



# COMMUNITY MEDIA

contributions to  
citizens' participation



Information Society Department

Report coordinated by Helmut Peissl  
(COMMIT) in collaboration with Judith  
Purkarthofer, Nadia Bellardi (CMFE), and  
Salvatore Scifo (Bournemouth University)

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With editorial support by the Media and Internet  
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Council of Europe

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# Executive Summary

## Research objectives and design

Community media are a tool of communication for people in hundreds of communities which are run for the community, about the community and by the community. Often referred to as the third media sector, it serves as a distinct alternative to public national broadcasters and commercial media.

Originating locally and using horizontal structures of production, community media allow people to create their own means of cultural expression, news, information and dialogue.<sup>1</sup> Thereby, they facilitate community level debate, information and knowledge sharing, and input into public decision-making. Community media are also often an indicator of a healthy democratic society,<sup>2</sup> whose mission lies in their independent and participatory nature.

The Council of Europe, together with EU institutions and other supra-national organisations such as UNESCO, has been working for decades towards the promotion of a more diverse media landscape in Europe and around the world. The contribution of bottom-up organised community media in adding diversity to the local media landscape and preserving identities has been emphasised consistently and continues to gain acknowledgment.<sup>3</sup>

Building upon expertise and research conducted across Europe, this study, commissioned by the Council of Europe, analyses how community media provide spaces for local dialogue and cohesion across generations and different communities. It does so by exploring the following questions:

- How do community media support and facilitate debate, dialogue and public participation both at the local level, and across different generations and communities?
- How do community media, both in rural and urban contexts, facilitate the involvement of the youth and elderly and how can community media claim its role in local networks of civil society?
- How can policymakers support the long-term viability of community media and what are the positive experiences and promising practices in different national contexts that we might learn from?

This report is based on case studies from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), France, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland. The selection of these countries was motivated by the objective to offer recommendations based on case studies from very distinct regional frameworks and the different conditions in which community media in Europe operate.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview of Nadia Bellardi, Community Media Forum Europe, ‘What is community Media?’ 9 May 2009, <http://europeanjournalists.org/mediaagainsthate/what-is-community-media/> (the original interview was conducted in the framework of Council of Europe Anti-discrimination Campaign and published here: [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/anti-discrimination-campaign/ressources/Interviews/interview\\_bellardi\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/anti-discrimination-campaign/ressources/Interviews/interview_bellardi_en.asp))

<sup>2</sup> ‘Community Media Sustainability’, UNESCO <https://en.unesco.org/themes/community-media-sustainability>

<sup>3</sup> Nadia Bellardi, Brigitta Busch, Jonas Hassemmer, Helmut Peissl, Salvatore Scifo, ‘Spaces of Inclusion – An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media’, Council of Europe report DGI(2018)01 <https://rm.coe.int/dgi-2018-01-spaces-of-inclusion/168078c4b4p7>

The respective national reports, available for consultation online,<sup>4</sup> were prepared by the researchers and media experts Nadia Bellardi (Austria, Germany and Switzerland), Koen Leurs, Elaine Nolten and Lola de Koning (the Netherlands), Biljana Žikić (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia), and the Groupe d'études et de recherches sur la radio (GRER), coordinated by Anne-Caroline Fievet (France). All the authors have based their findings on (a) earlier studies from the relevant regions and (b) data collected in community media outlets specifically for this report.

The editors and authors of the overall report guided this work by providing a shared set of research questions and by adding insights from additional sources, including the Media Pluralism Monitor.<sup>5</sup> Conclusions and recommendations, which have been formulated by experts from the Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), present transferable lessons from the European perspective that may be used by policy makers.

## **Overall Recommendations**

### **1) Recognition of community media as a defined third sector**

Despite the growing recognition of community broadcasting worldwide, community media are often disregarded by policymakers in Europe, occupying only marginal positions compared to mainstream media. The policy, legal and regulatory framework remains the single most persistent obstacle to establishment of community media as a defined third sector.<sup>6</sup> For community media to be sustainable, the sector needs to be formally recognised by law. Without a European legal and regulatory framework founded on a rights-based approach and considering the specific needs of the sector, national differences will have a tremendous impact on the opportunities for community media. In Europe, the situation differs greatly from country to country. While some have developed promising regulations such as the Netherlands, France, Germany (where community media gained licence in the 1980s) or Austria, Ireland and Switzerland (in the 1990s), the United Kingdom (early 2000s) and Luxembourg in 2021, others disregard their very existence. This is the case in some Balkan countries, where community media are still not formally recognised, as such, under legislation. The same goes for Portugal and Spain. Community media need to be recognised and legally defined as a separate sector from the public service and commercial broadcasters. These legislations should take into account their non-profit nature and capacity to provide a service to communities.

### **2) Transparent and reliable funding schemes**

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<sup>4</sup> The national reports are available for consultation at <https://www.commit.at/materialien/studien/citizens-participation>

<sup>5</sup> MPM, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/> At the time research towards this report was conducted, only the MPM 2017 survey had been published. This report therefore refers to the MPM 2017 survey's results. The last MPM-report has been published in 2022. For a brief comparison, please see the final note in the appendix which is available online at: <https://www.commit.at/materialien/studien/citizens-participation>

<sup>6</sup> Steve Buckley, 'Community media: a good practice handbook', published by UNESCO, 2011, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000215097>, p.10

Having a policy on paper does not mean much if there is not a supportive environment behind it, and funding is one of the most complex issues when it comes to community media. While there is ample research available that recognises the positive contributions of community media in terms of democratic participation, diversity and social cohesion, this rarely translates into funding schemes and support towards financial sustainability. From the respective national reports emerges overall a crucial need for transparent and reliable funding schemes, as funding is often project-based and short-term. Funding typically comes from public sources, volunteers' contributions, participation-based training and grants for social-impact projects. In reality, however, and due to the lack of clear recognition and status for community media, special public funds for community media, where they exist, risk being easily removed or diverted to other media entities, including private and profit-oriented projects.<sup>7</sup>

### **3) Recognition of volunteer engagement**

One of community media's key characteristics when compared with mainstream media is the sector's reliance upon the work of volunteers for activities that are required for the everyday functioning of community media organisations. Community media rely on skill-sharing, individual and collective empowerment and capacity-building which plays a central role in their mission and purpose. Training is seen as key to both sustainability and personal development of volunteers.<sup>8</sup> This contribution by volunteers should be more clearly recognised. Community media organisations interviewed for this report, have shared the difficulties encountered when engaging with members of the different communities to identify and discuss local relevant topics and activities. When they do manage to attract younger or older volunteers, it is difficult to sustain such activities over sufficiently long periods of time that would help to effect the desired changes within these age groups.

### **4) Support for local anchorage of community media and their activities**

The national reports emphasise the importance of community media being locally anchored, as well as involved and immersed in a variety of local activities. Integration and collaboration are seen as prerequisites for lively production and audience involvement. Well established community media outlets, as well as more recent ones, have demonstrated their ability to connect people of diverse backgrounds. They offer spaces for participation for newly arrived youth as well as for locally rooted elders. This work requires the support of a conducive policy environment that facilitates and enables community media to help strengthen and broaden opportunities. This will lead to forging networks within and between communities and countries.

