

2025 Annual Report



This was one of the most dramatic years in our almost 30-year-long history. It started with the US Government terminating almost all funding for international media development and pressuring media and other companies to scrap DEI policies. For an organisation such as MDI, which works in media and holds diversity and inclusion as its core principles, it's been a matter of fight-or-flight. Hard or not, it's more important than ever to fight for these core principles.

Milica Pešić

Executive Director, MDI

RDN

produces 13 research reports focused on gendered disinformation and hate speech

LIMENet

awards 33 grants, supporting 39 European organisations in 5 countries

- ▶ **MDI WB** hosts Breaking Words, Building Bridges: Responses to Polarisation in the Western Balkans
- ▶ **CHASE** formally recognised as a 'best practice'

CHASE

releases final version of its ICT tool to identify and analyse online gender-based hate speech

Key Achievements

- ▶ **MDI WB** holds events for YOU(th) CARE for Change: "Beyond the Framing: Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in Media", No Pride in Genocide, and "On the Frontlines of the Movement: Student Organising and the Deconstruction of Misogyny in the Media"

5 new projects

GTTO

wraps up after 10 years of combatting religious discrimination

- ▶ **Media Diversity Index UK** report with European rankings released, expansion into Latin America
- ▶ **PODCast** produces practical guides for podcasting
- ▶ **OSCE** recognises **GTTO**'s work as an example of 'good practice'



The centrepiece of the Research Centre's work in 2025 was the release of the second stage of the pilot Media Diversity [INDEX](#). The new report focuses on the UK and provides a comparative analysis and ranking of the 12 European countries included in the project.

The rankings are based on diversity and inclusion policies, practices and implementation, covering both governance and content.

The UK's media secured the top ranking with a score of 65.25, slightly ahead of Belgium. Two other nations, Lithuania and Portugal, were the only other countries to score close to 60.

Those with a score of around 60 are classified as Tier 1 countries: their scores boosted by evidence of diversity provision being built into regulation, recruitment and handling complaints.

The Media Diversity Index is expanding to Latin America. Worked started in December and results are due by mid-2026. The Index is a benchmark for evaluating the performance of countries regarding diversity and inclusion in their media.

Interns

Four interns joined the MDI Research Centre to contribute to three new projects related to inclusive, data-driven media research. Mohamed Salama (PhD candidate, University of Maryland) focused on developing tools to extract and analyse data from MDI project reports, Marta Kreckovic (UCL, then SOAS) and Na Xu (Goldsmiths) on academic literature and early narrative analysis on gender, LGBTQ+, ethnicity, religion, and disability, and Laure Marotte's (LSE) research centred on gender-based violence.



The Index is a useful tool for different sectors, including the media, civil society groups, policy makers and researchers at an academic level. It can also help organisations that represent different communities, minorities, and vulnerable groups.

They can use it as an advocacy tool when talking to policy makers, the media, and regulators.

Milica Pešić

Executive Director, MDI



The Media Diversity Index is the first of its kind and findings from the pilot stage highlight the significance of its specific focus compared with existing indexes on democracy and freedom of expression. This proactive process of developing a country database is ultimately far more important than the country ranking that the Index generates. It is a tool for identifying gaps in knowledge that need to be filled and identifying potential partners for filling them. For example, the pilot exposed a serious lack of data in some countries on media representation and recruitment of women, which in turn triggered contacts and offers of training to collect the relevant data as part of the periodic Global Media Monitoring Project ([GMMP](#)), also known as 'Who Makes the News?' Through coalitions and alliances, built through the processes of seeking and applying insights afforded by the Media Diversity Index, advocates for diversity can achieve a multiplier effect at a time of increasing polarisation coupled with devastating cuts in funding for work in this field.

Naomi Sakr

Team leader of the Media Diversity Index, Emeritus Professor of Media Policy at the University of Westminster, UK.

Project Highlights

2025 was a remarkable year for MDI, MDI Global (MDIG) and MDI Western Balkans (MDI WB) project work. We celebrated many major milestones, with the launch of several new projects, a focus on youth, innovation, and helping strengthen local media, among many other achievements. On a more reflective note, we bid farewell to Get The Trolls Out after 10 years of fighting religious discrimination.

CHASE



► Lead partner: MDIG

Responding to the challenges of tackling online gender-based hate speech in Cyprus, France, Greece and Italy

One of the highlights of the year for CHASE was the release of the **final version of its ICT tool** for the identification and analysis of gender-based hate speech in online media environments. The tool, which is now being deployed with media partners in Cyprus, France Italy and Greece to integrate into moderation workflows, will inform evidence-based recommendations for strengthening newsroom responses to gendered online violence.

