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20 Years of Networking for Independent Media Worldwide

The German Forum Media and Development 2025

The German Forum Media and Development

The Forum Media and Development is a network of institutions and individuals active in the field of media development cooperation. It serves as the German platform for the exchange of experiences, research and further elaboration of concepts. It facilitates the dialogue between media practitioners, development politics and the scientific community.

fome_

20 Years of Networking for Independent Media Worldwide

Twenty years ago, representatives from a handful of organisations involved in media development cooperation established the Forum Media and Development (fome). Some could draw on nearly 40 years of experience, some were newbies in the field of media development assistance. However, it was only three years earlier that all these actors had met for the first time to share information about their specific work and common challenges. After a few meetings and a jointly organised conference – known today as fome symposium – the founding members decided to collaborate more closely to sustain this exchange and their commitment to shared goals.

Meanwhile, 31 organisations and institutions from Germany and Switzerland have been forming a stable network for years. Instruments and focal points have evolved over the past 20 years; the shared goals and, consequently, the ongoing tasks have remained consistent for fome members:

- Learning from one another and from partners
- Coordination of joint action and collaboration
- Promotion of media support within development cooperation.

In fact, media development has gained a significantly stronger presence within German development assistance over the last decades. In the early years of fome's existence, media was one of several cross-cutting themes, for which four hours of the responsible staff member's time were allocated in the governmental administration. Currently, two staff members are responsible for media assistance within the BMZ – the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation. A fixed title has been established in the budget plan since 2015: 'Promotion of media, access to information, and freedom of expression in partner countries'. Over the years, this amount increased to €30 million. However, the sum was not increased in the fourth year, which ultimately signifies a slight decline, as personnel and material costs have risen during the same period.

The challenges in media assistance, however, increased over these 20 years. Digital media caused the breakdown of traditional funding business models, and especially local communication spaces are becoming more vulnerable. Never before have so many journalists faced such severe threats – being murdered in war zones, imprisoned by authoritarian regimes, and subjected to hate speech and open threats on social media. Digital media serve as tools of hybrid warfare, and the ways in which propaganda and misinformation influence democratic elections and societal debates have increased. AI will further boost the potential of deepfakes.

Therefore, combating disinformation remains a key focus of German media support. However, fighting disinformation also involves backing credible media organisations and making independent journalists as resilient as possible against various forms of attack. It also involves identifying the most effective ways of publishing and accessing information, as well as exploring the potential of AI in journalists' professional environments.

The most effective approaches to achieve this have been the subject of learning and discussion in the fome network during the last 20 years, and they will be explored within the fome network over the next 20 years.

Some of the member organisations featured in this brochure highlight one of their projects, which they implement with media professionals in the so-called Global South. The individual articles also demonstrate the diversity of the member organisations and their various areas of activity across different regions of the world.

Ultimately, they all work towards a common goal: empowering their media partners to establish a sustainable media environment in their countries and regions.

Sofie Jannusch, fome Coordinator
Germany, November 2025

The Voice of Palong: Building Bridges Between Rohingya and Bangladeshis

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In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, a unique community media program brings Rohingya refugees and the local host community together – to share information, foster dialogue, and build resilience.

BY ANDREA MARSHALL



'Palonger Hota' (The Voice of Palong) is a community media program co-produced by Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis in Cox's Bazar.

Run by the NGO Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) and supported by DW Akademie, it shares everyday stories, infotainment, and practical solutions – empowering marginalized voices, especially women, and fostering trust between communities often divided by mistrust.

When 22-year-old Khaleda Bibi enters the small recording room in Kutupalong camp, she brings more than her smartphone for recording. She brings stories – of resilience, recipes, and even football enthusiasts in the camps. As a Rohingya community reporter for 'Palonger Hota' (The Voice of Palong), she's part of a pioneering initiative that unites Rohingya refugees and local Bangladeshis to co-create media content that resonates across communities.

Broadcast weekly on the state radio service Bangladesh Betar, shared online, and narrowcast in camps and villages, 'Palonger Hota' is produced by Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) in cooperation with DW Akademie.

Initially launched to deliver essential information to refugees, the program has grown into a platform for constructive journalism – addressing issues like health, nutrition, domestic violence and trafficking, while highlighting shared experiences such as Eid celebrations and elephant encounters.

Since 2020, the initiative has expanded to include video content and live dialogue events. In a region where over a million Rohingya have sought refuge from persecution in Myanmar, tensions with host communities persist. 'Palonger Hota' offers a space for connection and understanding through storytelling.

Khaleda's journey into journalism wasn't straightforward. Like many Rohingya women, she needed her family's permission to work. Her segments focus on practical topics – from cyclone preparedness to hanging vegetable gardens – and also touch on sensitive issues such as child marriage. She sometimes shares poems or cooking tips, too, using storytelling to inform and inspire.

What makes the program unique is its diverse team of Rohingya and Bangladeshi reporters. Together, they explore common ground and shared challenges.

The editorial approach is rooted in constructive journalism and positive psychology – focusing not just on problems, but on solutions and empowerment. In a context often marked by despair, this perspective offers hope.

The team also hosts 'front-yard dialogues' and panel discussions, creating spaces for direct exchange. With around 70% of Rohingya – especially women – unable to read or write, audio and visual storytelling are essential. In 2024, women from both communities joined 'women dialogues' for the first time – a milestone in fostering mutual respect.

Funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the project has drawn international attention,

including a visit from the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

'Palonger Hota' demonstrates how community media can do more than inform – it can heal, empower, and connect.

The editorial approach is rooted in constructive journalism and positive psychology – focusing not just on problems, but on solutions and empowerment.

Project:
Displacement and Dialogue Asia – Information and dialogue for Rohingya refugees and host communities

Region:
Bangladesh

Partners:
DW Akademie and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA)



Reliable News : A Vehicle for Social Cohesion and Peace

Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL), a Fondation Hirondelle media in Central African Republic (CAR).

