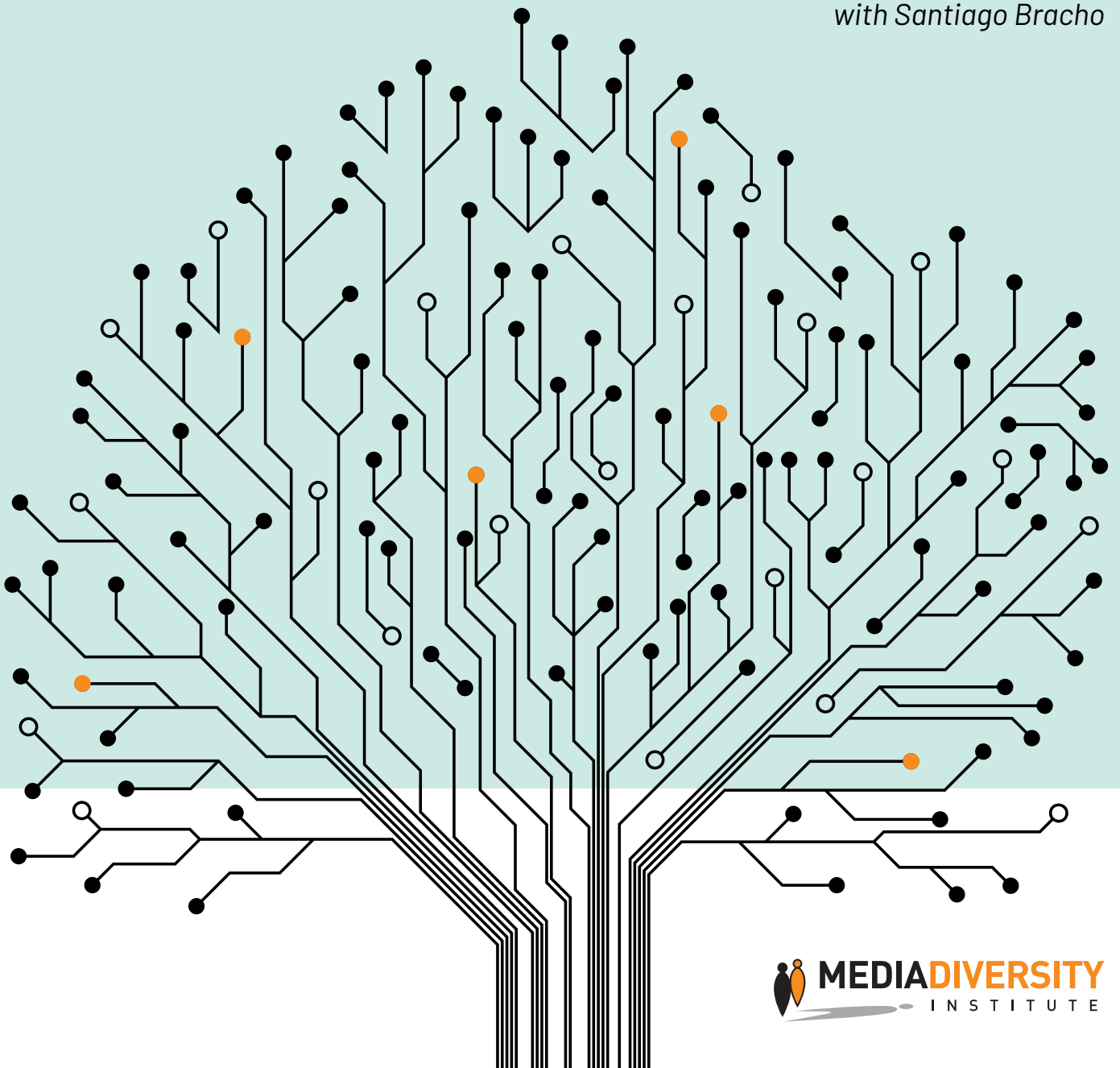


# DIVERSITY IN MEDIA

Challenges in the Age of Algorithms

—  
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# INTRO DUCTION

**The concept of diversity has undergone a profound transformation in the last couple of decades. While it is often understood as a simple, recognizable demographic marker—how many people in a particular social group belong to a different ethnic, religious, socio-economic, gender, age, sexual orientation or disability group – or as its social representation, it has gradually evolved into an important communications policy principle. The markers of the policy principles are numerous: does the company recruitment policy reflect a need to have a good balance between women and men; are the government departments composed of people from various ethnic backgrounds; how about the LGBT community and their full participation in the decision-making process? When it comes to policy-making, the objective is to create an inclusive society.**

The move from being simple pointers of socio-demographics to being communication principles has been happening at a time when the media landscape is experiencing seismic shifts too. The transition from the analogue to the digital world with the meteoric rise of social media has changed the ways we see the world, understand each other, and, most importantly, the way we access and consume the news, find information and communicate with one another.