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<sup>7</sup>Thematic focus 'community media', Brief overview of the latest Council of Europe guidelines and activities to support community media, Information society, Council of Europe <https://rm.coe.int/leaflet-community-media-en-january-2019-v2/168094b816>

<sup>8</sup> Kate Coyer, Arne Hintz, 'Chapter 14. Developing the "Third sector": community media policies in Europe', Central European University Press, 2010, <https://books.openedition.org/ceup/2186?lang=en> , pp 275-297



# 1. Research Design

## 1.1 Context

In the last decades European societies have experienced an important growth in cultural diversity, as evidenced by the increasing heterogeneity of migration in terms of countries of origin, ethnic and national groups, religions, and languages.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, disparities in terms of income, wealth, educational achievement, health status, nutrition, living conditions, occupations, social identity and participation in society have kept widening between and within countries.<sup>10</sup> These structural inequalities have accelerated due to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 but also the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to increased poverty, less social mobility and an overall a greater polarisation of society with intergenerational consequences. These are dangerous factors that could threaten the stability of political systems and undermine their ability to address these challenges.

In many countries, minorities and people with migrant background have been hit the hardest. As stated by Mr Michael O’Flaherty, Director of the Fundamental Rights Agency “*sections of our populations have exploited COVID-19 to attack minorities already subject to appalling levels of discrimination and hate crime*”. The current media ecosystem is particularly susceptible to disinformation. News media in general remains the first place to find the latest developments related to the pandemic and media professionals bear an increased responsibility to provide verified and timely information.

The many obstacles to reporting faced by traditional media during the pandemic have also greatly impacted community media, which may not necessarily be legally recognised depending on the country. The lack of sustainable funding, access to distribution platforms, information or the proper training required to report in times of crisis (particularly when it comes to fact-checking skills) constitute some of these obstacles. As stated in the toolkit of the Council of Europe’s Secretary General’s on ‘the impact of the sanitary crisis on freedom of expression’, it has become evident that the outcome of the pandemic is largely depending on the access to “*to accurate, reliable, diverse and timely information, as the need for such information was – and remains – crucial for the understanding of the situation and the ability to make informed decisions, limit rumors, reduce the effect of disinformation and foster solidarity and trust in measures taken to address the crisis*”.<sup>11</sup>

The focus now quickly needs to turn to ensuring that we build more inclusive societies. This objective, among others, requires effective intercultural integration policies and dialogue. As stated in the Council of Europe report “Space of inclusion” (2018): “*media, as facilitators of public communication and discourse, are widely viewed as a key tool to managing the*

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Faist, ‘Cultural Diversity and Social Inequalities.’ *Social Research*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2010, pp. 297–324, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972252>

<sup>10</sup> Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. ‘Socio-economic inequalities in Europe: time to restore social trust by strengthening social rights’ Rapporteur: Ms Selin Sayek Böke, Turkey, SOC, 2021  
<https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/SOC/Pdf/TextesProvisoires/2021/20210909-SocialInequalities-EN.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Secretary General of the Council of Europe, ‘The impact of the sanitary crisis on freedom of expression and media freedom’, SG/Inf(2020)19, 7 July 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/16809ef1c7>



*increasing diversity in society and promoting inclusion*".<sup>12</sup> This, however, requires that all segments of the population are included in media content production. Community media provide a channel for participation of minorities in the media who remain largely underrepresented in traditional European media. As stated by Nadia Bellardi in an interview conducted with the European Federation of journalists (EFJ) "*Access to media and the real possibility of involvement in media production and consumption can empower specific disadvantaged social groups*" and "*by enabling this access and providing the necessary training, community media plays a crucial role in encouraging participation, promoting social inclusion and democratic rights of migrant or ethnic minority groups.*"<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, Europe is becoming the world's 'oldest' continent with decreasing birth rates and rising life expectancy. This also challenges its economy and social welfare system.<sup>14</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Ukraine, the population is also rapidly shrinking because of migration to Western Europe.<sup>15</sup> Recently arrived migrants and refugees to these countries from other geographical areas are primarily of younger, working-age backgrounds. If supported by adequate inclusion strategies and training programmes, their participation in the European labour market could help mitigate the effects of an ageing and shrinking population.<sup>16</sup> As it can be assumed that a significant proportion of young migrants and refugees will stay in Europe, the potential of community media to facilitate their integration process while at the same time opening a window for residents of the country to learn about their culture needs to be assessed further.

However, one must consider that the means of receiving and imparting information have dramatically shifted with the advent of new technologies and particularly the rise of social media. Young people in particular use social media as their main source of news, entertainment, and education. These companies are not subject to national media regulation authorities and have the power to shape the public's perception of ethnic and social minority groups. As stated by the study council of Europe study "Spaces of inclusion", "*by deduction, one must also reflect on the fact that local issues, that people may feel are relevant to discuss, have less or no space.*"<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Nadia Bellardi, Brigitta Busch, Jonas Hassemmer, Helmut Peissl, Salvatore Scifo, 'Spaces of Inclusion – An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media', Council of Europe report DGI(2018)01 <https://rm.coe.int/dgi-2018-01-spaces-of-inclusion/168078c4b4>

<sup>13</sup> Interview of Nadia Bellardi, Community Media Forum Europe, 'What is community Media?' 9 May 2009, <http://europeanjournalists.org/mediaagainsthate/what-is-community-media/> (the original interview was conducted by the Council of Europe Anti-discrimination Campaign and published here: [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/anti-discrimination-campaign/ressources/Interviews/interview\\_bellardi\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/anti-discrimination-campaign/ressources/Interviews/interview_bellardi_en.asp))

<sup>14</sup> Christina Elmer und Donya Farahani, 'Die Menschheit in 85 Jahren', Spiegel Online, <https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/uno-prognose-so-entwickelt-sich-die-bevoelkerung-bis-2100-a-1046128.html> ; United Nations DESA Population Division, <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

<sup>15</sup> Corina Gall, Alexandra Kohler, Joana Kelén. 'Die Bevölkerung Europas hat sich von Osten nach Westen verschoben', Neue Zürcher Zeitung, <https://www.nzz.ch/international/osteuropas-bevoelkerung-schrumpft-in-rekordzeit-ld.1392288?reduced=true>

<sup>16</sup> European University Institute, 'Demography: Ageing Europe', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYBawRXVnNY>

<sup>17</sup> Nadia Bellardi, Brigitta Busch, Jonas Hassemmer, Helmut Peissl, Salvatore Scifo, 'Spaces of Inclusion – An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses

In addition, 74.3 % of Europe's population is urban, with capitals, other big cities and towns taking priority over rural areas in cultural and political discussions. Rural regions across Europe are experiencing depopulation and economic decline. Essential services and infrastructures such as education and health services often reach the urban areas first. The rural areas are also in isolation from information and media content production, with a concentration of traditional media broadcasters in bigger cities. In rural areas and smaller towns, community media often provide the only opportunity for social and cultural engagement of their population. They have served for decades as spaces that allow people with divergent opinions to interact and debate at the local level.<sup>18</sup>

**Community media are intended for a diverse backbone of people based on language, ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, political ties, and social, religious and cultural background.**

**How do they achieve a sense of community across a multitude of subcommunities and what are the necessary conditions for inclusive, social and participatory communication?**

**This study aims to answer these questions by exploring the contributions and further potential of community media to support and encourage debate, dialogue and societal participation at the local level. It reviews how community media, in rural or urban contexts, bring good practices for the involvement of the youth and the elderly in local networks of civil society. Finally, it outlines several ways in which policymakers can support these goals, drawing upon the experiences in national contexts researched for this report.**

## **1.2 Research questions and design**

Presenting a pan-European perspective while building upon local expertise and research in different nations, this study analyses how community media provide spaces for local dialogue and cohesion across generations and across different linguistic, educational and cultural communities.<sup>19</sup> Exchange and dialogue around common interests and across diverse groups is one of the key features of participatory democracy and social cohesion. This research examines how community media help to address and engage diverse members of society through participatory activities and how these differ in rural and urban areas and across various parts of Europe. The countries selected for this report have been chosen in order to identify the elements necessary for community media to operate to its fullest potential and to draw lessons for future policymaking in this area.

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by community media', Council of Europe report DGI(2018)01 <https://rm.coe.int/dgi-2018-01-spaces-of-inclusion/168078c4b4>

18 'Escape from the "filter bubble" — intercultural tips and tricks for journalism and communication', Medium, 2016, <https://medium.com/@nadiabellardi/escape-from-the-filter-bubble-intercultural-tips-and-tricks-for-journalism-and-communication-cd5eb8ffa468>

19 ECREA Radio Research Conference 2019, 'Radio as a Social Media: community, participation, public values in the platform society', <http://www.congressi.unisi.it/ecrea2019/>

**The report explores the following four aspects:**

- 1) Policy and funding contexts favourable to community media
- 2) The role of community media in rural and urban areas
- 3) Community media's contribution to representation of media diversity and its intergenerational dialogue
- 4) Engagement strategies for involving volunteers in community media

**The overall report is structured as follows:**

- **Chapter 1** outlines the main research questions, introduces and clarifies the terminology used in the study and highlights key features of the community media context in the countries selected, which indicate the rationale for these selections (a more detailed overview of the community media context in each country can be found online at: <https://www.commit.at/materialien/studien/citizens-participation>)
- **Chapter 2** consists of the research findings (outlining both benefits and challenges of community media); based on the findings, it then formulates recommendations.

### **1.3 Terminology and focus areas**

This report explores multiple frameworks of operation of community media to identify the conditions which are most conducive to realising their different objectives. One area of focus is whether community media operate in an urban or rural environment, and how it impacts its functioning. Another area of focus is the imbalance of representation between youth and elderly in the media.

#### **Rural and urban areas**

Rural areas are located outside towns and cities. Their development depends on various factors: the existence of businesses and employment opportunities, human capital, infrastructure, innovation and productivity.<sup>20</sup> Agriculture is the primary industry in rural areas. However, agricultural technology has decreased the need for workers while industrial technology has created many jobs unique to urban areas, driving many people into cities in search for jobs.<sup>21</sup> Distance from cities is also a key factor in the growth dynamic of rural areas: centres of learning such as universities or hospitals are much higher in urban areas. A lack of proximity to cities limits economic opportunities, subsequently leading to a decreasing population density. The case studies in this report show that most media production are established in cities while rural areas are far less represented.

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<sup>20</sup> OCDE, 'Promoting Growth in All Regions', 2012 [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/promoting-growth-in-all-regions/what-are-the-key-growth-factors-the-theory\\_9789264174634-6-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/promoting-growth-in-all-regions/what-are-the-key-growth-factors-the-theory_9789264174634-6-en), pp59-76

<sup>21</sup> National Geographic, 'Rural Area', <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/rural-area/>

## Youth and the elderly

While media should ideally represent all sectors of the population, some groups are systematically marginalised. A recent study by the Council of Europe found that the over-65s category is the age group most underserved by traditional media and information literacy initiatives.<sup>22</sup> In order to address this gap of representation of the elderly in the media landscape, community media aim to fulfil a role of dialogue between generations, for example through cross-generational activities. Additionally, recent conflicts have caused hundreds of thousands of families to flee their homes in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, to find safety in Europe or more recently the arrival of millions Ukrainian refugees in neighbouring European countries.<sup>23</sup> The displaced populations in European countries now include large numbers of children and teenagers. European media therefore face the urgent task of creating content that engages with the experiences of diverse and displaced youth in balanced and informative ways.

### 1.4 Selection of Countries

Before outlining the rationale for the selection of countries in this report, it is useful to refer here to the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM): a European-wide assessment of risks to media pluralism in 31 countries, which include the 27 European Union (EU) member states, the UK and three candidate countries.<sup>24</sup> The risks to media pluralism are measured in four different aspects: basic protection, market plurality, political independence and social inclusiveness. For the purposes of this report, the social inclusiveness indicators are particularly relevant. They reflect access to media by various groups in society, namely by assessing regulatory and policy safeguards for community media. The MPM is the first in-depth, Europe-wide research that explicitly includes community media. The **definition of community media** applied by the MPM is outlined as follows:

*“In the MPM, community media are defined as media that are non-profit and that are accountable to the community that they seek to serve. They are open to participation by the members of the community for the creation of content. As such, they are a distinct group within the media sector, alongside commercial and public media. Community media are addressed at specific target groups and social benefit is their primary concern.”<sup>25</sup>*

It may be relevant to note here that the term ‘community media’ has widely been used with reference to minority ethnic and language communities as well as with reference to communities of interest. Whilst this report focuses on the former, it does not exclude the latter.

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<sup>22</sup> Council of Europe, ‘Supporting Quality Journalism through Media and Information Literacy’, 2020, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/-/supporting-quality-journalism-through-media-and-information-literacy>

<sup>23</sup> This report was elaborated before the aggression of Ukraine on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 by the Russian Federation and therefore does not cover the situation engendered by the war in Ukraine.

<sup>24</sup> This assessment has been carried out since 2016 and is coordinated by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom (CMPF) at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy.

<sup>25</sup> Elda Brogi, Iva Nenadic, Pier Luigi Parcu and Mario Viola de Azevedo Cunha, CMPF, ‘Monitoring Media Pluralism in Europe: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor 2017 in the European Union, FYROM, Serbia & Turkey’, 2018 Policy Report, [https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/60773/CMPF\\_PolicyReport2017.pdf?sequence=4](https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/60773/CMPF_PolicyReport2017.pdf?sequence=4)

This report draws upon case studies from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia and Switzerland. These countries were selected to draw recommendations based on case-studies from vastly different conditions within which community media operate. Each country has a distinct approach when it comes to community media:

- In **Austria**, legal recognition for community media came very late compared to other countries, but programmes are now broadcasted in 41 different languages, contributing to great diversity in the community media landscape.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, community media landscape used to be a lot more diverse. Today, only three community media stations exist while the rest operate online exclusively.
- **France** has a long history of community media and was one of the first European countries to introduce a regulatory and funding framework for community radio. It has about 700 radio stations although no community media television is currently operating.
- In **Germany**, the competences for media are a regional responsibility. The regulatory conditions for media will therefore differ greatly from region to region.
- In **the Netherlands**, what we understand as community media operate as local media. This is because legally, they are part of the public service media sector and consequently funded by the State. Despite this, community media are underfunded because the funding is primarily focused on national and provincial media: community media only receive a very small portion of the overall funding for media.
- In **Serbia**, there is no legal recognition for community media. However, some of the functions performed by community media can feasibly be achieved by what is known as civil sector media. That said, a lack of transparency in funding structures hampers objectives.
- **Slovenia** has the oldest community media station - a student radio station - in Europe. However, although programmes of 'public interest' are recognised in Slovenia, community media do not exist as a category in the country's national legislation.
- **Switzerland** also has quite a developed community media landscape when it comes to radio stations but has no community media television. Community media are defined by media law as being 'complementary' to public and private broadcasting.