BY SACHA MEUTER AND THERESE GONNIER

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Created in 2000 by Fondation Hirondelle, Radio Ndeke Luka is the most listened-to radio station in the Central African Republic. For 25 years, RNL has been aiming to fulfil a public service role, providing access to reliable and independent information. In a media environment affected by geopolitical manipulation and misinformation, RNL broadcasts live 24/7 in French and Sango through 13 transmitters and partnerships with 18 community radio stations. It is available on Canal+ Afrique, social media platforms, and its website.

"About a month ago, a rumor circulated claiming that rebels had come out in Bangui. This false news caused widespread panic. It was only after listening to Radio Ndeke Luka that we learned it was just an unfounded rumor."

Anne Zombeti, Zako 3 district's leader – Bangui

Project:
Radio Ndeke Luka

Region:
Central African Republic

Partner:
Fondation Hirondelle



The CAR is one of the world's most fragile environments: weak penetration by the central government across much of the territory, inter-community conflicts, economic insecurity and population displacement. In this context, misinformation poses major challenges and RNL plays a crucial role by providing 24/7 access throughout the country to reliable political, social, and economic information. In a fragmented country lacking public services, RNL connects the capital and the regions by working closely with communities, relying on professional local journalists and correspondents.

Daily news, debates, educational and entertainment shows, music, and magazines: its programs, produced by a team of around 100 employees, target all the citizens of CAR, regardless of gender, age, or socioeconomic status. RNL also provides training and technical support to a network of local media partners and serves as a training ground for young apprentice journalists in its studio in Bangui. Adopting an inclusive and educational approach, RNL covers topics of local and national importance including humanitarian issues related to security, health or environmental threats.

RNL's aim is to fight rumours by providing higher-quality information to a broad audience. In a time of widespread distrust in state institutions, RNL stands out as a dependable source of information and a platform for community members to share their

concerns. According to the latest audience survey¹, listeners' trust in RNL remains high: in a media environment where radio is the most popular means of information², 86% consider RNL their primary and most trusted source of information during events in CAR.

A 2025 study by the University of St. Gallen confirmed that this trust is linked to RNL's ability to deliver reliable, objective, and high-quality information that is relevant to the community's needs. RNL plays a vital social role, often resolving issues for its listeners. In just one month (August 2025), 26 missing children were brought to the station and reunited with their families.

A 2024 evaluation (Bartolli, Ivan) found that RNL also contributes to greater social cohesion, by dispelling rumours, encouraging people to verify information they hear about others, representing different communities and perspectives on air, and encouraging dialogue between groups through community debate programmes.

¹ This audience study was conducted in two waves between 2022 and 2024, by IMMAR, on a sample of 4,705 individuals in six districts of the CAR. https://www.hirondelle.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/RNL_Etude-daudience_2022_24_finale_ENG.pdf

² Radio remains the most popular way of getting information, ahead of television, in CAR, with 86% of the population aged 15 and over having access to radio in their household, while only 26% had access to a smartphone according to the IMMAR audience survey (2022-2024). 23% of the population uses social media every day, while 75% listens to the radio. https://www.hirondelle.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/RNL_Etude-daudience_2022_24_finale_ENG.pdf

³ For more information on this impact study, see: <https://www.hirondelle.org/en/bekou-study-the-impact-of-radio-ndeke-luka-before-and-after-its-launch-in-three-remote-regions-of-car>

Key figures 2025



18 partner
radio
stations



3,2 million
weekly
listeners
(2024)



120 media
professionals
trained



53'000
followers on
social media



2 broadcast
languages



8'790
broadcast
hours



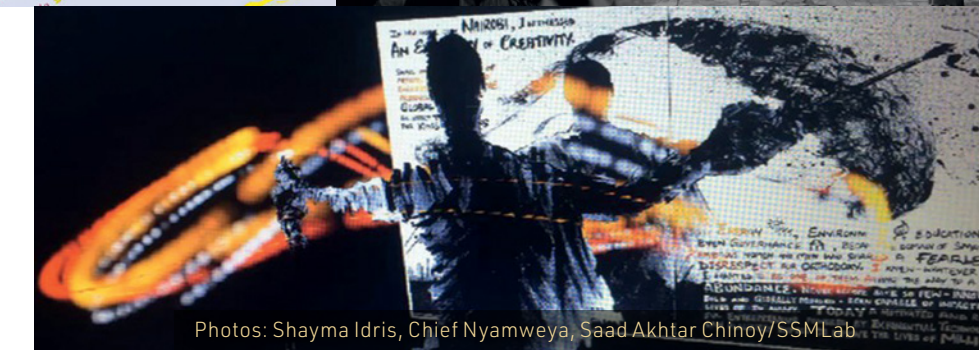
Photos: Gwenn Dubourthoumieu / Fondation Hirondelle

The promotion of freedom is inherently linked to global media and technological factors.

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The experience of the South-South Media Lab Collaboration (SSMLab) involves connecting media professionals and activists across East Africa and South East Asia.

BY AGAZIT ABATE



Photos: Shayma Idris, Chief Nyamweya, Saad Akhtar Chinoi/SSMLab

The SSMLab was designed to introduce new formats of collaboration among 16 young media professionals and 16 host organisations in 10 countries, fostering discourse through the initiation of working relationships across borders in the form of a South-South co-creation process.

The one-year program focused on open and free media technologies to address issues of press freedom and peace, media art, and local cultural work in new, creative, experimental, and interdisciplinary ways through digital means.

When the East-African Media Lab Collaboration evolved into the South-South Media Lab Collaboration, the primary aim of creating spaces for partnerships among media professionals, activists, and innovators was reinforced and expanded in both scope and scale. This program has always been driven by a desire to offer an alternative to the dominant model of fellowships and cooperation based on global south to global north exchange. We were excited to extend the programme from East Africa to a South-South co-creation process between East Africa and South East Asia.

The SSMLab fellows cohort was made up of multi-media digital activists, including journalists, visual artists, data storytellers, photographers, filmmakers, open source advocates, culture workers and feminist innovators. The host organizations work in policy advocacy, community radio, social entrepreneurship, children's literacy, open data, tech innovations, virtual and augmented reality, educational innovation, and more.