One of the processes that has made this shift most visible is the rapid proliferation of algorithms – programme-based, automated sets of rules that play a critical role in selecting and ranking content in search engines, and predicting what we would be interested in, might read and build our knowledge on.

Many hoped that the advancement of technology and the proliferation of media spaces would create forums for diverse narratives and perspectives, but that has not happened. As Safiya Umoja Noble (2018) notes in the book *Algorithms of Oppression*, the new media environment has not been as progressive as we all had hoped:



*It is of particular concern for marginalised groups, those who are problematically represented in erroneous, stereotypical, or even pornographic ways in search engines and who have also struggled for non-stereotypical or non-racist and non-sexist depictions in the media and in libraries. (Noble 2018)*

Other scholars have raised questions about the societal implications of technological changes and their impact on diversity in media. Research has largely focused on organisational factors influencing the adoption of algorithmic content and how institutional power imbalances affect the public service obligations of the media (Linden 2017, Linden & Tuulonen 2019, Jones & Jones 2019). All the scholarly work indicates that traditional media policy approaches struggle to keep pace with the most visible manifestations of the changing media landscape, the vast increase in media content and the rise of new actors in media production and distribution.

We start this study with the premise that new approaches to diversity in the media are emerging. They are discussion topics in academic and policy arenas, and they are becoming more visible in the work of civil society organisations, driving activities aimed at increasing diversity, equity and inclusion. The new approaches follow a similar pattern. What was dominant in the past focus on source and content diversity, is still there but the audience and its engagement with the media content is increasingly gaining prominence.

The *Diversity in Media* study outlines these process by examining current academic and policy research, as well as the ways policy-makers ensure that social, political and technological changes are aligned with media efforts to serve the public interest and ensure that diversity in the media is implemented and improved. Our case study looks at projects funded by the European Commission (EC).

The European Commission policy frameworks are set up with the goal of ensuring the inclusion and representation of all different groups in society. The key aspects of the EC's understanding of diversity include: *fundamental rights* (and the principles of non-discrimination and equality as outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union), *preserving and promoting cultural heritage, languages, and traditions*, and *social justice and equity*. These noble goals are to be achieved through the development of new laws and policies, working with member states, and supporting projects and activities aimed at the implementation of diversity policies and their further development.

The EC funding programmes are aligned with diversity goals and support universities, regional and local communities and civil society organisations through EC grants such as the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV), Europe Aid, Erasmus +, Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON), and Creative Europe (CREA). We believe that the ways organisations and institutions understand and build on this relational engagement provide insight into the media diversity dynamic.

The experience of civil society organisations in this domain is of particular interest. Their efforts to improve the everyday life and welfare of disadvantaged groups show that enhancing the agency and voice of these communities is a long process. In that context, the space of everyday interaction between individuals and groups, institutions and citizens, mainstream and social fringes - reveals relational engagement that is important to observe, explore and act upon.

We provide an overview of the projects that have been supported by the European Commission (EC) from 2021 to 2022. We decided to examine the most recent projects to identify the ways policy makers, public institutions, universities and civil society organisations define, design and implement their media and diversity strategies and activities. The objective is to identify current media diversity narratives in Europe.

# APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY

Much has been said about the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of diversity. From cooking shows to leading television bulletins, and from soap operas to tabloid headlines, diversity has been examined, discussed, criticised and praised, highlighting the need to properly assess diversity in media.

In the academic arena, a wide range of diversity meanings is used to refer to the recognition of people from various backgrounds. Scholarly discourse positions diversity in the centre of social processes such as inclusion. These processes are considered to be fundamental to understanding how diverse groups are integrated into societies and how cultural differences are acknowledged and managed over time.

If we live in an age of diversity, as many argue (see Vertovec 2012), then laws, policies and regulations – normative discourses – and institutional practices should be working together to foster both equality and inclusion. The ideas of a world based on equality and inclusion, often traced back to the civil rights movement in the U.S. and its fight against racial discrimination, have been developed over time and are now incorporated in major international declarations, treaties and laws.

In policy terms, the European Union (EU) has institutionalised diversity through documents such as the *Treaty of Amsterdam* (1997), the *2000 Race Equality Directive*, and the *Treaty of Lisbon*, whose Article 1 says:



*The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.*

In the EU context, the term “diversity mainstreaming” is gaining prominence. It has emerged as a critical approach and demand for having diversity considerations at all levels of public governance. A range of models has been developed to support the idea that all individuals and groups, particularly in relation to immigration, ethnic and religious origin, have equal access to and full participation in society. The most commonly seen models include:

- > **Multiculturalism:** This model recognises and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organisation or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context. Multiculturalism supports policies that accommodate cultural practices, languages, and traditions, promoting pluralism in areas like education, public services, and employment.
- > **Cultural Convergence:** Often referred to as the “salad bowl” model, this approach sees the merging of cultures through mutual adaptation, where cultural distance between groups decreases over time due to inter-group contact. While individuals maintain elements of their unique cultural identities, they also adopt shared norms and values through social interactions. This model emphasizes dialogue and the blending of cultural practices to build common ground.