## 2. Findings and Recommendations

### 2.1 Findings: Benefits of community media

The research conducted for this report revealed several interrelated benefits of community media, which are shared across the media landscapes of the various countries surveyed. Among these are the following:

- a) Promoting diversity and inclusiveness in media
- b) Developing media literacy and training
- c) Strengthening social cohesion
- d) Enhancing representation in media content
- e) Facilitating democratic and egalitarian discourses

#### 2.1a Promoting diversity and inclusiveness in media

Community media are a core component of the media landscape and make unique contributions in terms of diversity and inclusiveness in media, as well as **intercultural dialogue**. They provide a channel which brings together people from different cultures, backgrounds and ages, through their broadcasting in different languages and encouragement of participation in the public sphere by expressing specific opinions and interests and responding to the other ones. Community media has the potential to strengthen local identity and interest in local affairs through the production of broadcast and online programmes that are closer to its listeners, viewers, and users than conventional media.

Community media contribute to diversity in the media landscape by tackling issues such as misrepresentation, stereotyping, bias and racism.<sup>26</sup> The study ‘Promoting social cohesion: the role of community media’ notes that public service and commercial media are increasingly unable to meet the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged social groups in Europe.<sup>27</sup> Some community media specific initiatives promote direct empowerment and participation of communities who are typically absent from the public debate. For instance, the 2020 Council of Europe report ‘Media literacy for all’ indicated that projects running at Bradford Community Broadcasting in the UK specifically promote participation of Muslim women in community decision making and democratic processes in the city through radio production training.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nadia Bellardi, Brigitta Busch, Jonas Hassemmer, Helmut Peissl, Salvatore Scifo, ‘Spaces of Inclusion – An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media’, Council of Europe report DGI(2018)01 <https://rm.coe.int/dgi-2018-01-spaces-of-inclusion/168078c4b4>, p.13

<sup>27</sup> Peter Maynards Lewis, ‘Promoting social cohesion: the role of community media’, Report prepared for the Council of Europe’s Group of Specialists on Media Diversity (MC-S-MD), Media and Information Society Division, July 2008, <https://rm.coe.int/1680483b32>

<sup>28</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, ‘Media Literacy for all - Supporting marginalised groups through community media’, Artificial Intelligence - Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, p.14

In Austria, Germany and Switzerland, the community radio stations interviewed were reflective of the diversity of the multicultural cities in which they were based, where several cultures and languages coexist but do not necessarily engage with one another. In the Netherlands, the broadcasting stations interviewed all had at least one show that catered to a specific ethnic community. In Germany, community media started developing specific training formats to promote multilingual programming and exchange, seeking to foster dialogue between participants with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and reach a broader audience. In Austria, broadcasts are produced in 41 languages and in many cases, migrant groups were among the first producers to join newly founded community media. Community media projects in Austria are frequently designed to specifically include more women, young people, and vulnerable groups. In France, 12 languages are represented in community radio stations – seven regional languages, five foreign languages and more occasionally, programmes that cater to different communities in languages such as Arabic, Armenian, Berber among others. In Switzerland, programmes are broadcasted in more than 25 languages and have intercultural and multilingual training formats in place. Local research projects in Switzerland have shown that migrants, regardless of whether they later pursue a professional media career or not, have been able to engage on equal terms in Swiss society and to improve their professional and social integration skills due to their work in community radio. Community media organisations have also been making efforts to include people with disabilities. Some stations in Switzerland specifically support people with physical or mental impairments or people with psychiatric illnesses.

While already proving many opportunities in terms of intercultural dialogue, community media encourage at the same time **intergenerational dialogue** by serving as a learning space to different age groups. Community media help young people and older community broadcasters to gain digital media training and work experience through mutual exchange. In the Netherlands and France, many retirees aged 60 and above are still involved in community media and view it as a channel through which intergenerational exchange may be fostered. A study conducted by three community radio stations in Austria ('Wirkungsradios')<sup>29</sup> lists four groups as particularly relevant in reaching different generations: young people, because they are the adults of tomorrow; schools and possibly pre-schools, as cooperative partners who represent the whole community with regards to cultural diversity; students and young professionals, to enable them as trainees to develop their skills through radio production; and older generations, who feel that they no longer have a voice in our societies.

Students and young professionals are among the groups that are best represented in community media. In some countries, student radio stations are the first form of community media. In Slovenia, Radio Študent and Radio Marš are formally recognised as student radio stations. While their volunteers and listeners are primarily young people, the communities that are formed around Radio Študent and Radio Marš come from a more diverse age group. Older colleagues teach the young generation how to operate radio broadcasting equipment and facilities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Radio Active has young associates and listeners aged 16 to 25. Older members of the radio station act as mentors to new members. They complement this knowledge by attending seminars or training programs namely through Mediacentar Sarajevo, which supports development of independent and professional journalism. This is also

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<sup>29</sup> Verein Freies Radio B138, Wirkungsradios: Freie Radios im ländlichen Raum, <https://www.freier-rundfunk.at/download/dokument-27.pdf>



the case at Radio Prijatelji Srebrenice (The Friends of Srebrenica Radio), primarily composed of young people and members with diverse ethnic or cultural background.

At Radio 3FACH, a Swiss youth community radio station in Lucerne, all moderators are younger than 25 and all members in the management team are younger than 30. Once they reach their 'retirement age', new volunteers take over. This system seeks to ensure that ideas are always fresh and motivation remains high and by doing so, the radio station remains relevant to its community.

In Germany, there are and were many intergenerational radio programs on Freies Radio Potsdam. For instance, SPROEZL-Funk was a local historical series where the 'children of today' conducted interviews with older witnesses from Babelsberg about their childhood and youth in the GDR, or about life prior to the GDR's formation in 1949. They spoke mostly with shopkeepers, craftsmen, teachers, priests and tram drivers, and in the process, they discovered what the city used to be like in the past.

At Radio X in Basel, Switzerland, primary school children met senior citizens from retirement and nursing homes and produced radio content together. In cooperation with a local association, the children spent a morning with the seniors in the old people's nursing home and an afternoon in the studio of Radio X. They got to know each other in a playful way and exchanged ideas. Through this collaboration, the pupils gained their first interview experience. The seniors gained a sense of what makes today's youth tick and recalled things that they might have forgotten, such as how people lived in Switzerland in the past, what values were important and what everyday school life looked like during their own childhoods. These recordings resulted in a one-hour programme, which the students prepared the following day in the Radio X studio.

When compared to public service and commercial media, community media therefore offer visibility to a wider range of topics but also greater diversity in terms of the profiles among their volunteer producers. Hence, it reflects the demography of the local population more directly than other local media.

## **2.1b Developing media literacy and training**

Community media organisations are accessible centres of communication and technology in their communities. By allowing access to their production facilities, people have been given the opportunity to learn and further develop media production techniques, as well as other crucial skills in the media industry such as communication and management skills or problem-solving abilities. These organisations are places where all citizens, regardless of their skills, age or background, can learn about new media tools and developments with a critical literacy approach.<sup>30</sup> Media producers are encouraged to critically reflect upon the entire media system and its environment while actively contributing towards shaping it.

Since the late 1990s, several organisations have continued this work through community multimedia centres. As stated in the section above, many community media organisations have put in place specific training formats, helping marginalised communities in particular in the

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<sup>30</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, 'Media Literacy for all – Supporting marginalised groups through community media', Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, p.13

development of their media literacy skills and creative production skills, all within the limits of their resources and infrastructures. In Slovenia, both Radio Študent and Radio Marš stand for civic participation in media production and training. The 2020 Council of Europe report ‘Media literacy for all: Supporting marginalised groups through community media’,<sup>31</sup> has also identified several promising practices in terms of media literacy projects. One of them is the SMART Radio Training, which is a project offering the opportunity to create radio training for community radio covering diverse needs. It focuses on specific training situations and on the distinct training frameworks that already exist within community media. These trainings modules are also designed to meet the needs of special target groups, such as migrant women for instance. They are available in English, German, French, Hungarian and the Basque language and are used by practitioners all across Europe.<sup>32</sup>

The development of these media literacy skills, both through media production skills and the development of critical thinking and understanding of the role of media in democratic societies, therefore directly contributes to the empowerment and participation of different communities. Further, it reduces the digital divide by helping people in communities to make informed decisions, to be able to identify and counter false or misleading information and harmful and illegal online content and to understand the implications of media and new technologies.

### **2.1c Strengthening social cohesion**

The findings from the countries included in this report show how community media are helping to overcome communication gaps in local media contexts, offering spaces for encounters and creating connections among communities that are geographically more distant from one another than is the case in densely populated cities.

Community media production premises play an important role and often address the need to provide meeting places for a wide variety of people who would otherwise not meet at any other location. Community broadcasting organisations also invest time, money and space in a variety of social events that are not directly linked to radio and/or TV production, therefore performing community development functions that go beyond the production of media content. Indeed, recent findings from Austria, for example, show a web of cultural, educational and socio-political projects initiated or facilitated by radio stations, with direct connections to local, regional development.<sup>33</sup> The above-mentioned study, ‘Wirkungsradios’, conducted by three community radio stations in Austria, also showed that a region is much more resilient due to the presence of a community radio station. It gives the region a ‘voice’, the possibility to articulate and demand things. It provides a physical meeting place, and a space to experiment with a different, intercultural, intergenerational ‘art of hosting’.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, ‘Media Literacy for all – Supporting marginalised groups through community media’, Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, pp16-17

<sup>33</sup> Verein B138 (2016) Wirkungsradios. Der Beitrag bzw. die mögliche Wirkung von nichtkommerziellem Rundfunk auf Regionalentwicklung im ländlichen Raum,

Through their provision of spaces, their organisation of events and their mobilisation of social groups, community media organisations contribute significantly to social cohesion and the formation of social identity.

### **2.1d Enhancing representation in media content**

By enabling and encouraging diverse groups and individuals to get involved in media production and to develop a greater awareness of media in general, community media organisations facilitate wider media content representation, particularly when compared to commercial and public service media. They give voice to groups, ideas, and cultures not always represented in mainstream media.

As stated in the preamble of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, *“Different types of media, along with different genres or forms of editorial content or programming, contribute to diversity of content. Although content focusing on news and current affairs is of most direct relevance for fostering an informed society, other genres are also very important. Examples include cultural and educational content and entertainment, and content aimed at specific sections of society, such as local content and content aimed at vulnerable groups, such as minorities or persons with disabilities.”*<sup>34</sup>

Community media play a crucial role in responding to local needs under community control, focusing on issues which are directly relevant to a specific community and involving that community in all aspects of media production.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, they also seek to address gaps in terms of content representation for communities who are geographically distanced from each other, such as is the case in rural areas. Likewise, they constitute a bridge for communities in areas that are affected by rapid expansion growth, such as suburban locations.

Research conducted for this report in the Netherlands shows that community media help to balance the underrepresentation of regions in national news. This is also the case for suburban areas, in the outskirts of large cities, which often receive little attention and minimal or no funding, despite being the subject of very rapid population growth. In Switzerland, Kanal K in the rural region of Aargau has been operating as non-commercial radio complementary to mainstream media for over 30 years. The radio’s programmes are focusing on topics of relevance to the region as well as global topics which are omitted in mainstream media’s regional components.

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<sup>34</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680790e13](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680790e13) preamble, paragraph 4.

<sup>35</sup> Cammaerts and Carpenter, cited in ‘Community Media for Social Change’, Claire Ziwa, <https://wpmu.mah.se/nmict11group2/participation/>

## 2.1e Facilitating democratic and egalitarian discourses

A decline in trust, confidence in the political system and participation in public life has brought to the forefront concerns on the need to renew democracy and citizenship.<sup>36</sup> Discussions among European policy makers, particularly in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, have increasingly centered around the ability of community media to contribute to engaging citizens and facilitating participation. In this regard, community media have traditionally been accepted as a channel contributing to core European objectives, such as social cohesion, media pluralism and cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>37</sup> Community media projects are typically based on openness and participation, creating a gateway for people's voices to be heard. They represent spaces where the very issues and principles that compose a democratic society can be played out, explored, and experienced.<sup>38</sup> With the advent of new technologies, community media also have a potential to reach a wider audience and enlarge this democratic impact. In the past, the nature of community media broadcasting meant that audiences could be limited in size. However, as stated by in the 'Media literacy for all' background paper,<sup>39</sup> "*changes in content production techniques and distribution increase the potential for community media to reach beyond its traditional boundaries, empowering a wider range of people to contribute to, participate in and actively shape their media landscapes*".

## 2.2 Findings: Challenges of community media

Despite the many benefits of community media, the sector faces significant challenges to achieve sustainability and remain relevant and reachable for their audience. They include:

- a) a lack of formal recognition as a distinct third media sector
- b) a lack of funding or unfeasible conditional funding
- c) a lack of formal recognition of the volunteer workforce

### 2.2a Lack of recognition as a distinct third sector media

Today, community media have been recognised by law in a growing number of countries. Initially, however, community media have developed through social movements, with communities seeking to express their own issues and concerns disregarded by mainstream media and often without State authorisation. As stated by Kevin Howley in 'Understanding Community Media': "*as non-profit self-managed media organisations, community media are insulation from the structure arrangements and institutional interests associated with*

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<sup>36</sup> Kate Coyer and Arne Hintz, 'Chapter 14. Developing the "Third sector": community media policies in Europe', Central European University Press, 2010, <https://books.openedition.org/ceup/2186?lang=en> , pp 275-297

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* §19

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, 'Media Literacy for all – Supporting marginalised groups through community media', Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, p18

*corporate and public service media*”.<sup>40</sup> They have historically played a role in producing and legitimating oppositional discourse and thereby created a shared identity among movement participants.

The benefits and opportunities of formal recognition as a distinct third media sector are of high importance: as highlighted by the UNESCO Community Media Sustainability Policy Series, they open the door for proper licensing and a range of possible support measures, such as facilitating means of funding from the public budget.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, formal recognition contributes globally to the protection of the right to freedom of expression, ensuring diversity and pluralism and overall enhancing the development of the sector.<sup>42</sup>

However, the research conducted for this report shows that the policy environment for community media in Europe remains inconsistent. While some countries have developed promising regulations as well as a more sophisticated understanding of the policy needs for sustainable community media, others have established policies that are insufficient and therefore largely limit their development trajectory. When compared to other countries in this report, the status of community media in France and the Netherlands seems particularly stable. Both have a relatively long history of licensing – in France, since 1982 and in the Netherlands, since 1983. In terms of policy development, this indicates a growth in needs and expectations, which develop in a society once the first steps towards community media’s legal recognition have been taken. This is also mirrored in the experiences in rural Austria, where community media became important once they were established. On the other side of the spectrum, Serbia is among the countries with the lowest level of trust in the media in the whole of Europe and community media are the only alternative to public and commercial media under political control. Although regulatory and legislative frameworks in Serbia recognise civil society media, there is a need for more precise recognition of this type of media in Serbian laws.

