

Policy recommendations – Florence edition

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We live in a world where information is abundant, yet it has never been more difficult to find reliable information in the digital content maze and to distinguish it from artificial intelligence generated or altered content, various manipulations and deception. In many ways, today's information space is more democratic, with a greater plurality of voices and new opportunities for participation. At the same time, however, accuracy, authority, and even the sense of a shared reality is increasingly under threat.

Digital information spaces, largely designed, controlled, and governed by a handful of global technology companies, are contributing to the fragmentation of public discourse and, in turn, to the weakening of democracy. They undermine the conditions necessary for informed citizenship: a shared information space, trust in credible sources, and the visibility and economic sustainability of journalism as a vital institution of accountability for those in power.

In this context, VOICES is not just another journalism festival. It seeks to establish itself as a laboratory for exploration, dialogue, and vision. Through direct engagement with citizens, young people, journalists, the media industry, and other key stakeholders, VOICES creates a space to reflect on the future of journalism, democratic participation, and sustainable information ecosystems. The festival exists to celebrate the essential role of journalism and an informed public in democratic societies, while fostering critical thinking and resilience against disinformation.

Following successful editions of *VOICES – The European Festival of Journalism and Media Literacy* in [Florence \(2024\)](#) and [Zagreb \(2025\)](#), VOICES returned to Florence for its [2026 edition](#) at Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino from 10–12 March 2026. Reframed as *The European Festival of Journalism and Media Freedom*, the 2026 edition placed trust and reconnection between voices of reference and citizens at the centre of its programme. Over three days, VOICES became a hub for dynamic discussions, innovation, and collaboration, featuring around 60 sessions, more than 120 speakers, and approximately 2,500 participants through talks, interactive workshops, exhibitions, and networking opportunities.

As an itinerant initiative, the festival moves across different European cities to engage with diverse communities. The fourth edition will take place in **Thessaloniki from 26–28 November 2026**, continuing its mission to strengthen democratic citizenship through journalism, dialogue, and public engagement. But, before announcing the next edition, below are the **takeaways and recommendations from 2026 Voices in Florence**.

Key Takeaways and living initiatives

- The VOICES Festival reaffirmed that independent, diverse and accessible editorial media are essential to democratic resilience in Europe. Across sessions on public service media, AI, accessibility, youth engagement, freedom of information, media sustainability and platform regulation, a clear message emerged: producing quality journalism is not enough - **general interest media must also be easy to find, inclusive, trusted and financially sustainable**.
- At VOICES, journalism doesn't just get discussed - it gets done. An operational student newsroom in Florence brought together **more than 40 students from five journalism schools across three countries**, working side by side in a live, collaborative environment. The [VOICES student newsroom](#) is designed as a laboratory for the future of European journalism where students explore new technologies to enhance reporting and storytelling, while also critically examine how these tools work, who controls them, how they are monetised, and what risks or structural consequences they may pose for journalism and democracy.
- VOICES also celebrate excellence in European journalism, media freedom, and innovation, with a focus on young, emerging talent. Twenty-five awards of €1,200 each were presented in seven categories, covering print, radio, video, digital, comics, and media literacy, culminating in a ceremony at the VOICES in Florence. Explore the awardees and their inspiring projects [HERE](#).
- With the rapid development of generative AI, both as standalone products and as technologies increasingly integrated into online platforms and search engines, it is essential to strengthen **transparency, accountability, and diversity in those who design, provide, and govern the core digital information infrastructures** that shape access to information and the exercise of freedom of expression as fundamental rights.
- **Journalists are increasingly under attack through both traditional and emerging forms of pressure:** physical violence, strategic and abusive lawsuits (SLAPPs), political intimidation, discreditation campaigns, and economic threats. At the same time, they face growing digital risks, including surveillance, online harassment, and the use of AI-manipulated videos, fabricated images, and pornographic deepfakes designed to damage reputations and silence critical voices. In today's disrupted information ecosystem, safeguarding voices of reference is more important than ever. This is particularly urgent as the profession is already perceived by many young people as economically fragile, insecure, and increasingly dangerous, making it even **harder to attract the next generation of journalists**.
- **Impunity for crimes against journalists** remains a systemic problem that requires urgent action. The assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta in 2017 profoundly altered both the perception and the reality of journalists' safety in the European Union, prompting multiple policy initiatives aimed at strengthening media freedom and the protection of journalists. However, her assassins have yet face justice, as is the case in many similar attacks against journalists. The [Council of Europe's Safety of Journalists Platform](#) recorded 43 cases of impunity in April 2026.
- For this reason, and to send a clear message that impunity is unacceptable, the festival launched [Voices for Justice](#), a declaration calling for stronger international action to protect journalists and end impunity for crimes against the press. Supported by leading press freedom organisations, the declaration warns that **attacks on journalists threaten not only individual reporters but also the public's right to access information and hold power to account**. The initiative gained additional momentum through its convergence with the Voices student newsroom, which facilitated connections between journalism students and leading organisations and advocates for press freedom.

Policy Recommendations

1. Safeguard Diversity and Inclusion as a Core Public Service Mission

Diversity must be treated not just as an acknowledged value but as a democratic obligation. Public Service Media (PSM) must reflect the full reality of society through authentic representation on-screen and structural inclusion behind the scenes.