The release was preceded by a two-month pilot testing phase, free online sessions on how to utilise the tool, and a co-creation lab in July to present the ICT tool to stakeholders.

The consortium also organised Open Days across all partner countries to present the tool to journalists, policymakers, civil society organisations, and the public.



A pivotal Training of Trainers took place in Cyprus in October where project partners received a two-day intensive programme to enable them to train national-level media professionals. The trainings were then rolled out in December in all partner countries, with media professionals trained on the tool's functionalities and potential applications in editorial and moderation workflows. The training will continue into 2026.

High Praise

CHASE was formally recognised as a 'best practice' by the European Commission in Cyprus, underscoring the project's innovative contributions to combating online hate and strengthened its visibility and credibility across the European media Landscape.



LIMENET

LOCAL INNOVATIVE MEDIA IN EUROPE NETWORK

LIMENET

- ▶ **Lead coordinator: MDIG**
- ▶ **Project partner: MDI WB**

Enhancing local and community media in Europe

LIMENet awarded grants to local and independent media outlets and journalists in Belgium, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Serbia for innovative and creative projects to support media viability and resilience. A total of 33 grants have been awarded in the five countries, supporting 39 organisations. Those projects are now underway, with results due in 2026.

They include:

- Collaborations between media, non-profits and universities to expand youth audiences and produce a series on health.
- The development of an innovative content production system to increase audience reach by repurposing original content in different formats.
- The inclusion of Roma youth in covering pressing yet underreported issues to strengthen investigative community journalism.

- A 10-episode multimedia podcast series that brings unapologetically queer storytelling and critical political insight, featuring grassroots voices.
- A game environment and workshops allowing youth to dive into algorithms, echo chambers, and polarisation while experimenting with how different roles influence their media presence.
- A cross-border partnership to produce multi-lingual coverage on shared regional issues.
- The creation of engaging multimedia content that highlights the real-life benefits of European integration while pushing back against dis-information.

A public call for proposals was launched in August, attracting around 150 applications. The grants of between 16,000 and 20,000 euros cover up to 80% of eligible project costs, with a required 20% co-financing contribution from the applicant.

Innovation Fair

The LIMENet Media Innovation Fair in Budapest in March brought together 100 media professionals from six project countries and 15 other countries, for workshops on inclusive journalism and thought-provoking panels tackling the pressing challenges facing local media today. The event underscored what many in the sector already know: there is no silver bullet to save journalism, but there is strength in collective experience and innovation.





REPORTING DIVERSITY NETWORK

- ▶ Lead partner: MDI WB
- ▶ Partner: MDIG

Influencing media representation of ethnicity, religion and gender in the Western Balkans

RDN produced 13 research reports in 2025, focused on gendered disinformation and hate speech in the region.

Gendered disinformation

Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans led regional research on gendered disinformation in the Western Balkans through data collected from Reporting Diversity Monitoring and looking at fact-checking portals. Reports on [North Macedonia](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Kosovo](#), [Albania](#), [Montenegro](#), and [Serbia](#) are available online.

Key findings:

- In **Albania**, irresponsible reporting, or the outright dismissal of survivors, exacerbates collective trauma and perpetuates a culture of silence, discouraging women from speaking out. The prevalence of gender disinformation, particularly in the political and public spheres, calls for urgent reform.
- In **Kosovo**, gender disinformation is a growing and intensifying phenomenon. It is not isolated but intersects with broader ideological, nationalist, and populist agendas that seek to maintain patriarchal control and suppress progressive change.
- Political figures, media outlets, online trolls, and organised misogynistic groups are key actors in producing and amplifying this disinformation.

- In **Montenegro**, a study of 18 examples found most cases involved the political participation and professional achievements of women, with the aim of shaming and portraying them as untrustworthy.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, gendered disinformation is deeply intertwined with the country's post-war political and media landscape, the persistence of patriarchal norms, weak regulatory frameworks, and external geopolitical influences. Slow progress in aligning the country's legal framework with European regulations leaves significant gaps in tackling online gender-based attacks.
- In **Serbia**, gendered disinformation serves as a political tool to target women, with narratives actively undermining efforts for equal rights, with many focusing on health hoaxes. Women in politics are routinely discredited, portrayed as incompetent and morally corrupt based on sexist tropes.
- In **North Macedonia**, gender disinformation has evolved from just a media problem to a security risk and more effective mechanisms to combat misinformation and foster informed, respectful dialogue are needed.



Media Monitoring Reports

The project also published a series of [Media Monitoring Reports](#) for the Western Balkans countries. They summarise key narratives and perpetrators of hate speech, showing patterns and key triggers of polarisation. The findings were presented and discussed at a regional conference in Belgrade in September.

Key findings:

- On a regional level, a total of **611 cases of hateful and harmful speech** were recorded during the reporting period (January 2024 to June 2025).
- Ethnicity and gender remain the **two most targeted identities**.
- **Ethnic hate continues to dominate** in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, and North Macedonia.
- **Ethnic hate** was recorded in more than half of all BiH cases (53.57%).
- In contrast, **gender-based hate speech** prevailed in Albania (46.36%), making up almost half of all recorded cases.
- **Gender-based hate speech** was strongly present in Kosovo, where it often intersects with ethnic targeting.
- Serbia stood out for an **intensified wave of political targeting**.
- **Hate against sexual minorities** declined regionally.
- **Targeting journalists** rose significantly, in both frequency and intensity.
- **The main generators of hate speech were private persons** (29.96%), namely users on social media platforms or anonymous commentators spreading hate speech on online portals.



In April, Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans along with partners in Reporting Diversity Network opened a call for project proposals aiming to counter hate speech and improve representation of diversity. 230 applied, with 30 successful, including five in each of the Western Balkan countries.

Breaking Words, Building Bridges

MDI Western Balkans hosted a two-day regional conference, *Breaking Words, Building Bridges: Responses to Polarisation in the Western Balkans* in Belgrade in September, where journalists, media experts, and civil society representatives from across the region gathered to confront the growing challenges of hate speech, disinformation, and political divides.

The [panel](#), *Taming the Beast: Social Media Platforms - Regulating Content*, moderated by MDI Executive Director Milica Pešić, examined the impact of European regulations on Big Tech. The panel, with award-winning Croatian journalist and founder of the Europe Future Centre Ivana Dragičević, media expert and member of MDI's Media Diversity Research Centre Advisory Board Dr Snježana Milivojević, and Thomas

Hughes, the CEO of Appeals Centre Europe, explored the challenges of removing harmful content from major social media platforms. The panel examined the European Union's "troika" of digital laws - the Digital Services Act (DSA), Digital Markets Act (DMA), and European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) - highlighting why consistent enforcement matters for citizens, media, and democracy.

The conference also featured sessions with RDN's latest media-monitoring findings, an exhibition on sexist and misogynist media discourse, and an interactive workshop on detecting scapegoating narratives and linguistic tools.





PODCAST

► Partner: MDIG

Enhancing digital literacy and empowering young people by leveraging the power of podcasting

The two-year project which provides non-formal education opportunities that foster creativity, digital skills, and social engagement launched in January 2025.

What youth think about podcasting

In order to frame project activities on data, the project's first activity was to conduct a [survey](#). It found:

- 72% of young people showed clear interest in learning how to create their own podcasts.
- 89% stated that creating podcasts could boost their confidence in speaking and expressing themselves.
- Podcasts are considered safe spaces.
- 60% believe podcasts give youth a voice.
- They expressed a strong desire to talk about mental health, social inclusion, diversity, entrepreneurship, and personal stories.

Training and Resources

PODcast held training in Belgrade in November for 24 young people and youth workers from six European countries. The project has also produced guidelines, including [Start Your Podcast](#) - a practical step-by-step tools to record, edit and share a podcast.



YOU(th) CARE FOR CHANGE

► Partners: MDIG, MDI WB

Empowering and mobilising the next generation of Global Caretakers for a shared, sustainable Euro-Mediterranean future

As part of the YOU(th) CARE or Change project, MDIG organised a panel [discussion](#), “Beyond the Framing: Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in Media”, in November with Sabine Panet, editor-in-chief of Axelle Magazine, and writer and editor Shahed Ezaydi. The speakers explored the importance of intersectionality in storytelling, the power of media narratives in shaping social norms and the responsibility of journalists to challenge rather than reinforce stereotypes.

The project call for sub-granting to support ideas related to social and ecological issues received 112 project proposals, with a total of 30 grants awarded. In Serbia and Belgium, 5 projects were sub-granted running for a maximum of 12 months. They include providing safe LGBTQI+ spaces, strengthening diversity of student representation, and running workshops for safe spaces to empower students and teachers to co-create inclusive school environments through youth-led, participatory education in empathy.



