

Finland Tries to Protect Children Against Deepfakes, With Russia in Mind

By Amelia Nierenberg, *The New York Times*, Aug. 5, 2026

Finland is preparing for uncertain times ahead. To the east, it is boosting defenses along its 830-mile-long border with Russia, the longest in the NATO alliance. In the north, its soldiers are teaching other Western troops to fight in Arctic conditions.

And in its schools, young Finns are learning to defend another front line: reality itself.

5 Finnish teachers have long taught students to separate fiction from reality even before they have lost all their baby teeth. Efforts to promote media literacy started in the 1950s during the Cold War.

Generation by generation, Finnish teachers have adapted to changes in mass media, preparing students to think critically about information coming over radio waves and in print, and, decades later, through their computers, and now on their phones.

10 Russia remains one potential threat. As the Kremlin attempts to destabilize the West, it has increasingly turned to hybrid tactics, including cyberattacks, sabotage and disinformation campaigns.

In 2024, American spy agencies concluded that Russia was behind fabricated videos claiming voting fraud. Moscow tried to discredit Armenia's prime minister online, including with video fakes, ahead of a recent election. In Moldova, it used A.I. to flood social media with fake posts, videos and even fake websites.

Officials see media education, and now A.I. literacy, as a key civic skill that is part of the country's national security strategy and its broader approach to protecting its democracy.

20 A main goal, experts and officials said, is teaching young Finns to think for themselves. If Finns can trust that their neighbors understand the news, the theory goes, they will trust they are making decisions with the same set of facts. So, they'll be harder to confuse and manipulate, and their society will be harder to rip apart with fake news.

"Media literacy is a basic civic skill, but it's also a basic democratic skill," Anders Adlercreutz, Finland's education minister, said.

25 As the focus has turned to A.I., Aki Saariaho, a teacher in the Helsinki area, is turning to a quiz in the style of the Tinder dating app, in which users swipe right or left on a photo, to teach about its risks. It gives students a few seconds to guess if a picture is real.

The photos from 2024 can be obvious: A fuzzy picture of a policeman holding a beer looks clearly wrong. But the 2025 round is harder. A.I. has improved so much in just a few years that the hints could be as subtle as a too-short shadow—or just a strange vibe.

30 The point of the swiping exercise, said Mr. Saariaho, who also advises Faktabaari, a Finnish digital information literacy service, is not to teach students how to spot the deepfakes. Instead, it's to show them that, increasingly, they can't tell the difference.

"The base issue is learning critical thinking," he said.

35 Being able to use A.I. as a tool instead of being taken in by it could be the most important skill young people need to thrive in today's world.

"School is the last place where we reach the whole population," Mr. Saariaho said. "We need to teach the core things that you need to learn for the rest of your life."

40 Sonja Alanko, 17, was one of several students who said she could see the ties between their old classes and new challenges: "I apply the same lessons that I had on fake news and on media literacy to A.I.," she said.

She's already starting to look deeper into TikTok videos that seem really out there.

With just a few more clicks, either to check out the influencer's social media page or just search for the source of the information, she can often get a better sense of the trustworthiness, she said.