- > **Cultural Separation:** In situations where cultural differences are considered too profound to reconcile, this model supports the creation of separate institutions or spaces for different cultural groups. Examples include separate schools, religious enclaves, or community centres that cater exclusively to specific ethnic or religious groups. While it can preserve cultural autonomy, critics argue that it risks reinforcing divisions and limiting interaction between groups.
- > **Assimilation:** Under this model, individuals from minority or immigrant backgrounds are expected to shed their original cultural identities and fully adopt the dominant culture's values, norms, and practices. In the U.S., this is often referred to as "Americanisation" or the "melting pot" model, where the goal is a homogeneous national identity rather than cultural pluralism. Assimilation is often criticised for disregarding the importance of cultural heritage and promoting conformity over diversity.
- > **Interculturalism:** This more recent model emphasises interaction, dialogue, and cooperation between different cultural groups, focusing on mutual respect and understanding. Unlike multiculturalism, which can be criticised for encouraging cultural specificity, interculturalism promotes active engagement between communities to foster social cohesion and shared belonging.
- > **Transnationalism:** This framework acknowledges that individuals and groups may maintain connections to multiple countries or cultural spaces simultaneously, particularly in an era of global migration. Transnationalism challenges the traditional notion of bounded national identities by recognising the fluidity of cultural exchange across borders, influencing diversity policies that are flexible and adaptive to these global linkages.
- > **Cosmopolitanism:** This model promotes the idea of a shared global citizenship, where individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds are seen as part of a single human community. It advocates for policies that transcend national boundaries and prioritise universal values such as human rights, equality, and global solidarity. Cosmopolitanism is often associated with international human rights movements and global governance institutions.
- > **Equality-Based Models:** These focus on creating policies that guarantee equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, or religious background. Such models advocate for anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action, and inclusive practices that ensure marginalised groups are not disadvantaged in social, economic, or political participation.
- > **Civic integration:** Focuses on combining heritage identity with attachment to the destination society. Government policies play a crucial role here, often through mandatory language and civic knowledge tests aimed at fostering integration. These policies, while designed to promote inclusion, can also serve as gatekeepers, determining which groups gain full access to civic rights and participation.

News media often draw from multiple models of social inclusion in reporting on events and issues related to the participation of all citizens in social and political life, from outlining their exclusion to creating a sense of common belonging.

# DIVERSITY IN THE MEDIA

In the broader media context, the concept of diversity is often understood as “the variability of mass media’s sources, channels, messages, and audiences in terms of political, geographical, socio-cultural, and other differences in society” (McQuail 1992, p.147). This common view is articulated in UNESCO’s (1995) definition of cultural diversity as the manifold ways in which cultural groups and societies find expression encompassing various modes of artistic and media production, dissemination, and consumption.

The all-inclusive efforts are aimed at bridging cultural distances, promoting dialogue, and ensuring that diverse voices are represented in public discourse, to recognise the value of diversity:



*The magnificent diversity of humanity is a treasure, not a threat.*  
(UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, 2023)

The media’s role in recognising this treasure of humanity seems obvious. As the main centres of collecting, creating, disseminating and curating information, media institutions contribute to social inclusion by giving a space to a wide range of views and perspectives, therefore having the power to challenge stereotypes and prejudices. Their commitment to addressing structural inequalities supports a richer, more diverse public sphere.

The relationship between the media and diversity has become more complex and nuanced in the age of algorithmic curation (Rupar et al. 2024). What has been known as “information cocoons” (Sunstein 2006), “filter bubbles” (Pariser 2011) and “echo chambers” (Nguyen 2020) has affected all domains of social life, triggering calls for taking responsibility for the content produced and the variety of views and perspectives presented.

The ‘diversity of exposure’, a term used to explain the extent to which audiences engage with a diverse range of content (Napoli 2011), highlights the shortcoming of media diversity policies. They have been developed primarily around traditional legacy media, a shortcoming that calls for a reassessment of the ways diversity in the media is identified, measured and analysed. Previous efforts focused on ensuring a range of content and source availability, but the advent of algorithm-driven content curation requires an understanding of what media users actually consume before making a policy intervention.

So far, policy makers such as the European Commission assumed that having a greater diversity of content leads to a more varied consumption of information. In other words, a diversity of content allows broadening audiences’ perspectives. That has not happened. While it certainly plays a role, relying only on diversity of content is not sufficient to navigate the increasingly complex media world. As explained earlier, despite the availability of diverse content, many users tend to stay within information streams that reinforce what they believe in, therefore limiting their own exposure to differing viewpoints.

