MEDIA DIVERSITY RESEARCH CENTRE

SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS ACROSS THE ACADEMIC, MEDIA DEVELOPMENT, JOURNALISM, AND CIVIL SOCIETY SECTORS.

MEDIADIVERSITY
INSTITUTE

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Established in 1997, the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) unlocks the power of media to reduce conflict, advance human rights, and deepen public understanding of social diversity. MDI builds the capacity of journalists to produce accurate, nuanced reporting on issues of race, religion, ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual identity. Its projects amplify the voices of marginalised groups by empowering civil society to influence and enrich media content.

In order to complement its far-ranging portfolio of training, consultancy, and co-production, MDI has established a **Media Diversity Research Centre** (MDRC) which aims to foster a more granular understanding of the role played by media in promoting social inclusion and celebrating diversity. This will be achieved by sharing knowledge and empirical insights across the academic, media development, journalism, and civil society sectors.

Key outputs will include a **Media Diversity Index** that can be used by stakeholders in and outside the media industry as a benchmark for evaluating the performance of media outlets in different contexts. It will be based on an annual assessment of the way in which specific identity groups are portrayed in local media as well as the measures taken by media outlets to ensure proper diversity and inclusion, both internally and externally.

The MDRC is led by a Head of Research who reports to MDI's Executive Director. Its work is guided by an **Advisory Board** comprising more than 20 scholars who have actively contributed to MDI's research activities over the past two decades. The Advisory Board will play a crucial role in shaping the Centre's strategic direction and ensuring the quality and relevance of its work.

The MDRC responds to the growing need for more evidence-based insights into the intersection between public interest journalism, diversity, and inclusion. Its dedicated team is tasked with identifying needs and gaps in the research field and building long-term relationships with academics and policymakers worldwide. They will draw on MDI's extensive networks and unique track record in the media development sector.

CONTEXT

The importance of research in delivering effective media assistance was highlighted in the OECD DAC Development Cooperation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment, published in May 2024. Principle 6 calls for greater investment in knowledge, research, and learning, particularly in areas such as audience analysis, media legislation and regulation, media markets, and technology. It also underlines the need to develop metrics and indicators to improve our understanding of media landscapes and, thereby, to design more effective programmes.

At the current time, the media development sector uses a number of indexes to monitor, evaluate, and rank national information systems. These include:

- The Press Freedom Index published annually by Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) which aims to compare the level of press freedom enjoyed by journalists and media in 180 countries. The scoring system is based on amalgamated responses from experts to a standardised questionnaire.

- Freedom in the World and Freedom on the Net compiled by Freedom House which assess the condition of political rights, civil liberties, and Internet freedom in 195 countries and 15 territories. Both indexes use a combination of on-the-ground research and consultations to produce numerical ratings.

- The Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) which developed a set of indicators to measure the trustworthiness of journalism and media organisations, promoting and rewarding compliance with professional ethics through the application of an international standard.

- IREX's Vibrant Information Barometer (VIBE), an annual study that tracks how information is produced, spread, consumed, and used in 18 countries.

- UNESCO's Media Development Indicators that aim to enable a comprehensive assessment of media landscapes at a national level in order to develop and guide needs-driven media policies and improve the targeting of media development efforts. UNESCO also produces gender-sensitive indicators.

Furthermore, the media development community includes a number of networks and organisations that are dedicated to promoting research and knowledge in the sector. These include:

- The Centre for International Media Assistance (CIMA) which brings together academics, policy analysts, and media practitioners to discuss best practices and solutions for improving media systems.

- The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) which promotes media and communication research throughout the world, addressing socio-political, technological, policy-related, and cultural processes.

- The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) which, in 2021, launched the International Media Policy and Advisory Centre (IMPACT), a virtual research and innovation centre aimed at helping international donors and their partners to enhance the effectiveness and resonance of media support programmes.

The MDRC will complement these existing knowledge management initiatives and networks as well as the research work of other media development organisations by providing academic studies, policy briefs, and needs assessments that focus on issues related to media and diversity. It responds to a perceived need to systematise, organise, and map what has been done in this field while also identifying new trends and patterns to inform future work.

By adopting a more systematic and structured approach to researching the nexus of media and diversity, MDI expects to:

- Increase understanding of and innovation in the field of media and diversity;

- Bring together a range of perspectives from diverse sectors to critically consider key topics in media and diversity and use the findings to develop wider solutions;

- Promote improved diversity and inclusion in the media as tried-and-tested ways of resolving conflict, defusing political tensions, and building social cohesion.

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

The Media Diversity Research Centre will act as an international focal point for research in the field of media and diversity. It will study existing media practice and explore ways in which an increased focus on diversity and inclusion can:

- Improve problem-solving, foster creativity, and drive positive change.