## **2.2b Lack of funding or unfeasible conditional funding for the community media sector**

Almost completely across the board, a lack of funding or unfeasible conditional funding poses significant restraints on community media in the countries researched for this report, preventing them from achieving their fullest potential. As noted in the 2019 Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age, adequate financing and funding are critical for the sustainability of a pluralistic media environment<sup>43</sup> and community media often operate at the

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<sup>40</sup> Kevin Howley, “Understanding Community Media”, chapter title “Community Media and Social Movements”, SAGE Publications, Inc. 2010, [https://edge.sagepub.com/system/files/Chambliss2e\\_18.1SK.pdf](https://edge.sagepub.com/system/files/Chambliss2e_18.1SK.pdf), p5

<sup>41</sup> UNESCO, UNESCO Community Media Sustainability Policy Series, <https://en.unesco.org/community-media-sustainability/policy-series/recognition>

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), ‘The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age’, February 2019, published and disseminated by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), <https://www.osce.org/files/osce-tallinn-guidelines-online%203.pdf>, p.61

margins of economic viability.<sup>44</sup> In some cases, there are provisions of funding but with unfeasible conditions imposed for accessing such funding, which do not sufficiently take into account the particular context and ground realities of community media operational frameworks. The lack of sustainable funding also stems from insufficient transparency of the funding processes and guarantees of operational autonomy.

Analysing the various country reports,<sup>45</sup> it appears that having transparent and reliable funding schemes or financial models in place is crucial for community media to develop long-term plans. These should take into account the specific nature of community media structures, requirements and activities.<sup>46</sup> In the Balkan countries, funding is often project-based and short term. This makes it difficult for community broadcasters to adequately focus on different communities, as connections to these groups can only be established over time.

However, the goal must not be to provide a one-size-fits-all policy model as local broadcasters operate in many different frameworks. National policies must therefore accommodate and reflect such variations, which can then be taken up at regional and local levels. In Germany, a total of 25 million euros from the licence fees are available for German community media per year, while the distribution differs considerably at regional level. As the media policy portfolios are in the hands of the regional parliaments, it can be difficult to achieve an equal national framework.

There is also a recurring concern voiced regarding the lack of autonomy of community media, in particular the level of operational independence from those dispersing funds for the sector. To continue with the example of Germany, the fact that in some cases, the media authorities are directly involved in the operational activities of stations has raised independence concerns, while independence is essential as a guarantee for non-profit and local associations. According to community media outlets operating in Germany, ensuring a separate and independent status would still allow the media authorities to retain the power to regulate the sector, but it would strip them of the power to involve themselves in the day-to-day management of stations, overcoming the issue of independence.

In different interviews conducted for this report, concern was raised about the association of community media with a public authority through funding, which could threaten the autonomy of media stations and operators. However, in countries researched with a well-established community media landscape such as France and Germany, public funding is the main source of financial support. Best practices also suggest the need for a diversity of funding sources in order to create more sustainable organisations in the long term. For instance, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) promotes the concept of mixed funding sources, rather than a single source, to ensure the independence of the community radio stations supported.

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<sup>44</sup> Steve Buckley, 'Community media: a good practice handbook', published by UNESCO, 2011, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000215097>, p.34

<sup>45</sup> See individual country reports at <https://www.commit.at/materialien/studien/citizens-participation>

<sup>46</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, 'Media Literacy for all – Supporting marginalised groups through community media', Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, p.19



## 2.2c Lack of formal recognition and appreciation of the volunteer workforce

A key characteristic of community media is the voluntary participation of civil society members in creating and managing programmes. The role of volunteers is critical to the functioning of most community media organisations.<sup>47</sup> Research conducted for this report notes that there is an overall lack of recognition of the volunteer workforce. This stems from an absence of understanding of the ground realities of volunteers, particularly of their financial and employment circumstances.

The accessibility and inclusivity of community media is ensured in most instances through their reliance on volunteerism. Volunteers are indispensable driving forces behind the content and enable a grassroots connection. Recent data researched for this report showed more than 50% of Austrians above 16 years of age are active as volunteers in cultural associations, social initiatives, political parties, church groups, neighbourhood support, civil society activities and others. Social engagement is higher than political activity.<sup>48</sup> Such a socially active age group constitutes an important target audience and opens up recruitment opportunities for community media, as people who are socially engaged often look for communication channels to articulate, promote and document their activities.

In the Netherlands, local and regional broadcasters are largely dependent on the contribution of their 20,000 volunteers, some of whom have worked for these organisations for decades. Since volunteers often have other day jobs, they are positioned to have a better view of what it is like to be part of the community and reflect upon how diverse that community really is. The recruitment of volunteers differs with each broadcaster and is largely dependent on the audiences that the local or regional broadcaster wishes to engage with. For example, when there is a university in a region, the broadcasters are likely to collaborate with this institution to recruit volunteers, providing student volunteers with an experience of – and a connection to – the local community. However, this strategy often only attracts a certain demographic of media makers.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the amount of non-profit media is very low compared to commercial and public stations, the relationship between paid staff and volunteers is seen as highly important for the functioning of community media. Young volunteers who move from the smaller cities to the capital to pursue studies are seen as a resource, who send stories back to be broadcasted in the local community media. Yet, Bosnia and Herzegovina overall has an underdeveloped culture of volunteering. This is due to a lack of financial support and the development of social media which are ever more used as platforms of information and broadcasting content. In regions where the possibilities of employment are exceptionally low as is the case in the Balkan region, community media organisations often manage to retain volunteers when paid positions or small honoraria are available. The Serbian radios ‘Aparat’ and ‘Super Radio’ who largely depend largely on volunteers and a handful of paid staff to produce their content, have shared that attracting volunteers is not an issue, but keeping them is, as many leave in search of a paid job.

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<sup>47</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, ‘Media Literacy for all – Supporting marginalised groups through community media’, Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, p5

<sup>48</sup> Medienhaus Wien (2014) BürgerInnenjournalismus 2.0 - Perspektiven und Strategien von Community-TV



## 2.3 Recommendations

As highlighted in the challenges listed above, there is an overall lack of recognition of the full potential of community media, however, numerous steps could be taken to enable community media to continue their contributions to society and achieve their utmost potential. The recommendations that emerge from the research conducted for this report are:

1. Recognition of community media as a legitimate third sector media in legislation;
2. Creation of a favourable policy environment for community media's contribution to social cohesion;
3. Allocation of reliable funding and/or reevaluation of provisory funding; ensuring transparency and sustainability in funding models and the operational autonomy of community media;
4. A formal recognition of volunteer engagement;
5. Recognition of community media's contribution to developing media literacy; establishment of frameworks conducive to the development of media literacy skills
6. Support for local anchorage of community media and their activities
7. Establishment of impact evaluation methods and measurable standards towards recognition of community media's existing and potential contribution to public value

### 2.3.1 Recognition of community media as a legitimate third sector media in legislation

Community media need to be formally recognised as a distinct third, broadcasting sector, alongside public service and commercial broadcasting. As stated by 'Media literacy for all': *"If legislative measures are not in place, Member States should as a matter of priority develop the appropriate legislative measures to provide community media with legal status, recognition, and protection, as a distinct broadcasting sector with clearly identifiable objectives and characteristics."*<sup>49</sup> Formal recognition is often a pre-requisite to gain a broadcasting license, which is essential for the success of the sector.<sup>50</sup>

Policymakers should also ensure that non-commercial community media's definition as third sector media properly acknowledges their distinctiveness. They should consider the role community media are to play in the overall media landscape if they develop or review related laws and regulations.<sup>51</sup> Additionally - and taking into account that being legally recognised does not automatically translate into public funding - it will be the basis for community media

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<sup>49</sup> Martina Chapman, Nadia Bellardi, Helmut Peissl, 'Media Literacy for all – Supporting marginalised groups through community media', Artificial Intelligence – Intelligent Politics, Challenges and opportunities for media and democracy, Background paper, Ministerial Conference, Cyprus, 2020, <https://rm.coe.int/cyprus-2020-media-literacy-for-all/1680988374>, p.19

<sup>50</sup> UNESCO Community Media Sustainability Policy Series, <https://en.unesco.org/community-media-sustainability/policy-series/recognition>

<sup>51</sup> European Parliament, Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies Study, The State of Community Media in the European Union,

2007, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2007/408943/IPOL-CULT\\_ET%282007%29408943\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2007/408943/IPOL-CULT_ET%282007%29408943_EN.pdf) p.28.

to operate in a sustainable way and discuss models of funding. For instance, being registered as a legal entity is necessary in order to open a bank account or close contracts with potential advertisers or funding organisations.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, beyond formal recognition, policymakers should ensure that community broadcasters benefit from the same legal rights and privileges which apply to other media outlets.<sup>53</sup>

### **2.3.2 Creation of a favourable policy environment for community media's contribution to social cohesion**

Community media areas should be linked to the natural surroundings of their population, not necessarily to administrative borders. The licensing processes in place in the countries included in this report do not always take into account the natural environs of a population, especially in areas where migration dynamics, either incoming or outgoing, are rapidly changing. Policymakers should ensure that rather than being determined by existing administrative borders, licences for local and regional broadcasters matches – in terms of their coverage area – their target populations. This would constitute a more effective method to address and involve communities. Furthermore, this would ensure that the media they engage with are relevant for and reflect their everyday lives and experiences.

Community media also need to uphold diversity, inclusivity, and intersectionality as good practice. Therefore, policy measures should be taken to support work within and across communities and towards democratic programming to counteract increasing divisions in society. As community media outlets offer opportunities to connect people of diverse backgrounds within a defined geographical area, policymakers need to support this through focused media, cultural and social policies, from the municipal to the national level. This is likely to contribute to strengthen the opportunities for ties across communities, in border regions and across countries. In rural areas, these policies are of even greater importance, as such societies and related community media organisations face challenges linked to mobility, dispersed community members and migration to urban settlements.

Through multilingual programming, community media enable social and intercultural dialogue, especially, but not only, in areas characterised by migration. Aside from their traditional role of 'giving a voice to the voiceless', they also constitute important dialogue-oriented learning places for the development of multiple competences. The skills acquired can help disadvantaged groups and individuals in their quest for empowerment and self-determination in terms of social, economic, political and other choices and participation in public life.<sup>54</sup> To continue supporting local media that practise democratic programming, which reflects the socio-cultural composition of a community, policymakers should ensure that local broadcasting policies include the provision of a safe space for producers/makers. They should likewise strive towards identifying and including underrepresented communities.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> UNESCO Community Media Sustainability Policy Series, <https://en.unesco.org/community-media-sustainability/policy-series/recognition>

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Wimmer, 'Henry A. Giroux: Kritische Medienpädagogik und Medienaktivismus', 2009. In: Hepp, Andreas, Krotz, Friedrich and Thomas, Tanja (ed.) Schlüsselwerke der Cultural Studies. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften

Moreover, the importance of having community media practitioners of all ages emerged from all country reports. It is necessary for knowledge transfer between experienced producers and newcomers, as well as for the introduction of new media practices through younger generations. The challenge to keep offering relevant content and frames of participation requires in-depth analysis of communities' - often changing - needs and constant adaptation. In Germany, according to a recent youth survey, less than a third of respondents indicated social engagement and political awareness among their guiding attitudes.<sup>55</sup> Young people are routinely described as being "active participants through digital channels as never before". It has been found that people active in community media are not only active in social media but also that they have a greater awareness of the norms of respectful communication. In this context, the low figures of youth in Germany indicating social engagement and political awareness might seem surprising. It is therefore necessary to rethink the concept of participation with reference to community media and social media channels.

Finally, while the youngest and oldest often need some support (e.g. regarding mobility or technical help), it is in the interest of community media stakeholders and policymakers to encourage self-reliance as much as possible. In order to unlock community media's potential, policies need to strengthen community media as autonomous actors that are able to respond to the needs and the productive potential of their communities.

### **2.3.3 Allocation of reliable funding and/or re-evaluation of provisory funding; ensuring transparency and sustainability in funding models and ensuring the operational autonomy of community media**

Policymakers need to ensure that reliable and sustainable funding models are created. This does not merely involve allocation of sufficient funding for the sector, but also a re-evaluation of provisory funding with respect to the conditions imposed. For instance, in Slovenia, media legislation allocates 3% of the public broadcasting fee to a funding system for regional, local and student radio and for non-profit TV. However, Radio Študent, Radio Marš and Radio Romc cannot obtain these funds because such support is contingent upon the employment of six paid staff members and a stipulation that 50% of a station's income must come from sources other than public funding – a scenario that is unfeasible for these stations.

Additionally, transparency with respect to funding applications and allocations should be ensured. Legislation should embed such transparency within funding models, as stated by CM/Rec(2018)1 on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership:

*“States should also ensure stable, sustainable, transparent and adequate funding for public service media on a multiyear basis in order to guarantee their independence from governmental, political and market pressures and enable them to provide a broad range of pluralistic information and diverse content. This can also help to counterbalance any risks caused by a situation of media concentration. States are moreover urged to address, in line*

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<sup>55</sup> Stefan Forster, Vom Urknall zur Vielfalt. 30 Jahre Bürgermedien in Deutschland, 2018, <https://www.die-medienanstalten.de/publikationen/weitere-veroeffentlichungen/artikel/news/vom-urknall-zur-vielfalt/>

*with their positive obligation to guarantee media pluralism, any situations of systemic underfunding of public service media which jeopardise such pluralism.”<sup>56</sup>*

Collective experience agrees that a diversity of sources of funding is desirable to avoid dependency on one source<sup>57</sup> (i.e. public authorities) which undermines the autonomy of the community media sector. Therefore, in addition to supporting the establishment of a third, clearly separated, media sector, policymakers should create distinct, long-term funding schemes so that community media organisations have a variety of funding sources that they can access.

Funding support from various EU and other schemes, encouraging the blend of community media practice and research, can provide resources to foster regional and local development. To fulfil this role, national and international policies should be designed to support sustainable models for national media ‘umbrella’ organisations to operate, such as in the areas of allocating funding for basic advocacy tasks, distribution of information and as part of a more coordinated European -wide framework for community media. To protect the operational autonomy of community media, policymakers should introduce clauses in legislation which would ensure a separation of the personnel responsible for State budgetary allocations and the staff managing/operating community media organisations.