Furthermore, the effects of media ownership on diversity – television, radio, newspapers and online news outlets focused on local, regional and national markets – are less visible when a few nations dominate the global media environment. In the global, interactive, and on-demand media environment, diversity concerns become de-institutionalised, increasingly intersecting

with broader questions of digital access, construction of identity, and representation of minority groups already positioned on the fringes of society. In that context:

**diversity in the media is no longer just a matter of who speaks in the media and who controls content production and distribution but a matter of a complex interplay between a range of media actors, where factors such as media content, audience engagement, as well as the social structures that support diversity in the media are equally relevant.**

There is a need to operationalise these sets of indicators, and to develop robust mechanisms for its measurement and analysis. Effective monitoring tools should be designed to go beyond surface-level representation, capturing the nuances of diversity across content, ownership, and engagement, thereby ensuring that media systems truly reflect the pluralism of society.

## THE QUESTION OF MEASUREMENT

Existing research shows that several dimensions have to be taken into account when measuring diversity in the media: the range of voices presented, the representation of social groups, the topics covered, and the views expressed. These indicators are important for assessing the availability of diverse content and the extent to which it is accessed, engaged with, and perceived by audiences.

### *Who Speaks, Who is Represented?*

A foundational question in measuring media diversity is identifying “who speaks” and “who is mentioned” within media content. This approach involves examining sources of information, both voices that dominate the media landscape and those that remain underrepresented or marginalised. Traditional media often reflect power structures where dominant social groups have a disproportionate presence, leaving minorities and marginalised groups with limited visibility. By evaluating the diversity of sources - whether they be politicians, experts, journalists or community members - researchers can evaluate media performance and the overall inclusiveness of a media system.

### *Content diversity*

Along with source diversity, content diversity is often under investigation. This category focuses on “what topics” are being discussed and “what views” are taken on those topics. A diversity of issues and perspectives is necessary to avoid reinforcing singular narratives or perpetuating stereotypes about certain groups. Studies in this area often analyse the framing of news and the process of information gathering, assessing whether they provide a balanced and multifaceted portrayal of complex social issues.

### *Media access*

The media’s performance in terms of diversity is usually assessed by looking at how well it reflects the composition of society itself. However, while echoing socio-demographic matters, measuring access and choice is equally significant. Are users able to access diverse viewpoints, and are they given the choice to engage with content that reflects different segments of society?



Some regulatory bodies, such as the Netherlands Media Authority, assess not only the diversity of media content produced, but also its consumption patterns, ensuring that diverse content reaches audiences ([Media Monitor 2023](#)).

### **The Audience as Co-creators**

It has been widely accepted that the audience is no longer just a passive consumer of media content but an active co-creator (Lewis and Westlund 2015). The interactive digital spaces, social media platforms in particular, enable users to comment, share and contribute, thereby expanding the range of participants in the media sphere. The traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers are nowadays blurred, and any measuring of diversity in the media has to include the audience along with the institutional actors. By generating and curating content using a variety of tools, ranging from blogs to social media posts, the audience is in a position to actively contribute to what we see as diversity in the media. While it creates new opportunities for social change, it complicates monitoring and measuring diversity (Loecherbach et al., 2020).

### **Diversity Experience**

The diversity experience is shaped by the content available but also by the media users' needs, their motivation, awareness, and openness to diverse perspectives. Measuring diversity therefore requires taking into account who the users are and what their cognitive and emotional responses to diversity issues are. In other words, it is essential to understand whether users are motivated to seek out diverse content, aware of the range of perspectives available to them, and able to critically engage with media content that challenges their preconceptions.

### **Consumption patterns**

In assessing diversity experience, it is also important to examine whether media consumption patterns differ across social groups. Research indicates that minority communities may engage with media in different ways, often turning to niche or community-based media outlets that more accurately reflect their experiences (Husband 2005). Understanding these consumption patterns has become essential for measuring whether media diversity efforts are reaching all segments of society.

### **News Recommender Systems**

The rise of automated news recommender systems has increased exposure to a wider range of content, but some argue it has also aggravated existing inequalities by reinforcing user preferences (Gran et al, 2021). Scholars have highlighted the need for recommender systems that are designed to promote diversity, ensuring that users are exposed to a broader array of viewpoints rather than being trapped in algorithmically curated siloes.

To understand diversity in the media it is important to address these interconnected dimensions, the representation of social groups, the diversity of topics and perspectives, as well as media access, the role of audiences as co-creators and new actors in the field, news recommender systems being the most obvious ones.

As media environments become more algorithmically driven, developing new tools for assessing how well media systems reflect and serve diversity becomes essential for the creation of an inclusive society.

# MONITORING TOOLS

What set of tools is nowadays needed for monitoring diversity in the media?

To examine what has been used, what monitoring tools are emerging and what critical engagement with media means in terms of activities aimed at making a social change, we looked closely at the European Commission funded projects over two years. We focused on 30 projects from 2021 to 2022, a limited sample that outlines some trends without being necessarily representative.

The empirical part of this study addresses the question of how institutions and organisations, winners of the EC grants 2021-2022, define, perceive and promote diversity in the media. Through studying how the EC funded projects engage with diversity and the media, we are able to better understand the diversity narratives within the larger cultural sphere of Europe. Thus, this research seeks to understand which aspects of the media and diversity have been priorities at a given moment and how they were implemented.

