REPORT

Youth Facing Disinformation - Why Journalists Matter

9-10 November 2026, Strasbourg, France

Organised under the auspices of the Monegasque Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, as part of the Council of Europe's *Journalists Matter - Campaign for the Safety of Journalists*, by the Freedom of Expression and CDMSI Division, in cooperation with the Youth Department.

1. Background and objectives

The international event *Youth Facing Disinformation -Why Journalists Matter* took place on 9-10 November 2026 in Strasbourg, bringing together young people from Council of Europe member States, journalists, media professionals, researchers and institutional representatives.

Organised within the Campaign's 2026 thematic focus on prevention and promotion of journalists' safety, the initiative aimed to strengthen young people's understanding of the importance of independent journalism, address the challenges posed by disinformation and the changing digital information environment, and encourage youth participation in promoting media freedom and democratic resilience.

The event combined a public high-level conference at the Palais de l'Europe on 9 November with interactive workshops for selected young participants at the European Youth Centre on 10 November. Particular emphasis was placed on moving beyond awareness-raising towards meaningful youth engagement and concrete action, through direct exchanges, testing and learning sessions ….

2. Proceedings and main discussions

Day 1 -High-level dialogue, 9 November

The conference opened with addresses by Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General Tanja Gonggrijp, Monaco's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Isabelle Berro-Amadeï, and President of the European Court of Human Rights Mattias Guyomar. The opening highlighted the relationship between freedom of expression and media freedom, access to reliable information, media and information literacy, journalists' safety and democratic participation.

An exchange with journalist and digital creator Caolan Robertson introduced questions about journalism, social media, impact of digital technologies and related challenges for younger audiences.

Three thematic panels explored the following issues:

- **Disinformation and its influence on young people.** Discussions examined why misleading and emotionally charged content spreads rapidly, the psychological mechanisms underlying conspiracy beliefs, and the influence of algorithms and commercial incentives. Speakers emphasised the need to combine individual critical thinking with structural responses, including platform accountability and accessible media and information education.
- **Journalism in a changing information ecosystem.** Journalists and media representatives discussed the challenges of reporting in conflict situations, political and economic pressures, online harassment and threats to editorial independence. Particular attention was paid to the importance of professional verification, key for public trust, and the responsibility of States to

provide an enabling environment for journalism. Examples from Ukraine and other European countries illustrated the consequences of attacks on independent media.

- **Building critical minds for democratic resilience.** The final panel presented practical approaches to media and information literacy, including Council of Europe guidance for MS policies in the field, Finland's experience, educational games, fact-checking initiatives and youth-led journalism. Discussions stressed that media literacy should be a continuous and long-term investment, accessible to all generations and population groups, and acknowledged that young people are already involved in producing and questioning information, shaping the information environment, and should not be treated solely as vulnerable audiences.

Three youth rapporteurs from Sciences Po Strasbourg presented the main conclusions of the day, bringing forward critical reflections on unequal access to media education, the need for collective responsibility and the importance of reaching young people who are less represented in institutional discussions.

Day 2 -Practical workshops, 10 November

The second day focused on active participation and practical learning through three thematic sessions:

- **Reporting reality:** Charles Villa, Benedict Townsend and Beatrice Borromeo Casiraghi discussed journalistic methods, verification, ethical responsibilities towards sources, editorial independence and the challenges of communicating serious issues through digital formats. Young participants raised questions about the protection of vulnerable people, psychological pressures on journalists, stereotypes and the balance between humour and credibility.
- **Protection of journalism:** Rachael Kondak and Dragan Sekulovski explored the protection afforded by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, States' positive obligations and the realities of journalistic work. Practical exercises addressed physical and online threats, the need for psychological support, solidarity and cooperation with civil society organisations.
- **Understanding disinformation in the digital age:** Susan Flocken, Raphaël Troncy and Cléo Collomb examined the impact of AI-generated content, algorithmic amplification and the importance of trustworthy information. The Cognitive Wargame illustrated how factual information can be used to construct misleading narratives. Participants called for greater algorithmic transparency and stronger governance frameworks, while recognising the importance of individual responsibility.