YOUth CARE FOR CHANGE



MDI WB organised a [No Pride in Genocide](#) film screening in Belgrade in September, bringing together queer artists from Palestine, the diaspora, and around the world, emphasising the interconnectedness of struggles for justice, linking the fight against occupation with the fight against homophobia, transphobia, racism, misogyny, and exploitation, and creating a space for solidarity.

As student-led protests developed into a year-long nationwide movement for justice and accountability in Serbia, MDI WB held a panel discussion [“On the Frontlines of the Movement: Student Organizing and the Deconstruction of Misogyny in the Media”](#). The event brought together students and professors to share experiences from student-led movements and participatory civic engagement, with the panel also addressing media misogyny and specific forms of (media) violence targeting young women.

PROJECTS THAT WRAPPED UP IN 2025

▶ Get the Trolls Out!

Phase V

December 2023 - April 2025

▶ Youth in Western Balkans - a Virtual Postcard

December 2022 - November 2025

▶ YoCoJoin

September 2023 - August 2025

▶ Migravoice

January 2024 - June 2025

▶ Salam Online

Oct 2022 - July 2027
(Finished in 2025 due to US funding cuts)



GET THE TROLLS OUT

▶ Lead Partner: MDI

Phase V: December 2023 - April 2025

Combating discrimination and intolerance based on religious grounds in Europe

GTTO slowly drew to a close at the end of April 2025, wrapping up 10 years of work in the field of combatting religious discrimination in the European media sphere. The project leaves behind a strong legacy: a wealth of resources, guides, campaigns, and toolkits for young people, media professionals, civil society organisations and educators. All materials remain freely available on the project's [website](#), ensuring the work continues to inspire and support others well beyond the project's lifetime.

Recognition and praise

GTTO's work was recognised in a 2025 OSCE [report](#) on anti-Christian hate crimes, as an example of 'good practice'. The report highlighted the pivotal role both traditional media and social media platforms play in raising awareness about the nature and impact of intolerance against Christians.

Project highlights:

- Over 5 years, a total of 2,080 incidents were identified - 1,000 on news media and blogs, and 1,080 on social media.
- Most incidents were anti-Muslim (47%) and antisemitic (37%). Anti-Christian totalled 5%, while 11% was made of anti-migrant incidents that had underlying anti-religious connotations and a couple against other religions.
- The programme processed a total of 263 complaints resulting in success at persuading the media to take action and responsibility over the comment section on their websites. Media removed images that were inappropriate or misleading, and social media operators took down videos that spread hate.
- A total of 109 in-depth articles were produced and disseminated.
- GTTO also produced monthly media monitoring highlights, Troll of the Month, 51 podcasts, 728 graphic visuals (images), 92 videos, research, and hosted 6 workshops and 3 panel discussions.
- 7 manuals and reports were published including one on the coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict.
- GTTO worked closely with Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities, building spaces online where people come for help, to learn and to get tools to fight back against hate.



YOUTH IN WESTERN BALKANS - A VIRTUAL POSTCARD

► **Lead Partner: MDI WB**

December 2022 - November 2025

Increasing intercultural and media literacy competences of youth in North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina

The project worked with a total of 2,416 youth, including 1,607 high school participants and 809 other students.

Young people from Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina met in Montenegro in June for a summer camp on media and information literacy and intercultural dialogue organised by MDI WB. They explored topics including the deconstruction of stereotypes, and countering harmful narratives in the media as a precondition for intercultural dialogue and understanding.

The final conference for the Youth in Western Balkans - A Virtual Postcard project titled "Youth building bridges: Media literacy, solidarity and intercultural dialogue in the Western Balkans" was held in October in Belgrade in cooperation with YOU(th) CARE. It featured panel discussions on MIL as a tool of intercultural dialogue in a time of protests and navigating intersectional identities.

MDI WB awarded young people for their multi-media content production at the final conference. Along with one regional award, there were four national awards (for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) for best content on intercultural dialogue.



YOOCOJOIN

► **Partners: MDI WB, MDIG**

1 September 2023 - 31 August 2025

Intensifying efforts towards more inclusive and engaging journalism: introducing youth community reporters within local news media outlets

The final year of the project produced events, workshops, training and a workbook.

