

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media

Opening statement by Google

6 December 2023

Thank you Cathaoirleach and members of the Joint Committee for inviting us to speak to you today on the topics of online safety, disinformation and media literacy. My name is Ryan Meade and I work with Google as Government Affairs and Public Policy Manager in Ireland. I am also a member of the National Advisory Council for Online Safety and of the Steering Group of Media Literacy Ireland. I am joined today by my colleague Ollie Irwin, from our Trust & Safety team, who leads our Google Safety Engineering Center here in Dublin.

Online Safety

Our mission at Google is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. Information quality and online safety are integral to this mission, and a critical part of our responsibility to our users. We want to contribute to a more responsible, more innovative, and more helpful internet.

The products we have built have been a force for creativity, learning, culture and discovery. Products such as Google Search which has helped educate billions of people around the world, by opening up their access to information from across the web. Or our video-sharing platform YouTube, which allows users to watch and upload original video content and share this with others.

Our strategy for tackling illegal and harmful content is tailored to each of our products - based on the nature of the service, how it's used, and the specific risks which may arise.

We recognise that our products can only be as helpful as they are safe. We are constantly innovating and exploring new ways to keep users of our platforms safe online, including as new AI technology continues to advance.

Online disinformation

At Google, we are proud to play a part in connecting users to diverse sources of media and news. In line with our mission, Google facilitates access to information and contributes to media plurality by reducing barriers, increasing choice for consumers, contributing to a diverse news landscape, and promoting independent news outlets.

We are committed to fighting the spread of misinformation online, because helping people sort facts from fiction has never been more important, something we saw most recently during the disturbing events in Dublin. During incidents such as these, we focus not only on tackling harmful or illegal content, but also ensuring our systems prioritise connecting users with high-quality news from authoritative sources.

We also empower users with more information and context, which can help them better evaluate the content they encounter online. For example, when you search on Google, our

“About This Result” tool allows you to see more information about any result, such as “Who is behind this information?” or “When did Google first index this page?”

Media Literacy

Media literacy is crucial in tackling disinformation and improving online safety, and it's clear there is an unmet demand. According to a report by Ipsos, fewer than one in 10 Europeans have participated in any form of online media literacy training, while 60% of Europeans say they are interested in learning more.

Since 2018, [Google.org](https://www.google.org) has supported more than 75+ organisations creating positive online experiences, including many that provide media literacy and online safety programs for children. In Ireland this includes Barnardos' Online Safety Programme for schools, which includes Google's open-sourced [Be Internet Legends](#) curriculum. This flagship programme has been updated to add lessons on the new challenges around AI, in easy-to-understand language. Since 2019 it has reached over 150,000 primary school children aged between 8 and 12.

As a member of Media Literacy Ireland, we support the Be Media Smart campaign, which is currently running across a variety of platforms encouraging people to Stop, Think and Check that the information that they are getting, from whatever source, is accurate and reliable.

In March 2021, Google contributed €25 million to help launch the 'European Media and Information Fund' to strengthen media literacy skills, fight misinformation and support fact checking. The objective of this Fund, which is independently run, is to help strengthen the media literacy skills of adults and young people, support and scale the critical work of fact-checkers, and strengthen the expertise, research and resources to tackle misinformation. At last count, more than 70 projects have benefited from €11.2m since applications were first opened, including *Uisce Faoi Thalamh*, a recent report on online disinformation in Ireland from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue

We have also launched “pre-bunking” campaigns on YouTube to boost media literacy around disinformation. Rather than “de-bunking”, which tries to expose incorrect information, “pre-bunking” is a technique that aims to reduce the effectiveness of disinformation campaigns before individuals ever encounter them – by pre-emptively warning them of attempts to manipulate them. Last year in Ireland, YouTube launched its 'Hit Pause' campaign, which runs short clips ahead of video content that helps viewers spot and evaluate potential misinformation tactics.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to media literacy and tackling disinformation and it's not something that Google does alone. Collaboration between academics, policymakers, publishers, civil society and technology companies is key, and only by working together can we have the biggest impact. We are committed to playing our part and to collaborate to find new ways to fight against disinformation and we look forward to seeing what we can achieve together.