

MANIFESTO FOR UNIVERSAL IMAGE LITERACY EDUCATION

Lumière Summit — Saint-Paul-de-Vence, 7 September 2026

Jointly presented by France, Italy and the Republic of Korea

We, the undersigned Countries, Regions, International Organizations, Private-Sector Partners and Civil Society Organizations,

I. The situation: the challenge of our relationship with screens

In the space of a single generation, the mass adoption of mobile digital devices — smartphones, tablets — has propelled billions of people into a new anthropological condition, one that opens unprecedented possibilities for engaging with otherness, knowledge and creation, but also carries major risks for mental health, social bonds, democratic life and economic productivity. This challenge stems as much from the length of time spent on individual screens as from the nature of what is watched on them. The moving image — which for over a century, through cinema and then television, served as a powerful vehicle for opening minds to the world, promoting cultural diversity and building critical thinking — has too often become, caught in the loop of algorithmic feeds, a source of addiction, confinement and manipulation. Algorithmic recommendation further risks flattening cultural expressions and favouring standardized narratives over the diversity of voices and perspectives.

The human cost of these uses — anxiety and depressive disorders, sleep and attention disorders, damage to self-esteem — is now well documented, as is the economic cost, which early national studies put at several points of GDP over the long term, owing to the erosion of children's cognitive capacities. According to United Nations projections, generations that have grown up with mobile digital devices will make up 40% of the global workforce by 2030 and more than 60% by 2040, making this shift a central issue for the future of our societies and economies.

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence deepens this crisis by embedding a lasting erosion of trust in images and destabilizing our very relationship to reality, giving a harmful boost to the creation and spread of fake news. As synthetic content outnumbers authentic content online and becomes more sophisticated, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish true from false or manipulated and to critically assess the origin and reliability of images. The protective measures adopted by several Countries and Regions — banning social media and mobile phones in schools — are necessary but remain insufficient, at a time when eight parents in ten say they are aware of the negative effects of screens yet feel powerless to address them.

II. The ambition: universal image literacy education

In addition to these restrictive measures, it is now essential to take a firm and ambitious stance: to change our relationship with screens on the screens themselves, to confront the question of content head-on, and to give every child the means to understand images, to choose them, and to produce them within an informed framework.

Just as the 19th and 20th centuries set themselves the goal of universal literacy, the 21st century must set itself the goal of universal image literacy — a precondition for freedom of judgment in a civilization saturated with images that are increasingly manipulated and manipulable.

Moving-image works, chief among them cinema, are called on to play the same role for image literacy that literature played at the heart of universal literacy: works that elevate and emancipate, that open minds to the world, that showcase cultural diversity, and that thereby help shape judgment, sensibility and critical thinking in the face of flows designed to capture and confine;

Cinemas, which form a strategic cultural network across the widest possible range of territories worldwide — urban, rural, remote — have a central role to play in this education in images, as shown by the national programmes that already bring schools and screening venues together in a shared approach.

Several initiatives under way in our Countries and Regions stand out as good practice:

- in France, where the “Ma classe au cinéma” (“My Class at the Cinema”) programme has, for forty years, enabled 2 million pupils, supported each year by 80,000 teachers, to discover three films in cinemas, from kindergarten through the final year of secondary school and across every part of the country, including the most rural areas and the network of French schools abroad; and where, starting in autumn 2026, a national framework for film and image education will be published, aligned with the curriculum for every level of schooling;
- in Italy, where image education has been incorporated into the National Film Law as early as 2016, committing around 20 million Euros per year of the National Fund for Cinema and Audiovisual to it. Furthermore, since 2018, the National *Cinema and Images for Schools* plan has supported nearly 2,500 projects reaching 2.5 million pupils and more than 145,000 teachers, with a total funding - across all editions to date - of more than 130 million Euros, enabling pupils to discover films in cinemas. This National plan also supports initiatives designed to raise awareness among students on social issues. Alongside funding projects, Italy hosts every year the annual *National Cinema Days for Schools*, which bring together teachers and professionals from the audiovisual sector, providing a unique forum for exchange, collaboration and dialogue;
- in Korea, the Next-Generation Future Audience Development Program provides film viewing, film literacy, and career education programs by connecting cinemas and schools across the country. In 2025, approximately 90,000 students took part in educational programs that use film as a tool for learning;
- in other countries: the “school cinema weeks” brought pupils and their teachers into cinemas, with discussions, workshops and training built around each film; screenings organized in schools with the ambition of introducing four films a year; the requirement to screen at least two hours of national cinema per month in every school; “Media Arts” recognized as one of the artistic disciplines in the national school curriculum, from kindergarten through the end of secondary school, combining the analysis and practice of images.