Together, fellows with their host organizations, created projects that ranged from the documentation of feminist activism in Uganda to the creation of a collaborative database system prototype on extractive mining, oil and gas in Kenya and Cambodia, a photo exhibit exploring urban transformation and displacement in Addis Ababa to an augmented reality app for a graphic novel on how to unlock creative potential, a

remote metering system prototype collecting environmental data to a short film about a beekeeper in a social entrepreneurship program in the Nakivale refugee camp, and workshops and trainings on youth storytelling, AR and 360VR, social media strategy, and open source data and data journalism.

The project focused especially on critically and reflectively examining political and social issues. The promotion of freedom was inherently linked to the media-technological aspects of the initiative.

It has been truly inspiring to witness these 16 collaborations at work and to be part of a community of committed individuals who create and critique, collaborate and teach for a better, innovative and just world.

The South-South Media Lab was a collaboration between icebauhaus (Germany), common room (Indonesia) and iceaddis (Ethiopia), made possible with funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Gustaff H. Iskandar, common room, Indonesia:

We have explored hard- and software, hacking and experimentation, journalism and storytelling, as well as media empowerment – all under the shadow of the geo-political dynamics that both separate and connect the Asian and African continents in all of their utopian and dystopian complexities.

Project:
South-South Media Lab Collaboration

Region:
East Africa and
South East Asia

Partners:
iceaddis, common room
foundation and icebauhaus



Data Journalism – Central Asia's Quest for Evidence-Based Reporting 8

Using data journalism and open data to combat fake news, poverty and environmental destruction for sustainable development.

BY ALTYNAI MAMBETOVA AND DR. ULRIKE BUTMALOIU



Following the successful establishment of the School of Data (SOD) in 2017, IDEM and the SOD have carried out various projects to professionalize independent reporting through the application of data journalism in Central Asia.

Alongside further education and training, participants also received production cost support to create data-based articles.

The training courses and the resulting data-based reporting focused on topics such as environmental degradation, poverty, various aspects of the SDGs and fake news in connection with science and health. In particular, the use of open data was encouraged. This contributed significantly to strengthening both the credibility and safety of the journalists.

How do you report the truth when facts are concealed? Since 2017, the School of Data Kyrgyzstan, supported by IDEM, has been answering this question across Central Asia, where transparency and press freedom remain fragile.

In Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, data journalism has emerged as a critical tool for credible reporting, investigative work, and rebuilding public trust in media.

From Hackathon to Movement

It began with a 48-hour challenge. Fifty journalists, programmers, designers, and activists gathered for the 'Hack Poverty' hackathon in Bishkek, the first of its kind in Central Asia. Their mission: use data to expose inequality, investigate migration, public sector and education gaps, and propose real solutions. The hackathon ignited a nationwide network of data journalists. Major outlets like Kloop Media, Kaktus Media, and 24.kg established dedicated data desks. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these teams exposed healthcare failures and challenged official statistics. Their investigations reached over 30,000 readers, were cited by politicians, and sparked public debate.

The impact extended well beyond newsrooms. Through training programs, mentorship, and community platforms like Media Tootoo and DataSreda meetups, over 300 journalists, lecturers, and activists learned data analysis, visualization, and investigative techniques.

The School of Data Kyrgyzstan evolved into a hub where data enthusiasts tackle social inequality with evidence. Its courses, digital tools, and open-data platforms now serve media organizations, NGOs, and universities across the region. Universities joined the transformation, and integrated data journalism into their curricula. Two practical handbooks were published, making data journalism accessible across country.

Expanding Across Central Asia

Following the rise of open data in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan took its first steps into data journalism in 2019. The School of Data and IDEM, partnering with the Modern Journalism Development Center in Tashkent, trained journalists emerging from years of state control in statistical analysis, open sources, and clear visualization.

The impact was immediate: eleven data-driven investigations revealed women's rights violations, domestic violence, environmental destruction, and migration challenges. Despite the risks of public criticism, these stories reached over 35,000 readers and spread widely on social media. New networks formed between journalists, universities, and institutions – connections that continue to open access to reliable data. University trainings laid the groundwork for integrating data journalism into higher education, culminating in the textbook 'Writing about Data'.

The momentum extended to Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. What started as isolated workshops grew into a movement. Journalists in remote regions now work with colleagues in the capital, sharing investigations and establishing support networks. In Central Asia, access to data remains inconsistent, and politically restricted, particularly regarding governance, poverty, and the environment.

Political pressure compounds the problem. Uzbek journalists risk sanctions for questioning official figures, while in Kyrgyzstan authorities exploit disinformation and wartime rhetoric to justify media crackdowns. Shrinking donors support further strain on independent media.

Data journalism requires open data, skills, and sustainable funding. The next steps: improve data access, localize tools, protect journalists, and strengthen cross-border cooperation.

Sometimes getting the data takes longer than analyzing it. But without data, everything remains just opinion.

Project:
Professionalization of independent reporting through data journalistic formats

Region:
Central Asia

Partners:
School of Data
Kyrgyzstan and IDEM



The East Africa Radio Service (EARS)

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Advancing Revenues for Local Radios Across Uganda and East Africa.

BY DOUGLAS MUTUMBA

Established in 2019 by MiCT in partnership with the Uganda Radio Network, the East Africa Radio Service (EARS) aims to strengthen the viability of local radio stations in Uganda by improving their access to the national advertising market.

EARS aggregates independent radio stations into national and regional advertising packages, offering simplified access for advertisers to reach millions of listeners across linguistic, geographic, and demographic boundaries. Through its services, over 180 radio stations across Uganda have significantly and sustainably increased their advertising revenues.

Project:
East Africa Radio Service (EARS)

Region:
East Africa

Partners:
EARS and MiCT



Radio remains the most preferred and widely accessed medium across Uganda and the East African region. Despite their vital role in social and economic development, most of Uganda's nearly 300 local radio stations struggle financially. This is largely due to their limited access to media planning agencies and advertisers, who tend to work with large national broadcasters.