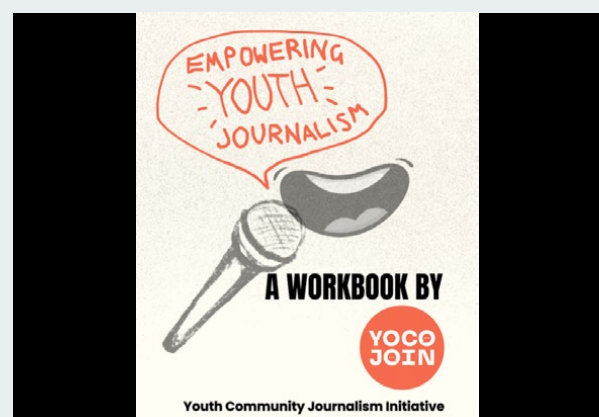
In May, YoCoJoin brought together 67 journalists, mentors, media professionals, and changemakers from across Europe at the Brussels event "[Young Community Journalists: Revitalising Local Media in Europe](#)". During the full day of discussions, workshops, and youth-led presentations, panels explored the challenges of local journalism, including news deserts, structural vulnerabilities, and the need for EU-level support. Workshops centred on the role of young journalists in local newsrooms. A highlight of the event was a showcase panel where young YoCoJoin reporters presented their stories.

Media Diversity Institute Global trained 10 young journalists on the importance of youth community journalism and continued mentoring six of them as they developed stories closely connected to their values, backgrounds, the challenges their communities face, and their motivation to create small but meaningful change. The stories covered a range of topics including [the impact of Russian influence on Georgia's democratic path toward the EU](#), [the challenges refugees face within Belgium's asylum system](#) and [why homelessness sector needs to listen to women with lived experience](#).

Reimagining local news with youth YoCoJoin held the workshop "Reimagining local news with youth" at the Voices - European Festival of Journalism and Media Freedom in Croatia in March, talking about best practices for engaging and empowering young people in community media.

Key lessons in a workbook

Key lessons of the 24-month project can be found in the [YoCoJoin Workbook: Empowering Youth in Local Journalism](#). It offers practical methods for engaging and training youth in journalism, tools and templates for collaborative content production, real-world examples from young reporters and mentors, and strategies to make youth community journalism sustainable in diverse contexts. The Workbook is aimed at local media organisations, educators, and youth workers.



SALAM ONLINE

► Lead Partner: MDI

1 Oct 2022 - 31 July 2027

(Finished in 2025 due to US funding cuts)

Fighting hate speech against vulnerable groups in MENA

With a mission to document and counter religious intolerance and hold digital platforms and state actors accountable, the Salam Online project was conceived in 2022 in response to a growing tide of religious intolerance and incitement in digital spaces across Egypt and Iran.

In a complex and often volatile regional context, the project provided a critical platform for surfacing marginalised narratives, equipping grassroots monitors, and building cross-border resilience among civil society actors in Egypt, Iran, and the broader MENA region. It conducted continuous monitoring of hate speech in Arabic and Farsi across major platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Telegram, and Instagram.

Across the duration of the project, the team documented:

- More than 5,408,844 instances of hate speech in Egypt and the broader MENA region.
- 2,598,272 instances of hate speech in Iran.
- There was a marked surge in instances after October 7, 2023.
- In Iran, the project recorded 15,542 incidents where hate speech was explicitly or implicitly linked to state actors. In Egypt, 12 incidents were identified, reflecting a more subtle pattern of state-adjacent tolerance or passive endorsement.
- The monitoring extended beyond antisemitism to include hate targeting Shia, Christians, Baha'is, and Sunnis.

The project:

- Trained a total of 111 defenders across both countries.
- Online training workshops for journalists reached 2,082 individuals - 1,623 from Egypt and the broader MENA region, 459 from Iran
- Produced a total of 910 media outputs - 489 in Arabic and 421 in Farsi - across formats including articles, videos, podcasts, memes, explainers, and social media campaigns, reaching an estimated 18 million people.
- In total, content was re-shared by external platforms 6,634 times - 1,880 in Egypt and 4,754 in Iran.
- Supported the publication of monthly reports documenting the most egregious offenders, hate speech instigators, and discriminatory campaigns across Egypt and Iran. These outputs served as critical tools in naming and shaming high-frequency inciters, tracking narrative shifts, and raising public awareness.
- Supported the development and publication of 18 Arabic and at least 20 Farsi learning resources, equipping journalists, digital content creators, and civil society actors with tools to counter hate speech and promote inclusive narratives.
- Delivered three documented advocacy campaigns aimed to hold media actors accountable for inciting content or for tolerating violations of journalistic standards.
- The project engaged over 30 civil society actors, including regional partners like No to Antisemitism, Freedom House, and the Shirin Ebadi Foundation, helping localise counter-narrative strategies.