- Foster a more active citizenship and galvanise the democratic discourse.

- Boost the self-esteem and self-confidence of misrepresented and underrepresented groups.

- Give these groups safe spaces where they can express their views and, thereby, influence policymaking processes.

- Build audience trust and foster the development of public interest content, thus expanding reach and strengthening media viability.

Consequently, the MDRC will embrace the following two objectives:

1. To advance knowledge on media, diversity, and inclusion within the media development community as well as the professional media sector;

2. To share learning between peers and different stakeholder groups, thereby building a community of best practice that actively promotes effective methodologies for maximising diversity and inclusion in media content.

It is anticipated that research and analysis produced and disseminated by the MDRC will be used by media practitioners, media development actors, academics, and policymakers worldwide.

THEORY OF CHANGE

01 INPUTS

EXTERNAL

- Stable funding from international donors
- Network of partners and contributors

INTERNAL

- Head of Research and research team
- Advisary Board comprising up to 25 scholars
- Administrative support from MDI

04 OUTCOMES

SHORT-TERM

Practitioner knowledge on media, diversity, and inclusion is enhanced

MEDIUM-TERM

Media development actors incorporate diversity and inclusion issues into their project design and M&E programmes

LONG-TORM

Beneficiaries of media development projects improve policy and practice relating to diversity and inclusion

02 ACTIVITIES

CAPACITY-BUILDING

- Training and mentoring of researchers
- Internship programme for researchers and journalists

RESEARCH

- Commissioning research
- Conducting studies
- Disseminating findings

MEDIA DIVERSITY INDEX

- Developing indicators
- Conducting research
- Producing index

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Cross-sector network-building
- Participation in conferences and seminars
- Annual conference for academics, media, and CSOs

03 OUTPUTS

- Peer-reviewed mappings of media and diversity ecosystems
- Academic papers on specific issues related to media and diversity
- Rosource base for media development actors

- Set of indicators for the Media Diversity Index
- Annual editions of the Media Diversity Index

- Database of kay stakeholders working on issues related to media and diversity
- Recommendations and conclusions of conferences

05 IMPACT

Representatives from vulnerable and marginalised groups are more present in media content and have increased opportunites to make their voices heard through media platorms

ACTIVITIES

Training and mentoring of researchers and journalists

In 2024, an internship programme has be launched for researchers and journalists who are interested in developing their research skills and knowledge, including in media and diversity issues. Research assistants will be paid and will receive ongoing capacity-building and mentoring throughout their internship. The aim of this programme is to develop a network of individuals with the skills and experience to contribute to future initiatives.

Production and dissemination of original empirical research

The MDRC will produce studies, policy briefs, and needs assessments using qualitative and quantitative research methods. They will be disseminated via a dedicated online platform, social media channels, and partner websites as well as at conferences and third-party events. During the first year of the Centre's operations (2024/2025), the following outputs are anticipated:

- A peer-reviewed mapping of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) community as well as the civil society and academic sectors to identify EU- and UK-funded projects on media and diversity. The study will include an analysis of the theoretical and methodological approaches that are used to investigate the topic. It will provide insight into funding patterns, the type of issues addressed, and the involvement of different stakeholder groups.

- A peer-reviewed mapping of the media diversity ecosystem in the Western Balkans to be used as a pilot for developing a robust methodology that can be applied to other geographical regions. Findings will include an overview of all local organisations that are actively working in the area of media and diversity including media, civil society, academic institutions, and policymaking bodies.

Media Diversity Index

The MDRC team is working with external experts, particularly from the academic community, to develop a set of indicators that will sit at the heart of the Media Diversity Index. The indicators are likely to include:

- The political economy of the media.
- The diversity of media types and platforms in local media landscapes.
- The inclusion of diverse voices in media content.
- The way in which specific identity groups are portrayed by local media platforms.
- The representation of minority groups in editorial teams.

The team will also design and conduct a survey in selected countries that will be used to produce the first edition of the Index in 2025. This edition will pioneer a system for scoring or categorising countries that will act as a barometer for progress or backsliding in this field.

During the first year of the initiative, the research team will identify a cohort of experts in different regions who have the skills and knowhow to contribute to future editions of the Media Diversity Index. The experts will be organised into working groups which will peer review the findings of surveys and in-country research.

Stakeholder engagement

The MDRC is creating a database of key stakeholders who are working on issues related to media, diversity, and inclusion, drawing on experience gained through MDI's ongoing and previous projects as well as additional research. Tabulated by country, type of organisation, and specialist area, the database will be accessible to partners including donors and policymakers who are looking for expertise in specific topics and geographies.

Using the database as a key resource, the MDRC will act as a convenor for individuals and organisations working on the target issues. A range of networking opportunities will provide a forum for these stakeholders to share their experience and update peers on relevant research projects. These events will include an annual conference on media and diversity for academics, media, CSOs, and the international development community.

In addition, the Centre will participate in third-party conferences and seminars that focus on trends and innovation in the media development sector. Examples include conferences held by IAMCR and GFMD as well as the International Journalism Festival in Perugia (April) and World Press Freedom Day (WPFD) which is held on May 3 each year.

AUDIENCES

The Centre will benefit **journalists and media organisations** seeking to extend their knowledge and understanding of diversity and inclusion. Through the research products and networking activities, these stakeholders will gain new insights into the causal links between diversity reporting and social cohesion as well as the practical measures that media outlets can take in order to improve the representation of different identity groups in their content.

Through the Centre's work, **civil society actors**, particularly those supporting vulnerable and marginalised groups, will be able to improve their ability to collaborate more effectively with media outlets as well as to promote the interests of their constituents through grassroots and social media platforms. The networking opportunities will also enable them to access external expertise and knowledge.

International donors and media development agencies are a core stakeholder group with a shared interest in keeping abreast of the latest thinking and innovations in the target field. They will be able to use the MDRC's outputs to improve the design and targeting of their programmes, including by considering ways in which media and civil society can work together to improve civic participation and engagement.

The MDRC offers significant added value for the **academic community**, particularly teachers of journalism and social sciences, who will be able to enrich their own research work and teaching curricula by accessing and leveraging the Centre's resources. Members of this target group will also be given the opportunity to participate in joint research initiatives and form partnerships with other individuals and institutions working in the same field.

MDI's experience in engaging with **technology companies** will inform the Centre's work which will include studies of discriminatory and agenda-driven narratives on social media platforms. The Centre will encourage Big Tech to use the findings to refine and update their community guidelines, taking advantage of MDI's Trusted Partner status with Facebook/Meta and Google/YouTube. It will also track developments related to the rise of Generative AI.

A B O U T   M D I

The Media Diversity Institute aims to encourage accurate and nuanced reporting on issues of race, religion, ethnicity, class, age, disability, gender, and sexual identity in media landscapes around the world. MDI works at the intersection of freedom of expression, diversity, and inclusion, unlocking the power of media and other content-creators to reduce conflict, advance human rights, and deepen public understanding of social diversity.

MDI collaborates with media leaders, journalists, media academics, and journalism students as well as with CSOs advocating for inclusion and representing at-risk, vulnerable, and marginalised communities. MDI in the UK has four sister organisations based in Brussels, Boston, Belgrade, and Yerevan which operate on a national, regional, and international level.

Over the past 25 years, MDI has implemented more than 100 programmes with a visible social impact, both on- and offline. For example, "Get the Trolls Out!" (GTTO), funded by the US State Department since 2015, encourages civil society activists to call out the perpetrators of online hate speech and take a stand against inflammatory rhetoric. An EU-funded project, Migravoice, amplifies migrant voices and perspectives in European media by bringing media and CSOs together and developing policy recommendations.

MDI retains a strong focus on capacity-building projects within the media and civil society sectors. For example, Reporting Diversity Network 2.0 mobilises CSOs to counter divisive narratives by influencing the quality of media reporting on ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. It takes its cue from the "Reporting Diversity Handbook for Journalists" which is periodically adapted in line with changing media landscapes and professional needs.

All projects are informed by preliminary enquiry that includes desk research, interviews with experts and key informants on the ground, and ethnography – namely, visiting the workplaces of journalists and CSOs and engaging in active consultation. MDI's projects themselves generate findings that help stakeholders to understand how to enable and facilitate social change in a variety of contexts.

MDI has established relationships with high-profile journalism academics from 80 universites worldwide. Current board members include: Verica Rupar, professor of journalism at the School of Communication Studies, AUT, New Zealand, and a former Chair of the World Journalism Education Council as well as Eric Heinze, a Professor of Law and Humanities at Queen Mary University of London. In addition, MDI has partnered with the University of Westminster to develop the first cross-sectoral master's programme for journalists, academics, and CSO workers.

MDI IN NUMBERS

3,000
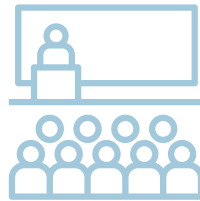
JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA DECISION-MAKERS TRAINED

2,500

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS SUPPORTED

800

JOURNALISM ACADEMICS ENGAGED IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

10,000

PARTICIPANTS IN CONFERENCES HOSTED BY MDI OR FEATURING MDI SPEAKERS

80

JOURNALISM FACULTIES WORLDWIDE THAT HAVE INTRODUCED MODULES OR COURSES IN INCLUSIVE JOURNALISM

72

HANDBOOKS AND MANUALS ON UNIVERSITY READING LISTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, NORTH AFRICA AND BEYOND