As a result, small local radio stations often rely heavily on donations and grants, making them vulnerable to manipulation, self-censorship, and political influence. In recent years, many struggling stations have been taken over by religious organizations, contributing to a growing trend of religious conservatism, including homophobia, and reinforcing patriarchal social structures.

EARS addresses these challenges by aggregating advertising space from smaller stations, enabling them to pool their capacities and secure better advertising deals collectively. The platform connects national and international advertisers to vast rural audiences, ensuring that local stations receive fair and sustainable compensation.

Local radio stations are often excluded from audience research, which forms the basis for advertising rate cards. To bridge this gap, EARS has supported professional audience research in areas outside major urban centers. Today, all EARS partner stations combined reach a larger audience than any single

radio station in Uganda. Since 2019, EARS has distributed approximately USD 1 million annually in additional revenue to its network members.

The EARS Network in Uganda covers over 70% of the country's population, enabling commercial brands, public service providers, and both national and international organizations to engage with new audiences across rural Uganda. Through this infrastructure, EARS has also facilitated the dissemination of critical public service campaigns related to elections, health, and education. During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, EARS played a crucial role in distributing essential health information weekly to refugee camps, remote areas, and vulnerable communities.

In addition to commercial services, EARS provides its partner stations with access to high-quality programming and public-interest content. A key example is the Climate Reporting in East African Media initiative, implemented in partnership with MiCT and JESE. This project has amplified climate journalism across Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. Through EARS partner stations, cross-border climate stories are broadcast in local languages – enabling communities, particularly those with limited access to other media, to participate in climate-related discussions. The initiative has not only raised awareness but also strengthened the editorial capacity of partner stations in environmental journalism.

By equipping under-resourced stations with training, content, and commercial opportunities, EARS directly contributes to the growth, resilience, and relevance of community media in Uganda. Currently, more than 180 radio stations have diversified their revenue streams and increased their advertising income through the EARS platform – allowing them to focus on meaningful local issues and expand their audience reach.

EARS is now replicating its model in neighboring countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, and South Sudan.

The platform connects national and international advertisers to vast rural audiences, ensuring that local stations receive fair and sustainable compensation.



Photos: East Africa Radio Service

Europe-Ukraine Desk: Strengthening Coverage Through Collaboration

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BY ANTONINA RYBKA

The Europe-Ukraine Desk has established a network of media professionals from Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Ukraine with the aim of strengthening quality reporting on Ukraine in the European press beyond the war lens.

Through fellowships, study visits, grants, curated press reviews, events in Kyiv, and a podcast, it has deepened expertise, enhanced coverage, created connections and provided a vital space for exchange on international reporting on Ukraine.

Radio remains the most preferred and widely accessed medium across Uganda and the East African region. Despite their vital role in social and Launched in early 2023 as an urgent response to the need for reliable coverage of Ukraine and stronger Ukrainian voices to counter Russian disinformation, the Europe-Ukraine Desk grew into a vibrant space for cross-border collaboration. It brought Ukraine into the professional focus of journalists from seven countries and created lasting links between media communities across Europe.

In total, 78 journalists participated in the fellowship programme. EU journalists travelled to Kyiv for in-depth study visits, two of which took place just before the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion. These visits provided many journalists and editors, some of whom had never or only rarely been to Ukraine, with a rare opportunity to see with their own eyes what everyday life in the capital looks like today. Simultaneously, Ukrainian colleagues embarked on study trips to Berlin, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Budapest, Sofia, and Brussels, meeting editors, experts, and politicians to gain a better understanding of how Ukraine is portrayed and discussed within diverse cultural and political contexts.

The Europe-Ukraine Desk also launched a grant programme that supported 35 cross-border projects, bringing high-quality stories from Ukraine to audiences across the EU and amplifying Ukrainian voices in the European media landscape.

Additionally, more than 620 media professionals received 70 editions of the weekly 'What about Ukraine' newsletter that kept Ukraine at the centre of media attention and highlighted both European press-review and debates taking place inside Ukraine.

In Kyiv, 11 public discussions brought together journalists to address the challenges of war reporting from ethics and risks in the field to coverage of occupied territories and various national perspectives. Two workshops for Ukrainian reporters provided practical training on working with international outlets and pitching stories abroad.

The experience and knowledge gained were also captured in 20 English-language episodes of the podcast 'Covering Ukraine'.

Above all, the Europe-Ukraine Desk established a vibrant network of connections and collaborations. Many participants went on to make decisive career moves: EU journalists began reporting regularly from Ukraine, while Ukrainian colleagues started contributing to international media.

Together, they deepened understanding, strengthened professional ties, and expanded the European conversation about Ukraine.

The Europe-Ukraine Desk grew into a vibrant space for cross-border collaboration, brought Ukraine into the professional focus of journalists and created lasting links between media communities across Europe.



Photos: Valentyna Naumenko/n-ost

Project:
The Europe-Ukraine Desk

Region:
Europe

Partner:
n-ost e.V.



#defyhatenow

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A decade of countering social media hate speech and online incitement to violence in conflict transformation.

BY STEPHEN KOVATS

#defyhatenow was initiated in 2014 by r0g_agency for open culture and critical transformation gGmbH, as an urgent call to action in response to the outbreak of conflict in South Sudan in 2013.

Supported by UNESCO and funded in 2015 via the German Federal Foreign Office through the ifa/zivik programme for civic conflict resolution in South Sudan, #defyhatenow has since been further engaged in (social) media literacy and community oriented action in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Tanzania.

Project:
#defyhatenow

Region:
Pan-African

Partners:
a.o. Association
Civic Watch, GAPI,
EMILC and r0g_agency



At a time when the connections between social media use and violent conflict were not on most people's radar #defyhatenow was engaged with social media activists to help network fragile, primarily youth led groups in countering virulent hate speech online that was being weaponized in the rapidly expanding conflict in South Sudan.

Initiated in 2014 as an urgent call to take action against the then nascent trend of social media influencers provoking conflict in South Sudan #defyhatenow has developed programmes and resources, both offline and online tools in the battle against online incitement to violence. With community oriented media and information literacy (MIL) programmes #defyhatenow has been active in South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon and Tanzania – as well as the global online diaspora of these regions.

The initiative, through the countering of violent extremism through peaceful community actions has sought to empower citizens – both media professionals, as well as members of the community with little access to or knowledge of the mechanisms of directed media-influenced hate speech and fact-checking, to engage in respectful public discourse online and offline.

In doing so, #defyhatenow has helped fill a media landscape in which conflict influencers reigned unopposed with strengthened and professional resilience against hate.



Photos: r0g_agency / illustration: Yemi Yetneberk

Following a philosophy of training and equipping citizens, strengthening their ability and confidence to identify and counter online hate speech, the initiative has targeted community leaders, educators, media professionals, content creators, bloggers, and a broad range of citizen journalists in MIL which incl. fact checking and monitoring skills. These skills currently also include the response to AI influenced disinformation and the impact of third party players in violence and destabilisation efforts.

Since its inception in 2014 as an entirely community-based initiative #defyhatenow has developed and produced a comprehensive 'Social Media Hate Speech Mitigation Field Guide' that has been published in English (with elements in Cameroon Pidgin English), French, Amharic, Tigrinya and Afaan-Oromo.

Coupled with the creation of an intensive African Fact-Checking Fellowship (#AFF), Early Warning / Early Response tools and a concerted effort to reach women's and youth-led organisations (with a view to help curb online GBV), marginalised groups including IDPs, former-combatants and people with disabilities #defyhatenow has established frameworks and networks of community peace mobilisers who themselves not only become community peacebuilders, but are often in an informed position to influence policy to curb hate rhetoric on various levels.

As part of its longer term sustainability approach the initiative has successfully supported the inception of independent local or community-based organisations in the countries it has thus far operated in. These organisations are equipped to further develop and implement the complex disinformation, hate speech and extremist violence oriented crisis intervention and conflict mitigation initiatives that are central to the #defyhatenow credo of urgency in action.

#defyhatenow has helped fill a media landscape in which conflict influencers reigned unopposed with strengthened and professional resilience against hate.

Coalition in Defense of Journalism: Protecting Press Freedom in Brazil

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In response to increasing attacks, a coalition of 11 civil society organizations collaborates to bolster the protection and resilience of journalists and media outlets in Brazil.

BY NUBE ALVAREZ AND HELEN DEACON

The Coalition in Defense of Journalism (CDJor) unites 11 civil society organizations, including RSF, to safeguard press freedom in Brazil. Since its launch in May 2024, CDJor has issued statements, engaged in advocacy, and advanced policies to protect journalists.

From supporting the Observatory of Violence to monitoring election-related attacks, CDJor defends journalism, sustainability, and information integrity.

Project:
Defending Voices Brazil – promoting press freedom and protect journalists in Brazil

Region:
Brazil

Partner:
Reporter ohne Grenzen
(RSF Germany)



The Coalition in Defense of Journalism (CDJor) was created to strengthen collective action for press freedom in Brazil. Gathering 11 civil society organizations, including Reporters Without Borders (RSF), it streamlines, coordinates, and amplifies their efforts. CDJor defends journalism, the exercise of journalistic activity, and the media ecosystem through public statements, advocacy, monitoring, and the organization of events.

Launched on May 3, 2024, World Press Freedom Day, CDJor quickly became a key actor. In its first year it issued nearly 30 statements denouncing attacks against journalists, took part in public debates, and promoted initiatives addressing urgent challenges: safety, sustainability, and integrity of information.

A central achievement is its role in shaping the Observatory of Violence Against Journalists and Communicators, created by the Ministry of Justice in early 2023 following assaults on reporters during coup attempts. CDJor members documented those attacks and submitted a report to the authorities. Since then, the Coalition has contributed to the Observatory's functioning, setting up working groups on protection, judicial harassment, and digital attacks, and analyzing cases brought to the government.

CDJor also led the monitoring of press attacks during the 2024 municipal elections. Between August and October, it recorded over 50,000 online

aggressions on X, Instagram, and TikTok, mainly targeting women journalists. Offline incidents were also documented, revealing systematic hostility against the press and its watchdog role. The final report, released in December 2024, became a key reference for media and institutions.

At the political level, CDJor has gained recognition as an interlocutor with authorities. In March 2025, Minister of Justice Ricardo Lewandowski and National Secretary of Justice Jean Uema met with the Coalition to discuss rising physical attacks, judicial harassment, and gender- and race-based violence, particularly against women, LGBTQIA+ professionals, and Black journalists.

In March 2025, the Coalition joined gender-focused journalism groups to organize the seminar 'Women in Journalism – The challenge for journalists covering women's rights'. The event launched RSF's report 'Journalism in the Age of #MeToo' and featured debates on rights, leadership, and resilience. Workshops provided practical tools on digital security and best practices for covering reproductive justice, gender violence, and femicide.

In a context where physical aggression, judicial intimidation, and online harassment remain widespread, CDJor acts as a collective shield. By uniting organizations with different profiles under one coordinated front, it strengthens protection, exposes threats, and works for systemic change.

In a context where physical aggression, judicial intimidation, and online harassment remain widespread the mission is clear: to defend journalism as a cornerstone of democracy in Brazil.



Photos: Coalition in Defense of Journalism (CDJor)

Strengthening independent journalism through capacity building and sustainable networks. 18

The Open Media Hub's role in promoting media freedom and enhancing professional skills in the EU Neighbourhood.

BY ANTON ARTEMYEV

The Open Media Hub (2016 – 2021) supported over 2,000 media professionals in 17 EU Neighbourhood countries, offering training, mentoring and content production grants.

The project improved editorial standards, increased local capacity for independent reporting and fostered cross-border collaboration, enabling journalists to deliver trustworthy stories for local and international audiences.

With the launch of the Open Media Hub, we aimed to strengthen the resilience and professionalism of journalists in challenging environments across the EU Neighbourhood. The programme was built on decades of Thomson's experience in global media development and responded directly to the growing pressures of disinformation, censorship and fragile media markets in that vast region.

Through a combination of newsroom mentoring, online and on-site training, as well as production grants, the programme enabled journalists to cover complex issues such as migration, and conflict, to social change and the environment with accuracy, balance and public relevance. More than 2,500 stories were produced and broadcast through local and international media channels, providing audiences with reliable alternatives to propaganda and state-controlled narratives.

Equally important, the project emphasized sustainability. By establishing peer-to-peer learning networks, training editors alongside reporters and connecting journalists with European media, the Open Media Hub helped ensure that professional standards and collaborative practices persist beyond the project's lifetime.

For many participating journalists, the OMH provided access to skills, tools and connections that would otherwise be out of reach in restrictive environments. It also offered recognition that

independent journalism matters – not only for audiences in the neighbourhood but also for European publics seeking credible perspectives from neighbouring regions.

Vitaliy Sych, chief editor of
Ukrainian weekly 'Novoye Vremya'

OPEN Media Hub has delivered an extensive opportunity to learn about vital ways of developing and monetising our media. It is probably the most precious contribution that we could expect in the hyperdynamic industry.



Project:
Open Media Hub (OMH)

Region:
EU Neighbourhood countries

Partners:
Thomson Media gGmbH and
Thomson Foundation (UK)



Fostering film education to boost the local film industry and career opportunities

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Five organizations in West Africa offer professional film training that prepares young people for careers while bolstering the local media landscape.

BY FRANK DOMHAN

The Western African film and TV industry is growing and requires skilled professionals. WELTFILME supports five partner organizations in Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Togo in operating low-threshold film schools.

These schools train young people for the audiovisual sector, strengthen the local media landscape, and broaden access to film as a medium. This fosters local narratives, enhances social dialogue, freedom of expression, and cultural diversity.

Project:
FILM NETWORK WEST AFRICA

Region:
West Africa

Partners:
ATCNA Togo, NAEAL, SJDM/
UTG, SLADEA, YMCA Ghana,
Xchange Perspectives and
WELTFILME



Since 2015, WELTFILME has supported five partner organizations in establishing themselves as low-threshold film schools that provide film education. The initiative began in Sierra Leone, with Ghana, Liberia, The Gambia, and Togo joining later. Since then, over 1,200 young people have been trained in various aspects of film production, many of whom now work in the region's expanding film and television industry. Over the years, curricula have been developed for a range of disciplines – including screenwriting, documentary filmmaking, cinematography, editing, and more. Additionally, over 120 project participants have been trained to become film educators themselves, enabling the partner organizations (Association Togolaise du Cinéma Numérique Ambulant, National Adult Education Association of Liberia, School of Journalism and Digital Media at the University of The Gambia, Sierra Leone Adult Education Association, and YMCA Ghana) to sustainably continue and expand their training programs in the future.

As part of the projects to date, more than 100 short films, as well as a feature-length film and a documentary have been produced independently and from a West African perspective correcting the usual and often biased portrayal of Africa that is presented by global media outlets. They address important topics such as civic engagement, COVID-19, democracy, Ebola, equal opportunity, inclusion and youth. All films have been, and continue to be, distributed via mobile cinema

tours, particularly in rural areas, as well as online and through TV stations, reaching an audience of millions. Many films have received multiple awards at international film festivals, which helps the filmmakers secure grants and scholarships and/or obtain new commissions. Some of the themes addressed in the films were later adopted by other media outlets, helping to carry the discussions forward.

Xchange Perspectives e.V. was a partner in all projects. The organisation developed the 'Media for Peace' framework, which explores the social role of media and how it can be used to challenge direct, structural, and cultural violence through responsible communication and storytelling. The framework combines critical media reflection with practical tools for peacebuilding and social change.

MOVING BEYOND (2023 – 2026) marks the conclusion of this project series. It supports the partner organizations, who have since formed the FILM NETWORK WEST AFRICA (FNWA), in strengthening their independence and future viability. The project focuses on establishing and expanding Learning Centers in all five countries equipped with classroom space and essential film equipment for practical learning. These centers are typically used for film training and post-production, but are also used by filmmakers to initiate and prepare their own projects. Meanwhile, the hubs are attracting significant interest from local film

production companies that regularly rent the facilities for their own projects, thus making these film schools economically sustainable.

The aim is for the partner organizations to continue working closely together, expand their networking efforts, and support the local film sector with trained professionals. Whenever possible, the partners arrange internships for their alumni, placing them directly with TV channels and production companies. This directly links the industry with new talent and allows emerging filmmakers to build successful careers.

Over 1,200 young people have received training in various areas of film production and work in the region's expanding film industry.



Photos: YMCA Ghana / ATCNA Togo

Media Freedom Rapid Response – Protection mechanism for journalists across Europe

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A European mechanism to monitor, respond to, and prevent violations against journalists and media workers.

BY ANDREAS LAMM



The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) is a Europe-wide mechanism that monitors and tracks violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries, and reacts to them.

The MFRR provides legal, practical and shelter support to at-risk journalists, conducts advocacy missions and promotes stronger safeguards for independent journalism.

The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) was established in 2020 with the aim of supporting journalists in Europe who were facing threats, pressure or violence because of their work.

Today, it has grown to become one of the strongest support systems for press freedom in the EU. Developed by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the MFRR is co-financed by the European Commission. The ECPMF now coordinates the MFRR consortium, which comprises several experienced organisations, including ARTICLE 19 Europe, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the International Press Institute (IPI) and OBC Transeuropa.

The ECPMF plays a central role in uniting these partners, transforming individual initiatives into a dependable and efficient protection mechanism for journalists in EU Member States and Candidate Countries.

The MFRR operates in four key areas: monitoring, direct support, advocacy and information sharing. Together, the partners create a system that reacts when journalists are attacked and works to prevent future harm, improving the overall situation for media freedom in Europe.

The Monitoring Work has become one of the most reliable sources of information on violations of

press freedom in Europe. Since 2020, the MFRR has recorded over 5,500 incidents affecting more than 9,400 journalists and media outlets. These cases, which range from harassment and intimidation to physical violence, are published on the Mapping Media Freedom platform and inform subsequent action.

When journalists are in immediate danger, the support strand offers practical assistance. Between 2020 and 2025, the MFRR processed over 1,600 urgent requests, providing more than €500,000 to cover legal costs, safety equipment, temporary relocation and other emergency needs. Through the Journalists-in-Residence programme run by ECPMF in Leipzig, over 80 journalists and their families have found a safe place to recover, continue their work and rebuild their lives.

Training is another essential part of the mechanism. Based on the findings of its missions, the MFRR organises workshops on topics such as digital security, protest reporting and risk management. Online tools such as PRESSProtect make it easier for journalists to find support services and practical guidance across Europe.

Advocacy ensures that the problems journalists face are not ignored by decision-makers. The MFRR regularly publishes statements, meets with governments and EU institutions, and carries out fact-finding missions to countries where

press freedom is under particular pressure. This collaborative effort has led to significant progress at the European level, including the introduction of the European Media Freedom Act and the Anti-SLAPP Directive.

The MFRR demonstrates what can be achieved when organisations collaborate with a clear purpose: to protect journalists and defend free media. Under the leadership of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the mechanism provides a combination of rapid, practical assistance and long-term solutions, ensuring that journalists can continue their vital work and that press freedom remains a living reality across Europe.

Our monitoring work has become one of the most reliable sources of information on violations of press freedom in Europe.

Project:
Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) –
A holistic protection mechanism for journalists
in Europe

Region:
European Union Member States
and Candidate Countries

Partner:
European Centre for Press and
Media Freedom (ECPMF)

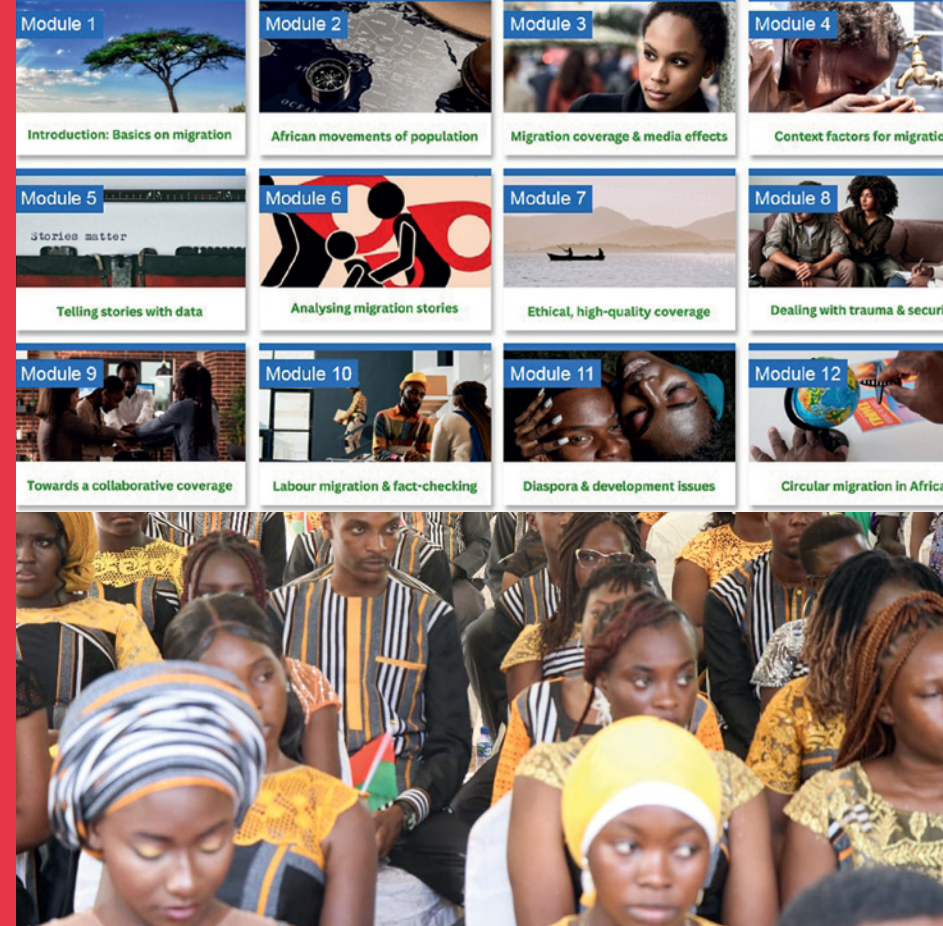


Reframing Migration: How CoMMPASS Redefines Media Development in Africa

Communicating Migration and Mobility:
E-Learning Programs and Newsroom
Applications for Sub-Saharan Africa.

BY MICHEL LEROY

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Photos: CoMMPASS

Led by the Erich Brost Institute (EBI) and six African universities, CoMMPASS is reinventing journalism training on migration through a multilingual e-learning platform that is grounded in local research and media products.

By promoting African-led, evidence-based storytelling, the project combats misinformation and bolsters media integrity, offering a powerful model for sustainable, collaborative media development in the digital age.

In an era when misinformation spreads faster than verified facts, it is more vital than ever to report on migration through an informed, human lens.

Across continents, distorted narratives are fuelling fear and populism. Yet behind the headlines, the data tell a different story. For example, in 2020, only 3% of Africans lived outside their country of origin, compared with 8.5% of Europeans. African migrants account for less than 15% of the global migrant population, with most migration occurring within Africa itself. These figures challenge long-held assumptions, and it is precisely this reality that the CoMMPASS project seeks to highlight.