MIGRAVOICE

► Partner: MDIG

January 2024 - June 2025

Fostering a more representative European media

MigraVoice and The London Story in the Netherlands hosted a two-day bootcamp for journalists at the Hague with the help of MDI Global, to develop storytelling, interview techniques and provide hands-on guidance on pitching stories. MDIG's Luc Steinberg gave a workshop on inclusive interviewing techniques.



migravoice



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for journalists

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NEW PROJECTS

MLADI IN DEFENCE OF FACTS

► **Project lead: MDI WB**

1 September 2025 - 30 April 2026

Empowering youth

The project aims to empower young people to recognise and critically analyse mis-, dis-, and malinformation, as well as harmful narratives that influence public discourse and the perception of social issues in local communities.

The project will focus on developing competencies for media literacy and critical thinking, which are key prerequisites for active civic participation, especially in societies facing polarisation and the manipulation of media content.

The project's goal is to contribute to the creation of more resilient local communities, which are capable of recognising and responding to harmful narratives and misinformation. Young people trained through project activities will be able to initiate socially engaged campaigns, promote accurate information ecosystems and encourage critical thinking among peers and the wider population.

MINDISHIELD

► **Partner: MDIG**

October 2025 - October 2027

Combatting minority-related disinformation

The project, which officially kicked off on 12 November in Athens will combat minority-related disinformation through innovative inoculation and pre-bunking methods, targeting ethnic minorities, community leaders, and social support professionals. The 24-month project bring together six EU partners from Greece, Belgium, Cyprus, France, and Italy and coordinated by Symplexis.

INFOFACTO

► **Partner: MDI WB**

3 November 2025 - 2 November 2027

Youth-centred media literacy

InfoFacto will help adolescents manage rapidly evolving media environments, by assessing digital content, engaging with diverse perspectives, and navigating AI-driven misinformation. Vulnerable and marginalised communities, including disadvantaged youth, rural populations, and minorities at risk of information manipulation, are being prioritised.

Although the focus is on youth, educators, parents, journalists, and researchers who play a key role in fostering media literacy will be offered targeted training to equip them with tools to support youth in critically engaging with digital content.

PARATA

► Partner: MDIG

1 September 2025 - 28 February 2027

Protecting at-risk activists from threats and attacks

PARATA aims to strengthen the resilience of CSOs and human rights defenders in Europe to threats, attacks, and other politically motivated attempts to curb the freedoms of assembly, association, and expression. It will prioritise protest movements that have been disproportionately targeted by repressive tactics, such as climate activists, campaigners for migrants' rights, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

The project will address the intersectional dimensions of the shrinking civic space by generating custom-made solutions to protect diverse groups.

Partners will:

- Utilise innovative monitoring mechanisms to identify examples of successful safeguarding measures.
- Collate and curate a pan-European database of protection resources tailored closely to beneficiary needs.
- Provide a training and networking programme that will help CSOs and HRDs to develop protection strategies.
- Develop national advocacy strategies and engage with policymakers at both the national and EU levels.

MDI Global, will enhance the ability of CSOs and HRDs to use influential media platforms to promote their "victories" and win public support for their democratic mission.

ACTIVE CITIZENS

► Partner: MDI WB

1 December 2025 - 30 September 2026

Empowering activism through the support of informal groups

Active Citizens aims to empower citizens to actively shape and improve their local communities with the support of small grants. The project will focus on strengthening up to 80 informal groups by building their capacities to develop clear, actionable initiatives and to mobilise community members around issues that matter to them and their communities.

MDI Western Balkans will directly support 10 informal groups.

The project also provides tailored support to locally led initiatives, helping informal groups improve the effectiveness, visibility, and impact of their actions. Through this approach, the project encourages active citizenship, fosters community engagement, and contributes to more accountable, inclusive, and democratic local environments.

Events

MDI led high-level discussions across the globe tackling key issues related to the media and diversity.

UNESCO MIL IN COLOMBIA

Is AI elevating astroturfers and sockpuppeteers at the expense of diversity, or can civic voices still set the agenda?

MDI Executive Director Milica Pešić moderated MDI's [panel discussion](#) at UNESCO's annual Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Week in October. The session explored the suitability of educational programmes to keep up with the rapid development of AI as well as the readiness of new and existing regulatory structures to empower individuals to engage with AI-driven content critically.