## METHODOLOGY

**Timeframe:** EC funded projects 2021- 2022.

**Sample:**

Asylum Migration and Integration Fund 2021-2027 (AMIF) - 4 projects

Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) - 7 projects

Europe Aid - Caucasus - 2 projects

Erasmus + Partnership for Cooperation in the field of Education and Training - European NGOs (Erasmus+ NGO Partner) - 3 projects

Erasmus + / ERASMUS-SPORT-2021-SCP / Cooperation Partnerships 2021 (Erasmus+ Co-op) - 3 projects

Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON) - 7 projects

Creative Europe (CREA) - 4 projects

Total: 30 projects

**Key words:** Media and Diversity

**Budget allocated by EC:** Only projects above 250,000 euros were included

**Methods:** Content analysis and documents analysis

**Categories of content analysis:** Project title, Year Awarded, Project Duration, Funding Programme, Budget, Countries Implemented, National Beneficiaries / Local Organisations; Partners (list organisations as CSO, Academia, Government, media), Lead Partner/ Coordinator, Media and Diversity associated keywords, Diversity Issues in the project, Engagement with Diversity, Activities, Media the Project Engaged with, Media the Project Created, Project Website Link

**Data set for document analysis:** projects' websites and projects' application documents to the EC

The EC's focus on diversity in the media spans across several sectors, including asylum and migration, equality, education, training, and cultural cooperation. The European Commission's approach to funding media diversity initiatives reflects its broader commitment to promoting inclusion, non-discrimination, and representation across member states.

The analysis considers both the media content produced and how audiences engage with this content, aiming to distinguish between earlier explained 'content diversity' and 'exposure diversity'.

## MEASURING DIVERSITY

A significant part of the study focuses on measuring diversity within the selected projects. The research categorises the projects based on several parameters, including their budgets, the types of diversity issues they address (e.g., gender, race, ability...), and the approaches to improve media diversity.

Each project's contribution to diversity is assessed using a structured coding system that captures key variables such as:

- 1 Diversity issues:** The specific diversity dimensions each project addresses, including gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and disability.
- 2 Project activities:** How the project promotes diversity through media-related activities, such as the creation of new content, public campaigns, or training programmes for media professionals.
- 3 Audience engagement:** How each project engages audiences in the co-creation of media content and the extent to which diverse groups are included in the audience.
- 4 Media formats:** The types of media the project interacts with or creates, including traditional journalism, digital platforms, and user-generated content.
- 5 Approach:** Analysing the foundations on which the project seeks to study their findings or pursue its aims. For example, does it prioritise working within currently established societal and government institutions, or does it instead access how these institutions have acted towards diversity?
- 6 Location:** Studying what countries are most likely to receive funding throughout all these projects.

This structured approach allows for a comparative analysis of how diversity is applied in media initiatives across different regions and sectors in Europe.

We used a system of 'binary results' (Rao & Scott 1992) to categorise elements of the project. For example, to create a category of analysis which could be tallied numerically, questions such as "Which societal organisations and bodies does the project target/work with to advocate for change?" were answered by describing the project's engagement as either "grassroots/communitarian" or "institutional". If the project displayed aspects of both, then it is listed under both categories.

Crucially, these terms for content analysis were carefully chosen based on the nature of all 30 projects. The content analysis was organised as per these terms, and split into the following binary result categories:

Questions for defining terms	Binary Term (1)	Binary Term (2)
What is the foundation of the project's methodology?	<b>Intersectional</b> - This project seeks to analyse and study the different forms of overlapping and conflicting oppression minority groups face within society.	<b>Sectional</b> - This project seeks to analyse public advocacy towards minority or disadvantaged groups by advocacy through established institutions and amplifying their voice within them.
Which societal organisations and bodies does the project target/work with to advocate for change?	<b>Grassroots/Communitarian</b> - The project interacts primarily through local communities.	<b>Institutional</b> - This project conducts research and advocacy primarily through established societal institutions and working within them.
What is its major aim towards minority or disadvantaged groups?	<b>Integration</b> - The project seeks to better integrate the disadvantaged groups into a more inclusive society.	<b>Representation</b> - The project aims to represent and acknowledge the current conditions of disadvantaged groups.
How does this project interact with the media?	<b>Critical</b> - The project is critical of current media narratives and ideologies which it seeks to change.	<b>Complementary</b> - This project interacts with the media in a way that is mostly complementary to the current media structures and narratives.
What is the project's relationship with forms of media?	<b>Analytical</b> - The project seeks to study, research, and primarily analyse current media trends.	<b>Creative</b> - This project focuses on creating a new product within the media format.
What was their outreach?	<b>Specific consumption</b> - The project is made for a specific societal sector.	<b>Mass consumption</b> - The project was made to reach a mass audience, with the aim to maximise viewership.
What is the project's format?	<b>Digital</b> - The project is primarily online.	<b>In-Person</b> - The media this project creates, or analyses is a physical format. For example, the creation of conferences, events, galleries or in-person surveys.