Funded by the EU and coordinated by the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism at TU Dortmund University, the CoMMPASS project, 'Communicating Migration and Mobility: E-Learning Programmes and Newsroom Applications for Sub-Saharan Africa', is more than just a training initiative. It is an experiment in transforming how journalism education responds to today's media crises. The project aims to strengthen fact-based, locally grounded reporting on migration across the continent.

At a time when the OECD is warning that public-interest journalism is under threat, CoMMPASS is offering an innovative partnership model. The project connects universities in Burkina Faso, Malawi and Uganda with their European

counterparts, as well as a network of associate institutions in countries including Tanzania, Ethiopia and Senegal. Together, they are developing an online course on migration, designed by African academics for African journalists. Rather than being an imported template, the course provides a contextualised learning experience that draws on African scholars and media examples.

This commitment to local authorship is coupled with a pragmatic approach to digitalisation. The partners began by mapping the technological and educational landscape in each target country and identifying obstacles such as low connectivity and digital inequality. The result is a flexible e-learning platform that works in diverse conditions and is available in English, French, Portuguese and Kiswahili. The 14-module programme incorporates interactive tools, such as role-plays, quizzes and multimedia storytelling, to make learning more engaging and practice-oriented.

Behind the scenes, the project's architecture also reflects a new model for sustainable capacity building. Each partner university hosts a senior researcher and a postdoctoral coordinator to ensure academic rigour and local leadership. Makerere University in Uganda provides technical hosting, while 'facilitators' in each institution bridge cultural and digital divides. This collaboration blurs the traditional boundaries between research and teaching: as participants

learn to report on migration more accurately, the institutions themselves strengthen their capacity to innovate and co-produce knowledge.

The impact is already measurable. Between 2024 and 2025, registrations for the online course doubled to over 2,000 participants from 33 countries. Beyond its pedagogical reach, CoMMPASS contributes to the global debate on sustaining free and reliable information ecosystems. Ultimately, the project's most significant achievement may be its quietest one. By investing in African voices, CoMMPASS is changing the narrative around migration, replacing stereotypes with statistics and fostering understanding. In a world flooded with noise, CoMMPASS reminds us that journalism's true compass still points towards evidence, empathy, and truth.

This collaborative approach blurs the traditional boundaries between research, and teaching.

Project:
CoMMPASS

Region:
Pan African

Partners:
University Institute of Lisbon,
Joseph Ki-Zerbo and
Thomas Sankara Universities,
University of Livingstonia and
Malawi University of Business
and Applied Sciences,
Makerere University and
Uganda Christian University,
Erich Brost Institute



Connecting Security and Communication Experts in the Black Sea Region

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Amid the ongoing war in Ukraine, military and media representatives engage in dialogue to address challenges and overcome prejudices.

BY RALITSA STOYCHEVA



The 2025 conference, ‘The Growing Importance of the Black Sea’, held in Constanța, brought together military, media and security experts from eight countries to promote dialogue during times of war and disinformation. Held under Chatham House rules, the conference fostered the exchange of ideas and experience.

The conference also included a visit to the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base. Discussions emphasised the dual nature of drones as both a threat and an opportunity, while stressing NATO's role and commitment in the region, and the need for trust and communication.

Constanța, Romania – The Black Sea has quickly risen to the attention of NATO. This was emphasised once again at the 2025 international conference, ‘The Growing Importance of the Black Sea’, which was held in Constanța, Romania this year and organised by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Programme South East Europe in cooperation with the Sofia Security Forum. The event brought together military officers, journalists, academics and policymakers for two days of discussions on security, communication and the region's significance and future. Representatives from eight different countries were present.

Building upon last year's launch in Varna, Bulgaria, this project aimed to create a much-needed platform for dialogue between the media and security services.

For years, the relationship between the military and the media in the region has been characterised by mistrust. The military has often accused journalists of oversimplifying complex security matters, while journalists have complained about secrecy and evasive answers. However, many journalists have also acknowledged that they have little insight into the work of security experts. The war of aggression unleashed by Vladimir Putin against Ukraine has proven to both sides that communication is now of strategic importance, particularly given the occurrence of missile strikes and disinformation campaigns simultaneously.

The conference was held under Chatham House rules. This enabled people to speak openly during the official discussions. However, many conversations also took place in the corridors, during coffee breaks and during other informal encounters.

A particular highlight for many was the visit to the Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, which is expected to become the largest NATO air base in Europe by 2030. Christoph Plate, Director of the KAS Media Programme Southeast Europe, was particularly impressed. ‘It felt good when the officers told us that they are defending not only Romania, but NATO and the European Union as a whole’, Plate noted.

Germany's Defence Minister, Boris Pistorius, is expected to visit this part of the eastern flank before Christmas. For NATO allies here, such symbolic gestures matter as much as deployments. A high-level political presence can signal commitment and reassurance, while its absence can foster feelings of distance or neglect. Nevertheless, practical cooperation on the ground, such as NATO deployments, joint exercises and projects like this conference, is steadily helping to bridge that gap.

The discussions also touched upon the use of drones, which are reshaping modern warfare. They are cheap to produce, difficult to intercept and can be operated from thousands of kilometres away. Nowhere else has drone

warfare been so innovative as in Ukraine, where constant attacks have forced the military to devise new countermeasures in real time.

By the end of the conference, it was clear that the Black Sea was not only a regional issue, but a European one too. “Such discussions that we are facilitating would have been unthinkable 10 or 20 years ago. Now they are essential”, Plate reflected after the conference.

For years, the relationship between the military and the media has been characterised by mistrust. Communication is now of strategic importance.

Project:
International Conference ‘The Growing Importance of the Black Sea’

Region:
Southeast Europe /
Wider Black Sea Region

Partner:
KAS Media Programme SEE



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The members of the Forum Media and Development advocate the human right to freedom of speech. They are convinced that free and independent media are essential for the development of democracies. Free and independent media ensure that all groups of society can participate in public opinion forming. At the same time they demand transparency and accountability from political, social and economic players.

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