The interactive format encouraged participants to challenge speakers, share experiences from their countries and formulate practical recommendations.

3. Main outcomes

Adoption of the Youth Pledge

A main outcome was the adoption of the Youth Pledge *"Why Journalists Matter to Us"*, based on young people's contributions and reviewed by the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth.

The Pledge sets out young people's expectations and commitments concerning independent and pluralistic journalism, journalists' safety, transparency and accountability of digital platforms, responsible use of artificial intelligence, and accessible media and information literacy.

It also calls for meaningful youth participation in decisions affecting the information environment and recognises youth-led grassroots journalism as an important contribution to media pluralism. Beyond recommendations addressed to institutions, young people commit to verifying information, sharing responsibly, supporting independent journalism and challenging manipulation.

The Pledge represents a concrete contribution to the Council of Europe's work towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe.

Support for youth-led projects

Four youth-led projects were selected for financial support and mentoring following an open call for proposals, addressed to young people from Council of Europe member States. The projects were presented during a grant award ceremony hosted by Beatrice Borromeo Casiraghi.

The initiative provides continuity across successive Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers: the call was launched under the Moldovan Presidency, the selection and awards took place under the Monegasque Presidency, and implementation will continue in 2027, with results expected to be presented at the Campaign's closing conference in the Netherlands.

The grants are intended to translate young people's ideas into practical initiatives promoting media literacy, countering disinformation and strengthening appreciation of independent journalism.

Key messages emerging from youth participation

The rapporteurs' contributions highlighted several recurring recommendations:

- Media and information literacy should be practical, inclusive and accessible beyond already engaged or privileged groups.
- Responsibility for combating disinformation cannot rest solely on individuals; governments, platforms, educators, journalists and civil society must act together.
- Journalists' safety requires an enabling environment for free, safe and pluralist journalism, which involves legal safeguards, effective responses to online threats, psychological support and public recognition of the importance of journalistic work and solidarity.
- Trustworthy journalism depends notably on verification, transparency, accountability and the ability to acknowledge and correct mistakes.
- Young people should be recognised as active partners in shaping the information environment, not merely as victims of disinformation and beneficiaries of awareness-raising activities.

4. Assessment and follow-up

The event successfully broadened the Campaign's engagement with young people, connecting journalists' safety with wider questions of information integrity, media and information literacy and democratic participation.

The combination of high-level discussions, first-hand testimonies, practical exercises and youth-led reporting generated substantive exchanges. Participants did not simply endorse the messages presented by experts; they questioned assumptions, raised concerns about structural inequalities and proposed additional approaches.

The initiative also demonstrated the added value of cooperation between the *Journalists Matter* Campaign, the Council of Europe's Youth Department and the Monegasque Presidency, as well as engagement with journalists, media organisations, researchers and civil society.

Follow-up priorities include:

- Supporting and monitoring the implementation of the four grant-funded projects, including opportunities for mentoring, visibility and exchanges between grantees.
- Disseminating the Youth Pledge through the Campaign's networks, national focal points and relevant youth and media organisations.
- Exploring opportunities to involve young participants in future Campaign activities and national initiatives, including media and information literacy and awareness-raising.

- Presenting the results of the youth projects at the Campaign's closing conference in the Netherlands in November 2027 and considering opportunities for continued engagement beyond the Campaign.

Overall, the event marked an important step in extending the Campaign beyond its traditional institutional and professional stakeholders. It demonstrated the potential of young people to contribute actively to the protection of journalism and provided concrete mechanisms to sustain that engagement further on. The event resonated well beyond the Council of Europe, generating interest among young people, civil society organisations, journalists and media professionals, and helping to bring the discussion on disinformation and the importance of independent journalism to wider audiences.