The EC funded projects from 2021 to 2022, create a concise and consistent account as to how the EC/EU engages with media and diversity. The **average funding for these projects is €959,764.23.**

**The countries which were most likely to get the funding were Greece and Italy.** As these projects involve diversity, the issue of mass refugee influx since 2015 seems to play an important role in the decision-making. Due to Greece's and Italy's proximity to the Mediterranean coast, they are more likely to be recipients of refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East.

**The most frequent grant beneficiaries in the 30 selected media and diversity projects were non-governmental organisations.** The difference between civil society organisations (CSO) and non-governmental organisations (NGO) can be quite vague, therefore in the study organisations were distinguished based on how they described themselves on their website and official documents.

For example, the “Deaf journalism project, Promoting and Expanding Deaf Journalism in Europe through Sign Languages” (DJE), funded by CREA-CROSS in 2022, involved partners from six countries - Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Slovakia, and Sweden - five were companies and one was the non-governmental organisation [Média'Pi!](#) that describes itself as “a non-profit and independent online Deaf medium from Paris, France, with national and international news in French Sign Language (LSF) and French”. The projects' website states its goal as:



*The [DJE] project aims to revolutionise journalism for the Deaf community in Europe by creating a collaborative network of Deaf-led media organisations. With a focus on innovation, collaboration, diversity, impartiality, and quality, the project seeks to address the significant gap in Deaf journalism and media accessibility. Key components include producing news content in national sign languages, tailored to the specific needs of Deaf individuals, and developing journalistic standards for Deaf audiences. The project also intends to train a new generation of Deaf journalists, expanding the pool of professionals who can contribute to Deaf-focused journalism.*

The DJE project is one of the projects across the sample that has a **sectional** view of diversity and social justice in general. The **intersectional** projects are more critical and focus on exposing interweaving and correlating forms of prejudice and structural bias against disadvantaged and minority groups.

The fact there are more **sectional** projects could suggest two things regarding the EC's view of diversity. One, many of the projects chosen have a very specific, and succinct relationship within the societal sector or institution they are currently engaging with. For example, AMIF focuses on migration and migration services, CREA on cultural industries and Erasmus+ Co-op on sports for young people. Additionally, **sectional** oriented projects tend to be more directly engaged with the chosen sector, and work within the parameters of the sector and industry to promote inclusion in an effective and feasible way.

An example of a **sectional** approach is the project “Combating Youth Radicalisation: Building Communities of Tolerance Combining Football with Media and Digital Literacy” (DIALECT2) funded by Erasmus + in 2021. It sought to tackle racism and homophobia in after-school sports clubs. The explicit aim of the project was to create a training curriculum, which after-school

sports projects across Europe could use. Therefore, the project sought to tackle diversity, internally by working within the structures of a specific institution and advocating for change by creating its own media content to raise awareness and counter discrimination.



*Partner organisations from Greece, Italy, Serbia and Hungary came together to create an awareness-raising video. All organisations worked with their local football teams in order to develop a video that showcases that football can be a wonderful means of bringing people together. The video aims to inform the public about the work the organisations are doing with the DIALECT2 project in their countries for the past 2 years and the continuous effort to eliminate discriminatory behaviours and xenophobia through the methodology of football3. (DIALECT2)*

The majority of the **intersectional** projects analysed in this study take a critical stance. Their demand for institutional change is transparent. For example, the feminist research projects funded by Horizon Europe in 2022, “Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics” (RESIST), and “Co-Creating Inclusive Intersectional Democratic Spaces Across Europe” (CCINDLE) engage directly with critical, intersectional views on feminism. The CCINDLE project’s website defines the main goals as being to co-create analysis and solutions that are feminist, anti-homophobic and anti-racist; that support high quality democratic politics and strengthen responses to authoritarian and anti-gender efforts. One of its work packages, Co-creations and Elaborations, outlines new ways of responding to anti-gender campaigns:



*Which feminist strategies can help to revitalise/realise democracy across Europe and to make it more inclusive and more resilient? What processes and practices can we set in motion to support the quality of democracy in the EU and promote gender equality?*

*We will further develop co-creation as a principle, and work directly with feminist media and pro-democracy think tanks, feminist donors, and gender professionals who are already responding to anti-gender campaigns and de-democratisation.*

*We will also engage with university student populations by piloting advanced citizen assemblies to transform more dangerous forms of political antagonism towards more democratic agonism. (CCINDLE)*

The primary aim across all projects funded by AMIF was **integration**. Diversity is primarily seen through the lens of the integration of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers into the host society. Therefore, making the host society visibly diverse by involving migrant and refugee communities in civic life, by promoting their voices in the media (emphasis on *source and content diversity*) and by exploring their engagement with the media (*diversity exposure*).

While AMIF projects typically focus on the representation of migrants and refugees in the media, aiming to combat stereotypes and promote positive narratives about migration, projects under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) focus on media diversity in terms of gender equality, ethnic representation, and combating hate speech. Usually with a smaller scope, they focus on research and advocacy in local areas.