To Public Service Media Organisations:

- Move beyond tokenistic representation by ensuring all communities are portrayed as multidimensional participants in everyday life.
- Develop diversity and inclusion strategies and targets, including for leadership, editorial teams and content production / commissioning

To National Governments and Regulators

- Protect editorial independence of PSM, including from politically motivated attacks framing inclusion as “wokeness”
- Ensure governance frameworks support diversity as part of the public value mandate of PSM.
- Ensure that funding levels are adequate, sustainable and predictable, so that PSM can fully serve their mission of serving the entire society

2. Enshrine Prominence of Independent General Interest Media in EU Regulation and Big Tech Practice

Citizens increasingly access editorial media through platforms, devices and interfaces controlled by global gatekeepers. Without prominence rules, public interest journalism risks becoming invisible. However, any prominence rules should be designed and implemented in a way that safeguards media freedom and pluralism.

To EU Institutions (European Commission, Parliament, Council)

- Include prominence obligations in the upcoming revision of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), ensuring that these are co-designed by independent stakeholders and media experts and independent from political, commercial and other undue influences, and in line with international standards guaranteeing freedom of the media and freedom of expression.
- Require platforms and their recommender systems, user interface providers and device manufacturers to ensure visible placement of trusted general interest media services and independent journalistic content.
- Make algorithmic recommendation systems and content ranking mechanisms more transparent and accountable.

To Big Tech Platforms and Device Manufacturers

- Clearly explain why users see certain content and not others.

- Enable meaningful user control over feed configuration and content discovery settings.
- Collaborate with trusted media companies to ensure that reliable and quality content is given enough visibility on their platforms.

To Member States

- Strengthen media and digital literacy programmes so citizens can critically navigate increasingly intermediated information environments.

3. Make Accessibility a Standard, Not an Exception

Accessibility must be embedded across all media services to ensure equal access to information for people with disabilities and other underserved communities.

To Broadcasters and Media Organisations

- Systematically provide sign language interpretation, subtitling, audio description and plain-language formats across news and major public interest programming.
- Establish permanent partnerships with disability communities to co-design accessibility services.

To Regulators

- Increase ambition in accessibility across the media sector.
- Consistently monitor and enforce accessibility obligations across both public and commercial broadcasters.

4. Rebuild News Relationships with Young Audiences

Young people are not avoiding news—they are consuming it differently. Trust, relevance and format are decisive.

To Broadcasters and Publishers

- Invest in youth-first formats including short vertical video, platform-native storytelling and interactive news spaces.
- Use clear language, relatable presenters and community-driven engagement through moderated comments and participatory formats.
- Balance difficult news with constructive journalism to reduce news avoidance and strengthen trust.

To Education Institutions and Journalism Schools

- Integrate youth audience engagement strategies into journalism training and newsroom practice.

5. Use AI Responsibly While Protecting Editorial Integrity

AI is already reshaping journalism across production, translation, distribution and investigation. Its use must remain transparent, accountable and journalist-led.

To Media Organisations

- Develop clear editorial AI policies covering transparency, verification and human oversight.
- Prioritise AI uses that strengthen journalism quality, such as translation, investigations and workflow efficiency.
- Support low-cost experimentation for journalists and freelancers through practical training (prompt engineering, vibe coding...)

To Journalism Schools and Training Institutions

- Institutionalise practical AI literacy as part of journalism education

6. Strengthen Freedom of Information as a Democratic Infrastructure

Freedom of Information (FOI) remains one of the strongest tools for investigative journalism, but access is too often slow, inconsistent and under-resourced.

To National Governments

- Improve implementation of FOI laws by reducing response times and limiting unjustified refusals.
- Ensure enforcement bodies are independent and sufficiently resourced.

To Media Organisations

- Invest in FOI expertise and cross-border investigative collaboration to maximise the public value of transparency tools.
- Promote accountability journalism and report on FOI barriers in order to champion access to information as a fundamental right, but also to encourage greater transparency from public bodies, support more journalists in using legal procedures to obtain information.

To Journalism Educators

- Include practical FOI training as a standard component of investigative journalism education.

7. Build Sustainable Funding Models for Independent Journalism

There is no single business model for journalism. Sustainability requires a mix of reader revenue, innovation support and public funding—especially for local and independent media.

To EU Institutions and National Governments

- Expand independent public funding schemes for local, regional and investigative journalism, with strong safeguards for editorial independence.
- Ensure funding programmes support innovation in format, distribution and audience engagement—not only legacy structures.

To Media Organisations

- Build distinctive journalism that creates trust and willingness to pay.
- Experiment with membership, participation and community-led models adapted to audience needs.

To Regulators and Public Funders

- Recognise that subscription models alone cannot sustain local journalism and design support mechanisms accordingly.

8. Invest in European Journalism Education

The student newsroom model demonstrated strong potential for strengthening European democratic participation and professional journalism skills.

To Media Organisations, Journalism Schools and European Institutions

- Support permanent student newsroom structures that connect journalism students with professional media organisations and investigative networks.
- Promote exchanges between students, public service media and independent newsrooms to build the next generation of European journalists.

9. Foster Digital Citizenship with Media Information Literacy

MIL and Digital Citizenship is widely recognised as an invaluable asset to foster media freedom, as it promotes integrity of information and media pluralism. MIL creates awareness on human rights, in particular freedom of expression, and protection of journalists. It also creates the condition for trust in independent and public media.

To EU Institutions and National Governments

- Expand public funding for national MIL programmes and training of educators among which teachers, journalists, youth workers and fact-checkers

To Media Organisations

- Reinforce MIL units, with journalists trained to work in schools and non-formal settings
- Increase the involvement of public media in the production of MIL actions and resources as required in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Media Freedom Act.

To Journalism Educators

- Include MIL as a standard component of journalist courses

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