing school policies, the curriculum, the staff's interest and competences related to social media literacy, parental involvement, etc. This diversity was also reflected in the strategies’ areas of interest selected by each school as well as in the target groups of these SML strategies.

SML strategies’ most common areas of interest

- **Raising awareness about preventing and coping with online risks**
  - Cyberbullying
  - Hate speech
  - Disinformation / fake news

- **Online privacy and data protection**
  - GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) awareness and education
  - Data security (school technical infrastructure)

- **Cybersecurity and technical infrastructure**

- **Positive online relationships**
  - Emotional intelligence
  - Respectful communication
  - (Online) empathy

- **Digital identity**
  - Reputation
  - Digital footprint
  - Self-expression

- **Cognitive skills**
  - Information searching
  - Critical thinking
  - Critical analysis of information sources

- **Creative expression/creation**
  - Fostering students’ creativity through social media
  - Digital content creation

- **School policies**
  - Developing social media codes of conduct or policies
  - Developing protocols to deal with potential (online) incidents (e.g. cyberbullying)
Preferred activities to implement

Depending on the focus areas and corresponding strategic goals chosen by participants, the submitted SML strategies proposed different types of activities (e.g. raising awareness about social media related risks or school policy development) on a wide variety of topics (e.g. cyberbullying, privacy, hate speech, etc.). Not surprisingly, most strategies focused their efforts on activities targeting students, but many also designed initiatives for teachers, parents or the wider school community.

Main target groups:
- Students (92 activities)
- Teachers (35 activities)
- Parents (19 activities)
- The whole school (21 activities)
- External stakeholders/the wider community (15 activities)

Key topics covered:
- Cyberbullying
- Privacy
- Hate speech
- Disinformation
- Creative expression

Examples of proposed activities:
- Understanding the school’s social media landscape
- Introducing social media literacy in school and local policy
- Developing and applying questionnaires, quizzes, and surveys
- Interviewing parents, teachers, and students
- Examine your digital image and identity
- Expert workshops or presentations
- Student debates
- Parent events
- Staff meetings and internal presentations
- External events like Safer Internet Day
- Raising awareness
- Developing and applying questionnaires, quizzes, and surveys
- Introducing school policy documents, such as conflict guidelines or codes of conduct
- Policy development
- Interdisciplinary projects
- Peer education, ambassador, and mediation schemes
- Teacher trainings
- Participation in European projects like eTwinning
- Fostering long-term SML initiatives
- Developing campaign and dissemination materials like graffiti, flyers, glossaries, videos, or theatre plays
- Building digital competences by making blogs, vlogs, video, websites
- (Co-)creation
- Create teaching materials and lesson plans
Main perceived risks to the successful implementation of SML strategies

No strategic planning is exempt from risks which could affect its successful implementation. Therefore, we encouraged the sml4change project participants to reflect on the potential difficulties which could affect their strategies and to reflect on ways to mitigate those risks. The table below summarises their reflections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk area</th>
<th>Most common prevention/mitigation strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff-related</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of time</td>
<td>• Communicate the SML strategy benefits to engage the whole school</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of motivation</td>
<td>• Put a motivated team in charge of the strategy coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Perceived lack of social media/ SML competences</td>
<td>• Create synergies with other school activities, teachers’ work, and existing initiatives and resources</td>
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<td>• Personnel turnover</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conflicts of interest</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student-related</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of motivation</td>
<td>• Involve students in the strategy development from the start to foster ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inappropriate use of social media by students</td>
<td>• Co-create activities and materials with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Agree on rules about social media use together with the students and formalise this agreement through a signed code of conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Put mechanisms in place to prevent, detect and tackle problems early on</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-related</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of engagement</td>
<td>• Involve parents’ representatives in the SML strategy coordination team</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Some parents’ opposition to the use of social media in school</td>
<td>• Communicate transparently and constantly before and during the implementation of the SML strategy and be receptive to parents’ concerns</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Promote joint activities with students and their families</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Integrate SML activities at school events that are popular among parents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enable children to showcase their SML activities, projects and accomplishments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School-related (other)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aligning the strategy with the school calendar</td>
<td>• Keep your strategy ambitious but achievable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Take the school calendar into account and plan accordingly well in advance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Review and monitor your strategic plan regularly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Be flexible and adapt your plan if necessary</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Data security and privacy concerns</td>
<td>• Be up to date about relevant data protection regulation (e.g. GDPR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have adequate technical measures and protocols in place to ensure that school systems are secure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of budget</td>
<td>• Use your strategic plan to attract sponsors and/or get external funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing the schools’ SML strategies: lessons learned