The concept of **integration** has two meanings in the EC context:

- > bringing together all nation states within the European Union - to level-up underdeveloped nations and create standards of diversity following general principles of justice and equality, and
- > referring to the inclusion and unity of all citizens regardless of their origin or orientation. Different projects focused on different aspects of their identity in terms of ethnicity, religion, age, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or other.

The ERASMUS+ project, "Right to Connect: Digital Inclusion for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities" (RESPONSE, funded in 2021), for example, seeks to improve essential public services for disabled people. Projects such as "Missing Pieces for Educators and Local Stakeholders Addressing Inclusive Sport" (MESIS, funded in 2021) seek to integrate migrant and minority youth into sports activities within local communities.

In all these projects the explicit aim is to accommodate certain services, so that disadvantaged groups can be more included in these spaces. For example, the project "Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies" (EMVI), funded in 2021, used digital platforms for migrant participation. These platform spaces were noticeably local, addressing the barrier posed by the dominance of transnational media giants, to focus on local migrants and organise them for face to face, town-hall-style gatherings. The project's outline specifies:



*A digital platform for migrants' participation based on the open source tool DECIDIM will be set up and adapted to the local context to open new spaces for issue-raising and making policy proposals, adapted for migrant communities which are often excluded from participation in elections and citizenship-related rights. (EMVI)*

The specific task carried out in every country was to conduct in-depth one-to-one interviews with a number of migrants. These interviews were key to showcasing the diverse viewpoints and personal stories of refugees and migrants.

This **communitarian** activism underlines the engagement with local communities in supporting diversity and inclusion. The EC funding for projects in Greece and Italy, countries with vast rural communities, focused greatly on grassroots mobilisation of migrant communities.

Engagement with the media was mostly **complementary** towards current media formats and narratives, producing content otherwise missing in the current environment. Most projects sought to integrate disadvantaged groups into society by increasing their visibility in the media. However, many of them did have a **critical** outlook, which sought to hold the media accountable for what they saw as general trends of racism and xenophobia.

The study results regarding whether projects **created** more media or rather **analysed** and studied media show both approaches have been present, aiming for both a **specific consumption** and **mass consumption**.

Our findings indicate the EC's main funding goal has been to **support key organisations working in the field of media and diversity**, from community forums such as local sports groups, to often large governmental systems established to improve the asylum-seeking services.

The analysis of 30 EC funded projects confirms that **diversity narratives across Europe are closely aligned with the EC's broader policy priorities** related to social inclusion, equality, and combating discrimination.

Some projects, such as AMIF's SHAPE project, sought to include multiple disadvantaged groups in their advocacy and tackle multiple forms of prejudice. However, it was more common for projects from a certain funding agency to focus on improving diversity, and media representation for a specific group. As we stated before, AMIF focuses on migration and migration services, CREA on cultural industries, and Erasmus+ Co-op on sports for young people. Projects such as RESPONSE funded by Erasmus+ NGO partner focused specifically on disabled people. The EuropeAid projects in Georgia and Armenia had a concept of diversity aligned with national frameworks.

Nevertheless, although different funding bodies prioritised their specialty regarding a particular group, they all sought to promote social cohesion and combat hateful narratives. Thus, they always promoted EC goals. This is why in conducting content analysis, and creating binary terms for all 30 projects, there was no distinction between the concept of diversity and inclusivity. There were methodological differences on how to best achieve it – as displayed in **sectional** and **intersectional** projects – but the aim was still the same: combat radical hateful narratives and improve inclusivity for all.

Throughout all 30 projects, the EC emphasises the role of the media not only as representing diversity but as an active agent in shaping cultural narratives around inclusion and equality. The EC's commitment to funding media diversity projects reveals its recognition of the media's power to either reinforce or challenge social inequalities, and the importance of ensuring that diverse voices are heard and represented.

The tension between diversity goals and their implementation in an algorithm-driven media environment requires attention. While digital platforms offer new opportunities for content creation and distribution, their reliance on personalisation algorithms can limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.

Several of the projects studied attempt to address this issue by promoting media literacy and developing tools to ensure that users are exposed to a wide range of content. However, more research is needed to understand how algorithmic systems can be reformed to better support diversity in media consumption.



# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our findings outline a set of possible directions for policymakers, civil society organisations, media practitioners, scholars and educators to enhance media diversity, strengthen inclusion, and adapt to the contemporary media landscape.



## *Taking a holistic approach to diversity*

Diversity must be viewed beyond mere integration into mainstream narratives. A broader understanding that considers various forms of discrimination—especially in digital spaces—should be central to future initiatives. This means looking at how identity markers such as ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic factors intersect, and how these intersections shape people’s experiences with the media. By addressing these layers of inequality, projects can tackle the systemic issues behind poor media representation and create a more equitable landscape for all.