### **2.3.4 Formal recognition of volunteer engagement**

Volunteers are an essential part of community media. People from all walks of life get involved, from high-school students looking for work experience to retired people looking for a way to give back.<sup>58</sup> They help community media organisations driving its mission forward and achieve its goals. However, as rewarding these experiences may be for the volunteers, realistically most people must prioritise paying jobs over community media making and organisations are struggling to attract new volunteers, especially long-term. Therefore, a formal recognition of their engagement could help increase community media’s sustainability, creating a motivating climate which recognises and honours their contribution to the achievements of community media.

Formal recognition of volunteer engagement would need to incorporate strategies for community media organisations to successfully engage and retain volunteers in order to sustain their long-term involvement in such organisations. Such recognition needs to consider the contributions of volunteers in terms of media production and training but also, the particular connections to local societies that they facilitate, anchoring community media organisations to the listeners/users that they serve. Two aspects must be taken into consideration:

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<sup>56</sup> Paragraph 2.9. of Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680790e13](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680790e13)

<sup>57</sup> Peter Maynard Lewis, ‘Promoting social cohesion, the role of community media’, report prepared for the Council of Europe’s Group of Specialists on Media Diversity (MC-S-MD), July 2008, <https://rm.coe.int/1680483b32>, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Community Media Association, ‘Community Media Volunteering’, 2016 <https://www.commedia.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering/>

- First, measures should be taken to support already engaged volunteers to better manage their volunteer work, so they can balance it with family, paid work and other demands.
- Second, it is necessary to attract new volunteers and specific measures should be taken facilitate entrance into community media organisations.

Regarding the involvement of already existing volunteers, policymakers could encourage the development and implementation of strategies like the best practices developed in the project Wirkungsradios (Austria),<sup>59</sup> although the appropriate choice should always take into account the local context where it will be applied. These best practices include:

1. ensuring that volunteers can experience media production as a rewarding (and fun) activity – people who are actively involved and enthusiastic about community media are the best multipliers and communicators for the projects;
2. experimenting with communication on different channels, prioritising direct and personal communication with people in the region;
3. providing a ‘living room’ for meetings and dialogue, and enabling interventions in public spaces (pedestrian streets, schools);
4. involving the local communities and institutions in programme production, make them experience the power of community media;
5. working with role models/personalities who are respected and trusted in the region (people who are socially engaged, independent and responsible);
6. looking for topics which are local/regional, but also have a supra-regional relevance; tackle difficult global topics, which people tend to feel disconnected from, such as the financial world; and
7. providing a platform for connections to educational and professional opportunities in the region.

Regarding support measures to enlarge the network and reach out to more people, policymakers should promote policies that support the continuous involvement of new volunteers and make sure that community media organisations remain representative of their communities as part of their key remit. Such strategies to attract new producers could include: public events organised by the community media broadcasters; visible presence in public spaces and mobile studios; unrestricted access of the community to the radio production facilities; discussions between listeners/producers and other people on topics covered in the programmes; stronger cooperation with regional local associations and small businesses; and recognition of volunteering and social engagement as driving forces in rural areas.

Findings from research in Switzerland highlight how attracting volunteers is especially feasible when the ‘experimental openness’, enabled by the not-for-profit nature of community radio is retained, as well as when it is kept as a local/regional incubator for youth and local culture in a digital, interconnected world. Policymakers can also help these attempts by ensuring a certain kind of institutional visibility for community media, and by formulating transparent regulations

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<sup>59</sup> Verein Freies Radio B138, Wirkungsradios: Freie Radios im ländlichen Raum, <https://www.freier-rundfunk.at/download/dokument-27.pdf>

regarding the presence of media content on diverse platforms. They can likewise take supportive local measures when it comes to the use of public spaces or local meeting places.

### **2.3.5 Recognition of media literacy: establishment of frameworks conducive to the development of media literacy skills**

Media literacy helps people understand the messages that are being communicated to them and adopting a critical stance when decoding these messages. Knowing about media practices, identifying and countering disinformation while being able to play an active part in producing media are all crucial aspects of modern citizens' media education.

Given the need to orient oneself in an increasingly complex media society, the efforts of community media to educate young and older producers, listeners and viewers cannot be overstated. Since their establishment, community media organisations in Europe have allowed access to millions of citizens and volunteers to their production facilities, providing free training in the acquisition of key basic and advanced digital media production techniques, teamwork, management and intercultural skills. Since the late 1990s, several organisations have continued such work through community multimedia centres.

Policymakers should support the ongoing availability of such options, to facilitate the sustained effort of community media organisations to train local communities in media literacy and production skills. This increases their employability in both personal and professional opportunities. Media literacy efforts therefore need to be recognised and policies to strengthen the media literacy mandate of community media should be put in place to support relevant activities.

### **2.3.6 Support for local anchorage of community media and their activities**

Policymakers should empower community media organisations to have a dual function. First, to act as local media organisations that can provide programming and services for the informational, communicatory and participatory needs of the local. In this way, they become nodes of exchange. Second, because local broadcasters can access the 'capillaries' of society in ways that provincial or national broadcasters cannot, they can offer a platform for communities that are rarely or not at all included or even represented in provincial or national broadcasts. By recognising certain (marginalised) communities and giving them a platform from which to speak and to listen to, policymakers would be acknowledging and validating them.<sup>60</sup> This recognition and validation results in a form of inclusivity, ensuring that people feel encouraged to join in as producers and/or watch and listen to local broadcasts.

Policymakers should put in place financial and policy support for community media to act as incubators of cultural and age diversity at the local and regional level. There is a certain dynamic amongst younger and older media makers, as they do not necessarily share the same views on content and production methods. Local broadcasting stations can serve as the physical space where different generations of broadcasters come together. Having media producers from

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<sup>60</sup> OSCE, The Tallinn Guidelines on National Minorities and the Media in the Digital Age, 2019, <https://www.osce.org/hcnm/tallinn-guidelines>



different generations working together offers the potential of a mutually beneficial learning environment and can stimulate dialogue.

Given that many different age groups are present in community media, a range of adequate policies should encourage more inclusive practices and local partnerships. For instance, some forms of managed access (e.g. restricting the age of presenters to nudge change in the editorial groups) can facilitate the passing on of good practices while often, active exchange between people of different generations renders the media programmes relevant and lively. Producers should reflect the profile of their audience – young or old, urban or rural, interested in culture and music, engaged in local/regional topics and politics. Local media partnerships with print media, cultural institutions and music festivals can also serve to better achieve such an outcome.

### **2.3.7 Establishment of impact evaluation methods and measurable standards towards recognition of community media's existing and potential contribution to public value**

Policymakers need to ensure that community media are considered when measuring media pluralism and development on a national and on a European level (such as in the Media Pluralism Monitor). Appropriate impact evaluation methods should be developed that focus on the public value of community media. Additionally, municipalities and other national policymakers' governmental organisations should consider the importance and value of local, non-profit broadcasting services, and accordingly, facilitate the growth and professionalisation of such services.

The public value perspective highlights the key contribution and societal relevance of community media, which should be recognised as core aspects of the sector and addressed accordingly in media, cultural and social policies.



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**This report** conducted across Europe illustrates how community media provide spaces for local dialogue and cohesion across generations and different communities. It does so by exploring the following questions:

- How do community media support and facilitate debate, dialogue and public participation at the local level, across different generations and communities?
- How do community media, both in rural and urban contexts, facilitate the involvement of the youth and elderly and how can community media claim its role in local networks of civil society?
- How can policymakers support the long-term viability of community media and what are the positive experiences and promising practices in different national contexts that we might learn from?

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