In their strategies, schools referred to possible ways of assessing the effectiveness of their SML strategies. They proposed to measure aspects such as:

- Acquisition of knowledge and skills related to social media literacy
- Changes in students’ social media-related attitudes
- Perceptions of social media

Participants proposed to use both quantitative and qualitative tools such as:

- Questionnaires and surveys
- Focus groups or interviews

The mapping of the strategies also showed that:

- Most schools are interested in assessing two aspects:
  - The level of success in implementing their strategy and
  - The impact their strategy has had on social media literacy in the school community
- Schools are eager to assess the impact of their strategies but they lack the know-how about how to assess strategic planning in general and social media literacy in particular. During our project it became apparent that specific training in these areas is needed. What is more, it is equally important that school professionals have access to appropriate and user-friendly assessment tools as well as guidance on how to use them.
- Access to reliable and user-friendly tools for schools to measure social media literacy is limited, especially in local languages other than English.
- Based on the analysis of these shortcomings, the sml4change project devoted a full module of the sml4change MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) to provide guidance and practical tips on how to monitor the progress of the SML strategy and how to assess its impact.
It is a fact that social media offer both opportunities and risks, and this poses numerous challenges and dilemmas for parents, carers and educators. While they wish to offer children enough opportunities for learning, creativity, participation, socialisation and personal growth, they often struggle to strike the right level of protection for them. School professionals are uniquely positioned to reach and help children and their families to better understand social media and to encourage their healthy and positive use as well as to prevent and monitor for potential problems. Nevertheless, few educators feel well prepared to support children and the wider school community to improve their digital and social media literacy skills.

By working closely with 25 teachers from 13 European countries during the academic year 2018-2019, the coordinating team had the privilege to get closer to schools’ realities and was able to better understand the challenges that many schools across Europe face when implementing social media literacy activities at school. From the interactions with the project participants it became clear that many teachers and school leaders felt the latent pressure to increase their own social media skills in order to be able to educate their pupils to become responsible, creative and skilful users of social media and digital technologies.

Nevertheless, many of these school professionals also expressed their concerns and frustrations when reflecting on potential ways to meaningfully incorporate social media literacy at school. Many mentioned the lack of coherent school, local or even national policies to properly guide and regulate the use of social media at school. Many also complained about the lack of (human) resources and appropriate technical infrastructure, while others felt that educators and school leaders were either uninterested, ill-prepared or reluctant to bring social media to school because of the immense responsibility and the potential problems that it could entail. Others highlighted a perceived lack of parents’ and families’ interest, skills and/or knowledge about social media and saw this as an obstacle to the success of their (potential) efforts to increase pupils’ social media literacy levels at school.

Another critical aspect is for schools to understand that social media literacy implies much more than using social media at school. Even in schools where social media is forbidden, there are plenty of options to educate the school community to be better prepared to make good use of social media by exploiting their potential benefits and minimising their risks. Social media literacy entails not only technical skills, but also cognitive and emotional ones. Thus, by supporting children to develop their critical thinking or to be more empathetic towards each other, schools are already fostering essential skills for social media literacy.

Throughout the project, the coordinating team encouraged teachers to find out what their colleagues, students and families’ perceptions of social media were and to analyse the main needs for their school. Based on this preliminary analysis, schools were better able to determine the focus areas and strategic goals of their social media literacy strategy. Schools were invited to develop ambitious strategies while remaining realistic, always taking into consideration their school’s human and financial resources, as well as the school’s strengths and weaknesses. Schools were also encouraged to further develop their strategies with the active involvement of colleagues, school leadership, pupils and families, and to continue involving all these stakeholders during the entire implementation and assessment of their strategies. If a school strategy is designed in collaboration with the whole school community, the chances that it succeeds are multiplied.

At the end of this one-year pilot project, it is satisfying to see how every school in the project underwent an individual process of self-reflection, co-creation and strategy development and how this resulted in social media literacy strategies clearly tailored to the specific needs of the respective unique school’s environment.
European Schoolnet is the network of 34 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to our key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners.

We are driven by our mission to support education stakeholders in Europe in the transformation of education processes for 21st century digitalised societies. We do this by identifying and testing promising innovative practices, sharing evidence about their impact, and supporting the mainstreaming of teaching and learning practices aligned with 21st century standards for inclusive education.

More information about the Social Media Literacy for Change project: [http://fcl.eun.org/sml4change](http://fcl.eun.org/sml4change)

You can equally follow the social media activity by using the hashtags: #SocialMediaLiteracy4Change and #sml4change

For more information about our project and activities, contact us by email at sml4change-info@eun.org

This project has received funding from the European Union. This communication reflects only the author’s view. It does not represent the views of the European Commission and the EC is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.