## *Supporting the media for social change*

While many projects focus on targeted, community-level work, all media spaces from legacy media, social media, community media to smaller digital outlets have the potential to create social change. Future initiatives could explore how they could be used to amplify diversity narratives, challenge stereotypes, and foster social cohesion on a larger scale. By partnering with media outlets, projects can ensure diverse representation reaching wider audiences, sparking important conversations about diversity in society at large.



## *Raising algorithmic awareness*

What content is seen and by whom is nowadays influenced by algorithms. They do not have agency, but their creators do. It is essential to include computer scientists in diversity and media conversations, to raise algorithmic awareness, counter biases and prevent the media from perpetuating or hindering diversity. Future projects should work on building partnerships with tech companies to push for transparency in algorithmic processes and develop tools that prioritise diverse content.



## *Encouraging cross-sector collaboration*

The challenges of diversity in the media cannot be solved by media organisations alone. Collaborations that bring together governments, policy makers, media professionals, tech experts, academics, and civil society will be key to creating innovative, diverse media solutions. These collaborations could lead to the development of new tools for diverse content creation, enhance media literacy, and help audiences critically engage with the media they consume. Breaking down silos between sectors will encourage a more holistic and impactful approach to promoting diversity.



### *Prioritizing media literacy*

Media literacy needs to be a top priority moving forward. It is crucial that audiences have the tools to critically assess this content and challenge biased or harmful narratives. Educational programmes that teach communities about the role of algorithms in media consumption, as well as how to engage with content thoughtfully, will empower individuals to advocate for diversity and equality in the media they consume.

**Social identities overlap, diversity of communities expand, and the media environment rapidly changes. In the contemporary environment, diversity in the media refers to:**

- > a range of sources, channels, messages, and audiences in terms of socio-demographic differences in society
- > representation of social identities
- > policy principles that outline diversity, equity and inclusion
- > the dynamic between agents and institutions within the media ecosystem

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## APPENDIX 1

### List of projects

Project title	More info
2incING: Thinking of Integration Process as a Two-way Inclusion	<a href="https://aditus.org.mt/our-work/projects/2incing-thinking-of-integration-process-as-a-two-way-inclusion/">https://aditus.org.mt/our-work/projects/2incing-thinking-of-integration-process-as-a-two-way-inclusion/</a>
Anti-Gender Backlash and Democratic Pushback ( PushBackLash )	<a href="https://pushbacklash.eu/dissemination/">https://pushbacklash.eu/dissemination/</a>
Challenging Online and Offline Roma Discrimination in Europe (COORDE)	<a href="https://forumhr.eu/combating-online-hate-speech-slovakia/">https://forumhr.eu/combating-online-hate-speech-slovakia/</a>
Civil Society Strengthening For Equal And Full Participation In Civic, Economic And Political Life, Georgia	<a href="https://en.heks.ch/sites/default/files/documents/2024-05/News%20and%20recent%20developments.pdf">https://en.heks.ch/sites/default/files/documents/2024-05/News%20and%20recent%20developments.pdf</a>
Co-Creating Inclusive Intersectional Democratic Spaces Across Europe (CCINDLE)	<a href="https://ccindle.org">https://ccindle.org</a>
Combating Youth Radicalisation: Building Communities of Tolerance Combining Football with Media and Digital Literacy (DIALECT2)	<a href="https://dialectproject.eu/dialect/activities-results/">https://dialectproject.eu/dialect/activities-results/</a>
Developing Effective Policies For Migrants And Refugees Through SAT-Based Policy Making Processes (DEPART)	<a href="https://project-depart.eu/the-project/">https://project-depart.eu/the-project/</a>
Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies (EMVI)	<a href="https://diaspora-participation.eu">https://diaspora-participation.eu</a>
Empowering the Youth: Strengthening Local News Media Services Through the Youth Community Journalism Initiative (YoCoJoin)	<a href="https://www.media-diversity.org/projects/yocojoin/">https://www.media-diversity.org/projects/yocojoin/</a>
European Cultural XR Network - Events, Lab Sessions And Online Content Dedicated To Opening The XR Market And The Metaverse To European Cultural Venues (Cultural XR Network)	<a href="https://techvangart.com/2022/06/17/lucid-realities-xr-networking-space/">https://techvangart.com/2022/06/17/lucid-realities-xr-networking-space/</a>
European Youth Journalism. The why of the news (XQ.EUJOY)	<a href="https://xquejoyproject.eu/news/">https://xquejoyproject.eu/news/</a>
Expanding Tools in Addressing Barriers for Migrant Women to Participate in Democratic Life (WE-EMPOWER)	<a href="https://wideplus.org/we-empower-project/">https://wideplus.org/we-empower-project/</a>
Fake News Risk Mitigator (FERMI)	<a href="https://fighting-fake-news.eu/materials/infographics">https://fighting-fake-news.eu/materials/infographics</a>
Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances Against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics (RESIST)	<a href="https://theresistproject.eu/what-we-have-found/">https://theresistproject.eu/what-we-have-found/</a>