Speakers:

- ▶ **Thomas Hughes**
Executive Director, Appeals Centre Europe.
- ▶ **Jamie Abello Banfi**
Director General, Fundación Gabo.
- ▶ **Sandra Acero**
Programme Manager, CIVIX Colombia.
- ▶ **Divina Frau-Meigs**
Professor at Sorbonne Nouvelle University, UNESCO Chair Savoir Devenir

INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM FESTIVAL, PERUGIA

"Open season on the oppressed: can diversity survive?"

MDI hosted a standout [session](#) at the festival in April, moderated by Milica Pešić, which examined the tension between freedom of speech and algorithmic control, the erosion of trust in journalism, and the responsibility of media professionals to speak truth to power, rather than echo it.

Speakers:

- ▶ **Gary Younge**
Award-winning journalist, author, and professor of sociology at the University of Manchester.
- ▶ **Verica Rupar**
Professor of Journalism, former Chair of the World Journalism Education Council, and long-time academic advisor to MDI.
- ▶ **Miazia Schueler**
Researcher at AI Forensics. Her work explores algorithmic injustice through a decolonial Black feminist lens.

Side event

MDIG hosted a side event at Perugia, exploring the role of the MigraVoice project in promoting diverse representation in European media. Journalists involved in the project shared their experiences and the session featured stories from the MigraVoice Magazine, produced by the MigraVoice Pop-Up Newsroom, which featured 15 journalists with migration backgrounds who highlighted underreported perspectives.

OTHER PANELS, EVENTS AND APPEARANCES

► IPI World Congress

MDI was proud to be a supporting partner of the 2025 IPI World Congress and Media

Innovation Festival in Vienna in October, which gathered leading journalists, editors, and media innovators to discuss the future of free and independent media. MDI Global presented the LIMENet project at the event.

► World Journalism Education Congress

Milica Pešić chaired a syndicate at the 7th World Journalism Education Congress in San Francisco in August titled: Diversity, Equality and Inclusivity in a Diverse and Polarised World with Anne Leppäjärvi, President EJTA (expert) and Cristina Nistor, Board Member EJTA (rapporteur). They answered the question: What are the most striking needs for journalism educators working with inclusive journalism in 2025?

► Global Media Forum

Milica spoke about the benefits of inclusive and diverse discussions in the media on the panel "*Breaking barriers – how to make journalistic products more inclusive*" at DW's Global Media Forum in July.

► Media Democracy Festival

In May, Milica joined a panel discussion "Oligarchs Inc. Who Owns the UK Media?" at the Media Democracy Festival in London, where she launched the Media Diversity Index for the UK.

► 'Coming Clean' book launch

MDI, in collaboration with the Centre for Law, Democracy, and Society at Queen Mary University of London, hosted the official **book launch** of *Coming Clean: The Rise of Critical Theory and the Future of the Left*, by Professor Eric Heinze at the Frontline Club in London in May. The event included a conversation between Professor Heinze, Dr. Edmundo Bracho- Polanco, Senior Lecturer at the University of Westminster's School of Media and Communication, and moderator BBC radio presenter Paul Henley.



Advocacy



Together with 50+ civil society organisations and experts, MDI signed a [letter](#) to President von der Leyen in September calling for **Europe to defend its digital sovereignty** in the face of renewed US attacks.



In August, MDI joined a coalition of 72 human rights and press freedom organisations [calling](#) on British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to secure the release of **Jimmy Lai** who had been in prison for over 1,680 days in Hong Kong and whose health was deteriorating.



In September, MDI WB organised, together with the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia and the Journalists' Association of Serbia, solidarity action outside the Government of the Republic of Serbia, [reading aloud the names of journalists killed in Gaza](#) to highlight support for Gazan colleagues and call for international media to be granted access to Gaza.



In October, MDI, MDIG and MDI WB joined more than 100 organisations to call on the European Parliament, the European Commission, and Member States to guarantee substantial and long-term EU funding and **investment for public interest media**. A joint letter, stress that independent journalism and public-interest media are essential for Europe's democracy, economy, and resilience against hybrid threats.

Leading the Conversation



MDI launched the podcast [Diversity Matters](#) in 2025 with an interview with award-winning journalist, author, and professor Gary Younge on the impact of President Trump's rollback of DEI. The aim of the monthly podcast, hosted by Tanya Sakzewski, MDI's Director of Communications, is to explore why diversity matters in media at a time when it's under attack globally.

