



# MEDIA AND INTERNET GOVERNANCE HIGHLIGHTS

*The inter-governmental Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), with the support of the Media and Internet Division in the Secretariat, lead the Council of Europe's work related to freedom of expression, media, internet governance and all information society-related issues grounded in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Council of Europe promotes an enabling environment for freedom of expression while taking into account the challenges of the changing media environment.*

Brief overview of major Council of Europe activities in the field of media and internet governance

Thematic  
Focus

Information  
Society

[www.coe.int/freedomofexpression](http://www.coe.int/freedomofexpression)

The Media and Internet Division of the Council of Europe develops and implements, under the authority of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), an array of standard-setting, cooperation and awareness-raising activities, to help member States respond to long-standing as well as newly arising challenges to the freedom of expression in Europe.

### Protecting media freedom

Annual reports of the Secretary General on the *State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law* address, among others, major challenges to freedom of expression, providing a strong basis to assess trends and develop appropriate responses. In the past few years, new policy instruments were adopted to address pluralism, quality and sustainability of media and journalism in the fast-changing media environment: the *Recommendation on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership* (2018), the *Declaration on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age* (2019) and the *Recommendation on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age* (2020).

Other aspects of media freedom and freedom of expression have been examined by in-depth studies, such as *Information Disorder* (2017), *Media coverage of the “refugee crisis”: A cross-European perspective* (2017), *Spaces of Inclusion* (2018), *Media, Elections and Gender* (2018), *Internet and Electoral Campaigns* (2018), *Liability and jurisdictional issues in online defamation cases* (2019), *Supporting Quality Journalism through Media and Information Literacy* (2020).

Major international conferences were organised to debate and raise awareness on most pressing issues:

- “Addressing hate speech in the media: the role of regulatory authorities and the judiciary”, Zagreb (2018);
- “Media pluralism – how can we deliver?”, Strasbourg (2019);
- “(Last) call for quality journalism”, Ljubljana (2019).

### Defending safety of journalists

Attacks on journalists are on the rise, as reported since 2015 by the Council of Europe *Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists*. The *Recommendation on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media* (2016) provides specific Guidelines to member States on addressing this trend. The Recommendation is complemented by a Strategy to ensure its effective implementation (2019) and an Implementation guide providing valuable practices and concrete suggestions for action steps to improve journalists’ protection and stem impunity. The studies *Journalists under Pressure* (2017) and *A mission to inform* (2020) assessed the prevalence and impact of unwarranted interference on journalists, providing valuable statistics and a closer look at the qualitative dimension of interference.

### Protecting freedom of expression in the digital environment

The high pace of digitalisation of society raises new concerns regarding freedom of expression, as regards communication between individuals, in terms of processes in newsrooms, and with respect to public debate and political communication.

In 2019, the Committee of experts on Human rights dimensions of automated data processing and different forms of artificial intelligence (MSI-AUT) prepared the Committee of Ministers *Declaration on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes* as well as *Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)1 on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems*.

Furthermore, a high-level conference “AI: Governing the Game Changer” was held in Helsinki in February 2019, bringing together global leaders from different disciplines to discuss potential measures to address the impacts of AI on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As a follow-up, the Council of Europe established the Ad-hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI), which was tasked to examine the feasibility of a legal framework for the development, design and application of AI.

### Enhancing internet governance

The internet offers many opportunities but equally generates new and, in many cases, amplifies old threats to freedom of expression. Responding to these growing concerns, the Council of Europe has developed and successfully implemented its *Internet Governance Strategy 2016-2019*, developing standards for building democracy on-line, ensuring on-line safety and security for all, and respecting and protecting the human rights of everyone in the digital world. This strategy will be followed by a new *Digital Governance Strategy 2021-2024*.

A partnership with businesses was launched in 2017 to promote the adoption of best human rights standards by private internet or telecommunication companies. It currently includes 21 major companies and their associations.

### Building capacities in member states

During the past decade, the Council of Europe has implemented over 20 projects in member States and partner countries promoting media freedom. The aim is to foster an enabling environment for freedom of expression, taking into account the challenges of a changing media environment. Currently projects are being implemented in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Tunisia and Morocco to promote Council of Europe standards, in cooperation with both national authorities, regulators and press councils as well as the judicial system.

### Media in times of health crises

As stated in the *Toolkit by the Secretary General on the impact of the sanitary crisis on freedom of expression and media freedom (SG/Inf(2020)19)*, freedom of expression and information and freedom of the media are crucial for the functioning of a democratic society and continue to be so in times of crisis - when accurate, reliable information to the public are indispensable for preventing panic and fostering people’s understanding. Crisis situations may therefore not be used as a pretext for restricting the public’s access to information.

Freedom of expression, media independence and open deliberation, rather than information control, are the core principles underlying European democracy which will allow us to surmount the great challenges facing our countries.