These experiences resonate with UNESCO's mandate in education, culture and communication, its historic action in favour of literacy, the 1982 Grünwald Declaration on media education, its work on media and information literacy, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, along with the ongoing discussions to strengthen its implementation in the digital environment.

We must nonetheless go further and share our common ambition of universal image literacy education.

III. Commitments: three lines of action

Line 1 — Prioritizing film and image education as the key agenda

We commit to advancing image literacy education for all learners and at all levels of education: a skill that has become as fundamental as reading, writing and arithmetic can no longer remain an option reserved for the few. To this end, we commit to developing competency frameworks aligned with school curricula, supported by educational activities and teacher training.

Just as literature helps to better understand the world around us, moving image represents a vital tool for empowering young people to engage more consciously with contemporary social as well as historical realities.

Learning to interpret moving image also enables younger generations to develop the critical skills needed to identify misinformation and disinformation, which are increasingly disseminated through video content across online contexts.

To ensure that these commitments deliver tangible and lasting results, it is essential to develop shared methodologies for impact assessment and for the qualitative and quantitative monitoring of public policies on image literacy education at a European and international level.

More broadly, young people must remain at the centre of public policymaking, as they represent our future. Governments should therefore systematically evaluate the impact of their decisions on younger generations, making this the yardstick against which the quality of legislation is measured.

We call on UNESCO to begin work on an international normative instrument dedicated to image literacy education, which could take the form of a Recommendation to be presented to the General Conference and would constitute a concrete step in Member States' commitment to implementing the 2005 Convention in the digital environment; and to create a dedicated programme deploying expertise, competency frameworks, indicators and training in countries wishing to integrate image literacy into their education systems. UNESCO's Associated Schools Network, with nearly 11,700 institutions across 182 countries, could serve as the first testing ground and channel for dissemination.

We encourage film industry professionals, particularly distributors and exhibitors, as well as national, regional and international professional organizations, to strengthen their involvement in initiatives that put image literacy programmes into practice, in order to broaden young audiences' access to cinemas. These initiatives can also act as powerful facilitators of in promoting social inclusion and fostering urban and cultural regeneration, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas.

Line 2 — Building an alliance with cinemas

We recognize the singular place cinemas hold among all screens: one of the last places where images are discovered collectively, with phones switched off, and, in many countries, one of the first cultural venues available at the local level. We therefore welcome Governments' initiatives to support the sustainability of the cinema business as appropriate.

Cinemas provide a vital spot for face-to-face social interaction, especially for younger generations, whose social lives are increasingly shaped by online environments.

We commit, wherever possible, to anchoring image literacy education in cinema attendance, by forging partnerships between governments, national film institutions, cinema networks and operators. This alliance benefits everyone: cinemas welcome school groups during the day, at off-peak hours and at reduced rates; pupils discover works under the real conditions of projection — the very conditions for which they were created — and develop a habit of cultural outings they will continue into adulthood. In this way, the cinema shapes, in a single movement, both the audiences and the citizens of tomorrow.

Line 3 — Developing the practice of image-making

We commit to developing pupils' practice of creating images themselves, guided by teachers and by image professionals. It is therefore essential to provide teachers with training in moving image, enabling them to use cinema and audiovisual content as a powerful educational tool across different disciplines, including history and literature.

Just as one cannot learn to read without learning to write, one learns to read images better by learning, at the same time, to make them: practice reveals how images are constructed — framing, editing, special effects — and it builds creativity, expression and cooperation, while raising awareness of the importance of the diversity of cultural expressions. It also helps awaken vocations for creative professions, to the benefit of the vitality of our cultural industries. As artificial intelligence increasingly challenges human labour and creativity, we affirm the need to safeguard these professions and the irreplaceable value of human creation and expertise.

We invite all UNESCO Member States and Countries, Regions, International Organizations, educational and cultural institutions, image professionals and cinema networks to join this Manifesto and to carry forward with us the ambition of universal image literacy education.

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