Episodes include:

- **[Innovative solutions for local and independent media in Europe](#)** – inside the LIMENet project: Josh LaPorte, Project Manager at MDIG, explains the crisis facing local media in Europe – and how the LIMENet project is trying to change the story.
- **[Reporting Gaza: Safeguarding or Harming Journalists?](#)** Guest presenter Martin Gak speaks with fellow journalist Hanno Hauenstein to explore whether the way Gaza is being reported in Germany is putting journalists in danger.
- **[AI and Missing Voices: Surabhi Srivastava on Diversity, Ethics and Media Narratives](#)**: The Media Innovation Lead at RNW Media talks about the voices being sidelined in an era of AI.
- **[Gaza: Reporting without favour, but not without fear](#)**: Journalist and broadcaster Tim Sebastian talks about what it means to report on conflict with integrity, inclusion, and courage – even under immense pressure.
- **[Media Diversity Index](#)**: Prof. Naomi Sakr, lead researcher on the Media Diversity Index, explains how MDI's unique Index tracks media diversity across content, governance, newsroom culture, and access, and how it can be wielded to advocate for change.
- **[Media Bias and the New Pope](#)**: journalist and author Jean-Paul Marthoz unpacks how the media covers papal succession and why complexity matters.
- **[Echoes from Belgrade: Unheard protests and the power of media coverage](#)**: Vladimir Paskaljevic, award-winning Serbian Canadian film director, screenwriter, producer, and university teacher, unpacks the international coverage of the Serbian youth-led protests and whether youth were taken seriously by the media.
- **[Diversity under Attack](#)**: Gary Younge, award-winning author, columnist, broadcaster and professor of sociology at the University of Manchester, analyses the impact of President Trump's decision to axe DEI initiatives and what it means for the media.

DIVERSITY MATTERS THIS WEEK

A weekly roundup of media diversity news

Under the Diversity Matters brand, we launched a weekly round-up of news related to media and diversity for LinkedIn and Instagram, which is published every Friday to inform on what's been happening during the week.

Stories from around the world

- ▶ MDI posted 90 articles on its website in 2025.
- ▶ An increase of more than 30% on the previous year.
- ▶ 11 in collaboration with projects - 8 with YoCoJoin, others include CHASE, RDN, Migravoice.
- ▶ 32 written by MDI team members.

MDI covered stories from across the globe, from Peru, the US and Australia to Japan, Sudan and Lebanon.

These are just a few of the articles of note:

Britain's first trans judge, [Dr Victoria McCloud](#), wrote a powerful piece on the impact of April's Supreme Court ruling that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. "The UK's only openly trans judge (this author) resigned in 2024, stating that it was no longer possible to serve with dignity as a UK trans person, though the press offered other views, blaming trans people for causing it."

[Luc Steinberg](#), Head of Operations, MDI Global, explored what artificial intelligence means for diversity, what it will take to safeguard inclusive media, and why building global alliances matters more than ever.

[Mahsa Rahimi](#) answered the question of whether the location of a news outlet determines how it frames a global crisis by comparing Al Jazeera and Euronews coverage of the migration crisis in Europe.

And journalist in exile, [Lailuma Sadid](#) wrote about the struggle of refugee reporters to be heard.

OTHER NEWS

A special edition of the Central European Journal of Communication Media Freedom and Deliberative Democracy: Europe in a Comparative Perspective featured two articles related to MDI.

In an [interview](#), **Milica Pešić** explained the need for a straightforward approach to tackling issues and the importance of embracing diversity.

Tanya Sakzewski, Director of Communications, wrote an [article](#) advocating for the media to adopt a deliberative approach to help re-engage the general public and win back trust.

Aleksandar Đokić, Project Manager at Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans, won the second prize in the Socially Responsible Reportage category at the 30th International Reportage and Media Festival (INTERFER). “The [story](#) of Marina Adamović and her humanitarian mission has been recognised, supported and rewarded. Marina is an inspiration and an indicator of the strength of an individual in the middle of the system, and the possibility that her story reaches the wider public represents true value and an incentive for further engagement.” - Aleksandar.

Aleksandar also travelled to Finland and Estonia on a study visit examining the role of public media services in the protection and promotion of equality, the rights of minority and vulnerable groups, and challenges in preserving professional and responsible journalism. The visit follows his win of the 2024 Annual Media Awards for Tolerance at the competition of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in Serbia.

Christiana Warne joined the MDI Communications Team for a one-year internship. She is studying illustration at the University of Westminster, London.





Annual Report 2025

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