



A new push for European Democracy: Quest for independent and sustainable local journalism in the service of the community

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We, the partners of YoCoJoin, have experienced firsthand the value that youth-driven local journalism brings to our communities and democracies, and our assessment is clear: youth-driven local journalism in Europe is in crisis.

For too long, our local media ecosystems have suffered under the weight of corporate consolidation, newsroom closures, and job losses. The result? Entire regions across Europe are becoming news deserts (communities without access to relevant, reliable, and independent information about their own lives). The promise that global digital platforms would support local journalism has proven empty: tech giants like Meta, Google, and Amazon continue to generate massive profits from audiences, all while undermining the sustainability of public interest journalism and enabling the unchecked spread of disinformation and hate speech.

At the same time, increasingly hostile environments, marked by political interference, censorship, and attacks on press freedom, are shrinking the space for independent and fact-based reporting. Nowhere is this more visible than in conflict and war zones, where journalists face harassment, imprisonment, and even death simply for doing their job.

We need implementation of policies that protect journalism as public good, and we want more democratic and diverse youth-driven local media. To make this a reality, young people must be meaningfully included in the production of news and connected with local media in their communities. This means moving beyond token participation and creating real opportunities for youth to shape media narratives, report on issues that matter to them, and learn from experienced journalists.

From our YoCoJoin experience, local newsrooms benefit significantly from the fresh insights, unique experiences, and digital expertise that young journalists bring, rejuvenating and enhancing their content and audience engagement.

As YoCoJoin reaches its conclusion, this manifesto serves as a call to action to continue and expand upon its impactful work.

Several partner organizations have already committed to sustaining their youth journalism initiatives, and we invite media organizations, local authorities, educators, and communities everywhere to join this ongoing effort and commit to the following principles:

Empower local news outlets

- **Prioritize financial support for outlets that serve underrepresented and rural communities:** Direct funding to local media that focus on oppressed communities and underserved (rural) areas.
- **Fund:** establish dedicated national and European funding mechanisms for independent youth-driven local journalism
- **Engage and revitalize:** Champion fresh perspectives and innovative storytelling by empowering youth journalists, ensuring local media authentically reconnects with younger generations.
- **Embrace diversity:** Foster inclusive newsrooms where young voices enrich content, inspire innovation, and reflect the true diversity of our communities.

- **Build sustainable futures:** Invest in youth journalism initiatives to foster long-term growth, deeper community relationships, and lasting positive impact.
- **Protect young journalists:** Ensure safe, fair working conditions by embedding training on legal rights, mental health support, and clear policies and mechanisms for reporting abuse into all youth journalism programs.

Strengthen local authorities

- **Champion civic engagement:** Support youth-led reporting to increase community awareness, stimulate civic participation, and strengthen democratic processes.
- **Promote transparency:** Encourage independent youth journalism as a watchdog of local governance, ensuring transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.
- **Enhance inclusion and cohesion:** Amplify diverse youth perspectives to promote social cohesion and inclusive community development.

Empower the youth

- **Develop essential skills:** Provide meaningful journalistic experiences to equip young people with critical thinking, effective communication, and ethical decision-making abilities.
- **Build confidence and leadership:** Support youth journalists through mentorship and real-world reporting experiences, fostering confidence and leadership skills.
- **Encourage active citizenship:** Inspire young people to engage with their communities and become lifelong active citizens through meaningful journalistic practices.
- **Create future pathways:** Open opportunities for youth to explore careers in media and related fields, fostering professional growth and sustainable employment.
- **Ensure fair opportunities:** Provide paid internships and transparent, accessible entry paths into journalism for young people, so that economic barriers do not prevent talented youth from entering the profession.
- **Partner with schools/universities:** Create strong collaborations between local newsrooms and schools or universities to offer mentorship, hands-on experience, and “up to date” knowledge.

Defend local media as a pillar of democracy

- **Ensure accessible information:** Commit to trustworthy, locally-relevant journalism that empowers citizens to make informed decisions.
- **Amplify underrepresented voices:** Actively support youth journalism to represent and share perspectives of communities whose voices are often overlooked and hold powerful institutions accountable.
- **Invest in democratic health:** Recognize youth-driven journalism as essential for vibrant public discourse and resilient democratic societies.
- **Condemn and address violence against journalists:** Take firm action to protect all journalists - especially youth and local reporters - from threats, harassment, and harm.

To achieve that, we need urgent action: sustainable public funding, protection from political pressure, fair opportunities for young journalists, and deep partnerships with educational institutions.

We invite you to join us in supporting and growing youth-led local journalism, building stronger, informed communities, and safeguarding the future of democracy.

Signed by:

