



South East European Network
for Professionalization of Media

JOURNALISM UNDER ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND DIGITAL PRESSURE

The Future of the Media in Kosovo – Considerations by Key Actors

Jeton Mehmeti

OUR MEDIA:

A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism,
counter polarisation and promote dialogue



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Publishers:

Foundation "Mediacentar", Sarajevo

The Press Council of Kosovo, Pristina

Peace Institute, Ljubljana

Sarajevo, January 2026



Këshilli i Mediave të Shkruara të Kosovës
Press Council of Kosovo
Savet Stampe Kosova



Mirovni inštitut
Inštitut za sodobne družbene in politične študije
The Peace Institute
Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies



*This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union.
Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author and the publishers
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This second phase of research *The Future of Media in Kosovo*¹ examines how the country's media landscape is experienced by those who live and work within it—citizens, journalists, and media professionals. It moves beyond statistical indicators to capture perceptions of freedom, trust, and accountability in everyday media practice. The findings reveal a media sector that remains formally free but structurally fragile, where economic dependency, political rhetoric, and digital competition continue to erode journalistic independence and quality of media content. Building on the baseline findings of *The Future of Media in Kosovo* (Mehmeti, 2025), the study highlights how declining trust, ethical lapses, and growing political hostility are reshaping both the role of journalism and public confidence in it. These dynamics unfold within an increasingly polarized society, where political divisions and competing narratives shape both the production of news and the ways in which citizens interpret it.

The findings reveal a media sector that remains formally free but structurally fragile, where economic dependency, political rhetoric, and digital competition continue to erode journalistic independence and quality of media content.

The decline in public trust emerged as the most pressing concern. Data from the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) show that confidence in media in Kosovo fell from 50 per cent in 2023 to just 30 per cent in 2024. Two interrelated dynamics appear to drive this erosion. First, internal weaknesses within the media sector—particularly the failure to uphold professional and ethical standards—have compromised credibility. Evidence from the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK) shows that of 90 complaints reviewed between January and September 2025, 47 were upheld as violations of the Code of Ethics. Second, external pressures—especially from political elites—have further damaged public perceptions of journalism. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) documented several verbal and administrative attacks by political leaders between January and October 2025, including smear campaigns and intimidation of journalists. Such rhetoric has normalized public hostility towards the press and fostered a climate of fear.

Together, these internal and external factors reinforce one another, producing a sustained decline in media credibility and civic trust. These developments mirror broader regional patterns captured in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Index, which downgraded Kosovo from a “problematic but improving” to a “difficult and declining” context for media freedom, with particularly low scores on political and economic indicators.

1 For more on the first phase of the *Future of Media* research, see: https://futureofmedia.seenpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Ourmedia_KS-ENG_25-01-22.pdf

Despite these challenges, the research findings reveal strong foundations for renewal of the role of media in society. Citizens and media professionals share a clear vision for a more ethical, inclusive, and socially responsive journalism. Both groups emphasized that trust can be rebuilt through credible reporting, professional integrity, and public accountability. Citizens called for content that reflects their daily realities—education, employment, community development—rather than endless political conflict, while journalists stressed the need for transparent funding, stronger self-regulation, and continued donor support for independent media. Across all focus groups, participants agreed that technology and artificial intelligence will reshape journalism, but insisted that human oversight, empathy, and ethics must remain at its core.

I.

INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes the second phase of the research project The Future of Media. The findings of the first phase were published in a report in January 2025 under the title “The Expanding Media Landscape, Decline in Journalists’ Safety and Low Media Literacy – The Future of Media in Kosovo: Facts and Trends” (Mehmeti, 2025). Built exclusively on quantitative data, the first phase provided a descriptive and analytical overview of an extensive data set on media and democracy indicators. By examining variables related to journalism, media use, trust, and governance, the study aimed to establish an evidence-based understanding of the structural dynamics shaping Kosovo’s media system. The data were organized across five thematic areas—general data about Kosovo’s population and economy, journalism and education, media structure, media use and trust, and indicators of democracy, the rule of law, and corruption—compiled from both primary and secondary sources.

The rationale for conducting this second phase is to move beyond the quantitative and institutional analysis of the first phase and to capture the lived experiences of citizens and media professionals. Through focus group discussion, this phase seeks to understand how people interpret ongoing transformations in media and democracy, how they experience changes in information ecosystems, and how they envision the future role of journalism and media in society.

The discussion mostly focused around the major trends that were identified during the first phase. The first noticeable trend is citizens’ declining trust in media. While television remains the most trusted source of information, its credibility has weakened among younger audiences, who increasingly rely on social media platforms for news. The blurring of boundaries between journalism, commentary, and political messaging has further deepened scepticism toward the media as a whole. A second persistent challenge relates to political and economic pressures, as journalists continue to face attacks and threats that undermine their safety and independence, a challenge that may lead towards fostering self-censorship in the long-run. Finally, the rapid digitalization of the media landscape has increased access to information and stimulated innovation but has also fragmented audiences and intensified competition between media and influencers. Competition is also pushing many outlets to prioritize speed over accuracy and verification, leading towards violation of journalism standards.

The blurring of boundaries between journalism, commentary, and political messaging has further deepened scepticism toward the media as a whole.

The second phase aims to deepen understanding of the interconnections between media and democracy through the voices of those who consume and produce information. Specifically, it seeks to understand: How do citizens' perceptions relate to the trends identified in the first phase? How do citizens and journalists perceive the current role of media in democracy? What are their expectations for its future? What measures can strengthen and safeguard the democratic functions of the media in Kosovo?

The research for the second phase was conducted through three focus groups with 28 participants (14 women and 14 men), designed to ensure diversity in age, gender, geography, and professional background:

- Two focus groups with citizens—one with younger participants (aged 18–35) conducted on 5 June 2025 in Prishtinë and one with older participants (aged 36–65) conducted on 12 June 2025 in Prishtinë. Both groups included participants from urban and semi-urban areas across Kosovo and ensured gender balance; and
- One focus group with media professionals, including editors, journalists, and digital media managers from television and online outlets conducted on 13 June 2025 in Prishtinë.²

These methods provide a qualitative foundation for understanding how different social and professional groups interpret the evolving relationship between media and democracy in Kosovo—and how this relationship might be strengthened in the years ahead.

2 Each session lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and was audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed thematically according to the coding framework provided in the General Methodological Guidelines. Additional information about the focus group participants is provided in Annex 1.

II.

OPINIONS ON MEDIA, JOURNALISM, AND DEMOCRACY

A central concern raised across all focus groups is the growing disconnect between young audiences and domestic journalism. Media professionals noted that young people increasingly consume information through English-language social media content rather than local news sources, weakening cultural connection and civic engagement. One online editor warned, “Young people today get information only in English through reels and social media, and they are losing interest in reading information in their own native language.” This shift is reshaping the information ecosystem in ways that marginalize Kosovo’s media and diminish the public’s familiarity with local affairs.

Participants also described a deepening antagonism between political actors and the media, rooted in years of delegitimizing rhetoric from public officials. Journalists argued that hostile political discourse has normalized public distrust. Citizens largely agreed that while direct censorship has become rare, indirect political influence—especially at the local level—remains commonplace, with local outlets particularly vulnerable due to their dependency on municipal funding and advertising.

Another theme dominating the discussions is the financial precarity of the media sector. Journalists widely described 2025 as one of the most economically difficult years for the profession, with donors withdrawing and advertising revenue shrinking. Many argued that these pressures have created conditions of “economic censorship,” in which financial vulnerabilities shape editorial decisions. As one participant explained: “We opened a call for small grants of up to 5,000 euros and received 50 applications... the competition for funds is enormous” (Managing Editor, online media, Prishtinë). This resource scarcity fuels self-censorship, weakens independent reporting, and leaves media outlets struggling to sustain investigative work.

These economic pressures contribute to a broader decline in professional standards, as newsrooms increasingly rely on underpaid, inexperienced reporters and rapid-fire content production. Both journalists and citizens

Journalists widely described 2025 as one of the most economically difficult years for the profession, with donors withdrawing and advertising revenue shrinking.

pointed to the proliferation of sensationalism, superficial analysis, and “talking heads.” Younger citizens expressed frustration with low-quality debate formats, complaining about “analysts who talk about everything without expertise.” Senior journalists attributed this decline to the erosion of editorial mentorship and the mismatch between the expectations of young reporters and the demands of rigorous journalism.

Participants from both groups highlighted the deterioration of newsroom culture and the struggles of intergenerational learning. Editors described young reporters as less patient with training and more eager to cover major stories without first mastering basic skills. One media participant explained the difficulty: “It has become very hard to tell a young journalist to sit with me so I can teach them how this work is done” (Editor, television, Prishtinë). This gap in professional development undermines the sustainability of journalistic standards and the ability of newsrooms to function as spaces of ethical and civic learning.

At the same time, the rise of influencers and digital creators was seen as both an economic and cultural threat to journalism. Media professionals noted that advertising budgets increasingly flow to social media personalities whose popularity—not professionalism—determines market value. As one participant put it: “Suddenly a TikToker or YouTuber comes in and creates illegal competition, taking company deals just because they have reach and views” (Journalist, online media, Prishtinë). This shift diminishes the financial viability of newsrooms and blurs public understanding of what constitutes journalism versus entertainment.

Citizens also expressed alarm about the lack of institutional accountability, noting that investigative journalism, no matter how strong, often results in no tangible legal or political consequences. One citizen participant summarized this sentiment by saying that important investigations “expose wrongdoing without producing outcomes,” which in turn contributes to public disillusionment and questions about the effectiveness of watchdog reporting as a democratic tool.

A further challenge identified in all focus groups relates to harassment, intimidation, and personal security risks faced by journalists, especially women and investigative reporters. Journalists described a climate of fear and exhaustion, shaped by online abuse, smear campaigns, and coordinated attacks intended to silence critical voices. As one participant noted: “Female journalists and investigative reporters face the harshest treatment, often through online abuse or targeted intimidation” (Female, 32, Prishtinë). These pressures discourage critical reporting and undermine the sector’s capacity to perform its democratic oversight function.

The broader information landscape is also threatened by the proliferation of low-quality online portals, often created by inexperienced individuals who bypass professional standards. Media professionals observed that many young people open news websites immediately, without training or editorial supervision. One media participant explained: “There is declining interest in becoming a journalist, yet many young people without experience open their own online portals right away” (Editor, television, Prishtinë). This trend contributes to information pollution, weakens credibility, and further complicates citizen efforts to identify trustworthy sources.

Finally, participants underscored the existential crisis facing local media, which remain the weakest part of the media ecosystem yet the most essential for community-level democracy. Local outlets were described as highly vulnerable to political pressure, economic dependency, and self-censorship. One editor suggested a structural solution, noting that: “We should follow Slovenia’s model, which subsidizes local media to write about culture, education, and community issues” (Editor, online media, Prishtinë). Without such interventions, participants warned that information deserts may emerge outside major cities, further eroding democratic participation.

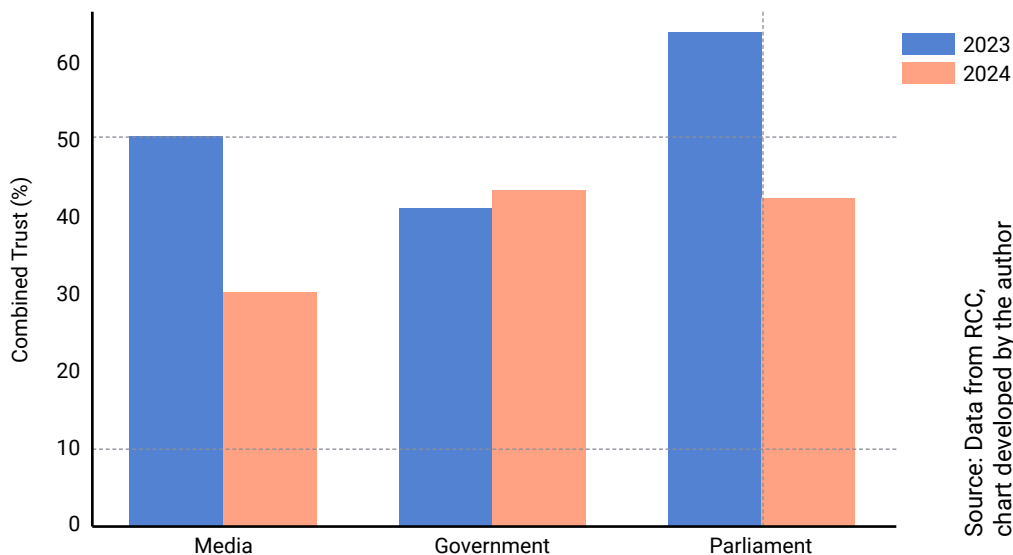
Despite all these challenges—political hostility, economic instability, declining professionalism, and security threats—participants across groups emphasized the enduring democratic value of journalism. As one citizen put it simply: “Journalism remains a pillar of democracy” (Male, 44, Gjakovë). This shared belief reflects both an acknowledgment of the pressures facing the sector and a recognition of its irreplaceable role in protecting the public interest.

III.

REFLECTIONS ON IDENTIFIED TRENDS AND RISKS IN THE FIRST RESEARCH PHASE

The first phase of the research identified trust decline as the most visible and alarming trend in Kosovo's media environment. Data from the 2024 Balkan Barometer show that public trust in the media fell from 50% to 30%, the steepest fall compared to trust in government or parliament (RCC, 2024). Both journalists and citizens framed this decline not as a sudden shift, but as the outcome of cumulative structural problems.

Chart 1: **PUBLIC TRUST IN MEDIA, GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT**
- KOSOVO (2023 VS. 2024)



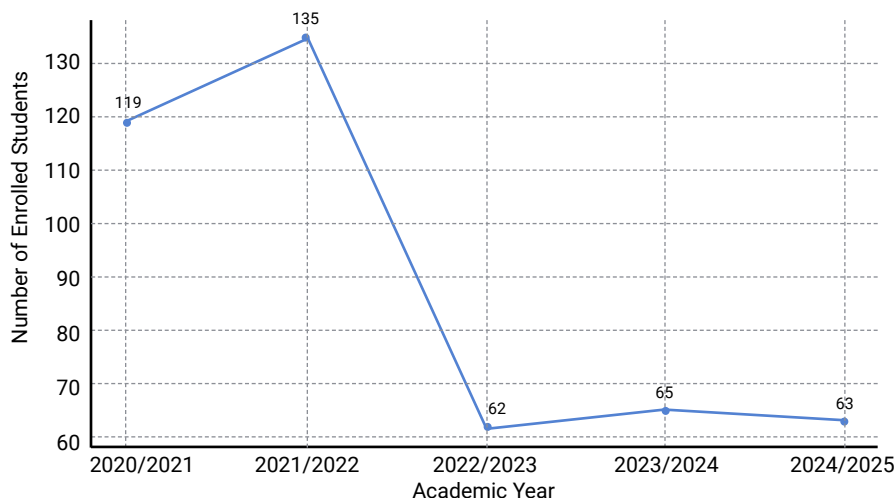
The first major driver of trust decline concerns the evolving nature of political pressure, which has shifted from overt censorship to more subtle but pervasive forms of delegitimization. RSF data and focus group testimonies indicate that political actors increasingly deploy rhetoric that undermines the credibility of journalists (RSF, 2025). According to the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AGK, 2025a), of 35 public reactions on journalist safety issued between January and October 2025, 24 involved political actors and included verbal attacks or smear campaigns. Journalists described the psychological toll of this hostility. As one participant explained: “The government has invested years in language that discredits media” (Journalist, online media, Prishtinë). Citizens echoed this view, arguing that such rhetoric “teaches the public to disrespect journalists,” normalizing an environment in which critical reporting is easily dismissed as politically motivated.

The enrolment data from the University of Prishtina’s Journalism Department reveal an alarming trend—the decline in student interest in journalism as a field of study.

A second major factor influencing this trend relates to systemic ethical violations within the media sector. Data from the Press Council of Kosovo (PCK, 2025a) show that between January and September 2025, 90 complaints were filed against online media, with 46 confirmed as violations of the Code of Ethics. Nearly 90% involved breaches of Article 2 (Reporting the Truth), while many also violated Article 4 (Right to Reply).

Another negative trend identified in the first phase of research concerns the shrinking pipeline of future journalists, which threatens the long-term sustainability of the profession. The enrolment data from the University of Prishtina’s Journalism Department reveal an alarming trend—the decline in student interest in journalism as a field of study. After peaking at 135 students in the 2021/2022 academic year, enrolment dropped by more than half in 2022/2023 and has since remained low, fluctuating only slightly around 60–65 students per year. This downward trend underscores a growing disinterest in the profession among younger generations—an early signal of the challenges facing journalism’s renewal and sustainability.

Chart 2: NUMBER OF JOURNALISM STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA
Number of BA Students Enrolled in Journalism Department University of Prishtina (2020-2025)



Source: University of Prishtina

Senior editors interpreted this trend as evidence of a deeper crisis of professional identity. One editor noted, “Young people don’t want to study journalism anymore, and those who come into the newsroom think they already know everything because of social media” (Editor, television, Prishtinë).

Finally, all these risks converge in the deterioration of Kosovo’s overall media freedom environment, as reflected in the Press Freedom Index. Between 2022 and 2025, Kosovo shifted from “problematic but improving” to “difficult and declining,” with significant regression across political, economic, legislative, social, and security indicators.

Table 1. Kosovo: RSF PRESS FREEDOM INDEX (2022–2025) WITH CLASSIFICATION

Year	Rank /180	Score	Classification	Political	Economic	Legislative	Social	Security
2022	61	67.00	Problematic situation	64.34	45.24	80.85	74.33	70.26
2023	56	68.38	Problematic situation	62.95	50.28	80.26	75.49	72.95
2024	75	60.19	Difficult situation	56.61	48.05	73.92	67.56	54.81
2025	99	52.73	Difficult situation	44.61	39.88	68.54	57.28	53.35

● Good (85–100)
 ● Satisfactory (75–84.9)
 ● Problematic (65–74.9)
 ● Difficult (45–64.9)
 ● Very Serious (0–44.9)

The political category experienced the most dramatic decline—falling by 19.73 points to 44.61—placing Kosovo in the “very serious” range of the RSF’s scale. Focus group participants strongly associated this environment with rising self-censorship. As one journalist observed, “With this level of hostility, many colleagues avoid sensitive topics because they don’t want to be attacked or humiliated online” (Journalist, online, Prishtinë).

In sum, the first research phase revealed a media environment confronting ethical lapses that undermine credibility, political hostility that fuels reputational attacks, economic insecurity that distorts news production and a shrinking pipeline of new professionals entering the field. These patterns, together with additional findings related to media use and public trust, are further elaborated below through the perspectives and lived experiences shared by participants in the focus group discussions.

IV.

MEDIA USE AND TRUST

This section examines how citizens and media professionals in Kosovo consume, evaluate, and trust media in an increasingly digital information ecosystem. Drawing on focus group discussions, it analyses evolving media habits, generational differences, the role of digital platforms, and shifting perceptions of credibility and accountability. Three dynamics dominate this landscape: (1) migration from traditional media to online platforms, (2) growing scepticism toward social media, and (3) the persistence of selective trust in a few outlets.

All focus groups agreed that access to information in Kosovo has expanded dramatically over the past decade, driven by digitalization and mobile technology. Younger citizens now rely primarily on online news portals, social media platforms, and mobile apps for news consumption. Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were cited as convenient and immediate sources—though participants acknowledged that these platforms are not always reliable: “I get my news mostly from social media, especially Instagram” (Female, 22, Prishtinë).

Older citizens, by contrast, described a hybrid model of consumption, combining online browsing with television news and, to a lesser extent, radio broadcasts. Many expressed nostalgia for the depth and editorial discipline once associated with traditional journalism: “On Facebook I have unfollowed all the media—I only check the media websites I trust directly” (Male, 48, Decan).

Both generations observed the disappearance of printed newspapers and the normalization of a “free information” culture, where audiences expect unlimited online access without payment. As one participant summarized: “We now believe everything should come to us for free, online” (Male, 35, Gjiilan).

Media professionals confirmed these trends, describing them as a double-edged sword: digitalization has democratized access but eroded sustainability. They believe that audiences increasingly consume news indirectly through social media feeds rather than directly from media websites. “We have no culture of subscriptions. Whoever controls the money controls the message” (Journalist, online media, Prishtinë).

Participants also noted that local businesses now advertise directly on social media platforms, bypassing professional outlets. This shift has deprived

Younger citizens now rely primarily on online news portals, social media platforms, and mobile apps for news consumption. Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were cited as convenient and immediate sources.

traditional media of vital income, pushing them toward more commercialized, click-driven content strategies: “TikTok influencers are charging as much as a radio station for commercials. We pay taxes—they don’t” (Journalist, broadcast media, Prishtinë).

Participants across all groups expressed a growing scepticism toward online portals and social media as credible sources of information. Younger citizens described most portals as politically biased and driven by clicks rather than facts: “Every online portal supports one political side, and this is visible in their writing” (Male, 26, Ferizaj); “Many portals ignore ethics completely—some just post anything for clicks” (Female, 22, Prishtinë).

Older participants shared this concern but showed greater trust in television news and investigative programmes, which they associated with professional standards and editorial oversight. Media professionals confirmed that blurred boundaries between reporting and commentary have confused audiences and weakened public confidence: “People need to learn the difference between a report and an opinion. Even some journalists don’t” (Editor, online media, Prishtinë).

This scepticism has also affected engagement patterns. While most citizens consume news daily, few actively interact with media by providing feedback or submitting complaints. Older citizens, however, noted increasing awareness of accountability mechanisms, such as the Press Council of Kosovo and the Independent Media Commission: “There’s now more awareness of fact-checking and content responsibility, but it’s mostly among media-savvy readers” (Editor, television, Prishtinë).

Despite scepticism, participants maintain selective trust in a limited number of credible media outlets. These are typically well-established local platforms known for ethical standards and transparency. Trust, however, has increasingly migrated from institutions to individuals—bloggers, commentators, and influencers—who often operate outside professional frameworks.

We’re competing with influencers for the same audience and advertisers. They have the followers; we have the code of ethics. (Editor, online media, Prishtinë).

This shift toward personality-driven news ecosystems has blurred accountability and deepened polarization, as audiences now tend to follow individuals they agree with rather than institutions they can verify. Older participants described nostalgia for an era when “news was verified before it reached the public,” while younger ones valued the diversity of online voices but questioned their reliability.

V.

CITIZENS' NEEDS AND DEMANDS

There are diverse expectations among Kosovo's citizens regarding media content, representation, and ethics. This section explores their perceptions of media quality and diversity, their sense of whether they are adequately represented, and the ways in which they engage with journalistic content.

Across the two focus groups with citizens, participants expressed a strong sense that Kosovo's citizens expect more from their media—more substance, diversity, ethics, and accountability. Participants across generations agreed that the media have become overly politicized and sensational, often prioritizing conflict and controversy over public interest reporting. Citizens called for journalism that educates, informs, and reflects the realities of their communities, while media professionals emphasized that such journalism is increasingly difficult to sustain within a financially fragile system.

Younger participants were particularly vocal about *content fatigue* from political news. They described the media landscape as dominated by repetitive, polarized political debates that mirror politicians' social media rhetoric rather than investigate it. Instead, they expressed interest in coverage that is both informative and relatable—focusing on education, employment, and social life. One participant said: "I prefer showbiz and sports news. Political stories just repeat what politicians say on Facebook" (Female, 21, Prishtinë). Another participant said: "Media should focus more on youth education and social issues, not just politics" (Male, 24, Gjiilan).

Older citizens, by contrast, called for more constructive and development-oriented journalism. They emphasized the need for reporting on the economy, agriculture, and community development—areas they felt were neglected by both national and local outlets: "We don't have enough stories about economic growth or agriculture. The focus is always on politics" (Male, 52, Prizren).

Both groups agreed that the dominance of political coverage does not reflect the diversity of public needs and interests.

On the other hand, ethics and professionalism were central themes in every discussion. Citizens from all age groups voiced concern over declining

Both groups agreed that the dominance of political coverage does not reflect the diversity of public needs and interests.

journalistic standards, particularly among online portals. They attributed this to the rise of inexperienced reporters and the absence of editorial oversight. Participants criticized sensationalist outlets for prioritizing attention over accuracy: “Media should not follow public interest only to attract attention, but serve the public interest with responsibility” (Male, 27, Mitrovicë).

Moreover, both young and older citizens reported feeling *underrepresented* in the media. Young participants said their perspectives appear mainly in entertainment or crime stories, rather than in discussions of policy, culture, or civic life. Older citizens highlighted the near-absence of community-based coverage, especially from smaller towns and rural areas. Many noted that local media increasingly act as “relay stations” for national content, failing to capture local realities: “Local media have stopped covering community life—they just copy press releases” (Female, 47, Ferizaj).

A recurring theme in all groups concerned the sustainability of independent journalism. Citizens generally agreed that media financing should be shared among the state, international donors, and private actors—but with strict safeguards for transparency and non-interference. Younger citizens were sceptical of state funding, fearing political influence.

Media professionals stressed the urgency of establishing a transparent, sustainable funding framework. They described a “financial vacuum” following the withdrawal of donor assistance and the migration of advertising to social media platforms. Many advocated for mixed models that combine state subsidies, donor contributions, and private sponsorships under independent oversight. One participant said: “We need a sustainable financing mechanism. Without it, ethics and independence are impossible” (Editor, online media, Prishtinë).

VI.

OPINIONS ON THE FUTURE OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

Discussions about the future of media and journalism revealed a mixture of hope, anxiety, and realism. Participants across all three focus groups— young citizens, older citizens, and media professionals—acknowledged that Kosovo’s media system stands at a crossroads. While they recognized the transformative potential of digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and social media, they agreed that the core values of accuracy, ethics, and human judgment must remain central to journalism’s survival and credibility.

“AI will challenge journalism, but journalists must go to the field themselves, not wait for AI to do their job”.

Young citizens expressed both fascination and caution regarding emerging technologies. They viewed AI as inevitable and potentially useful for efficiency but feared it could erode authenticity and critical thinking if used irresponsibly. Many emphasized that journalism’s strength lies in human presence, empathy, and contextual understanding—qualities machines cannot replicate: “AI will challenge journalism, but journalists must go to the field themselves, not wait for AI to do their job” (Male, 26, Gjilan).

Older citizens shared this view, arguing that technological progress should enhance, not replace, the journalist’s role. For them, credibility depends on human accountability, which technology alone cannot guarantee.

Media professionals described firsthand how digitalization has reshaped newsroom routines. They observed that the post-pandemic shift to online operations accelerated the “*speed over accuracy*” dynamic, weakening editorial review and mentorship.

After the pandemic, we moved completely online. The model is ‘speed over accuracy.’ The editorial link has been broken. (Journalist, online media, Prishtinë)

Participants also agreed that the future of journalism in Kosovo depends as much on economics as it does on technology. Citizens recognized that quality

journalism requires both time and resources, while professionals warned that persistent financial insecurity threatens editorial independence and ethical standards.

Discussions revealed three interrelated structural threats shaping the media's financial landscape. First, the withdrawal of donor support has left many independent outlets without stable funding, particularly those engaged in investigative and public-interest reporting. Second, advertising revenues have declined sharply as local businesses increasingly shift their marketing budgets to social media platforms, bypassing professional media altogether. Third, this environment has encouraged market concentration, where ownership and influence are consolidated in fewer hands.

Younger citizens also questioned whether future audiences will be willing to pay for reliable journalism. While digital access has democratized information, it has simultaneously fostered an expectation that news should be free—making sustainable business models difficult to establish. For both citizens and professionals, the economic fragility of journalism stands out as one of the most pressing risks for the future.

Media professionals also stressed that technical innovation alone cannot sustain the industry unless it is matched by renewed professional discipline and ethical commitment. They called for the restoration of editorial hierarchies, structured mentorship, and continuous professional development to rebuild integrity within newsrooms. Many argued that self-regulation, rather than state intervention, remains the most effective means of upholding standards and preserving public trust.

Despite concerns about political pressure, financial fragility, and technological disruption, many participants expressed resilient optimism. Professionals highlighted the courage and perseverance of journalists who continue to investigate corruption and injustice. They described journalism not simply as an occupation but as a civic mission grounded in curiosity, integrity, and courage: “Journalists never give up. We’ve been discouraged, but they haven’t taken our courage” (Journalist, television, Prishtinë).

Citizens shared this optimism, expressing pride in Kosovo’s tradition of media freedom and its watchdog role in democratic life. The collective sentiment was not about whether journalism would survive—but what kind of journalism would define the next decade: one driven by ethics and public service, or one dominated by algorithms and clicks.

When asked to imagine the future of journalism, participants across all groups called for a more ethical, inclusive, and human-centred media system. Citizens emphasized accuracy, balance, and empathy; professionals added

sustainability, mentorship, and digital adaptation as vital priorities: “Journalists should be more careful, accurate, and not influenced by personal or political preferences” (Female, 25, Prishtinë).

Overall, participants believe the future of journalism in Kosovo will depend on three conditions. The first is ethical and professional renewal, which requires reinforcing mentorship, restoring editorial hierarchies, and strengthening self-regulation as a means of public accountability. The second is financial sustainability, achieved through transparent and diversified funding models that protect editorial independence from political or commercial pressures. The third is technological adaptation with human oversight, where AI and digital tools are used to enhance journalism’s civic mission—supporting, rather than replacing, the human judgment, empathy, and integrity that define the profession.

VII.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from both phases of *The Future of Media in Kosovo* project portray a media ecosystem that is vibrant yet vulnerable. Kosovo's media remain legally free, digitally advanced, and diverse in form, but they operate under mounting pressure from political hostility, economic fragility, and a deepening crisis of public trust. Across all focus groups, participants identified trust as the central fault line of the country's media system. Citizens now consume more information than ever before, yet fewer believe what they read or watch. Ethical breaches documented by the Press Council of Kosovo, coupled with persistent political attacks and financial dependency, have gradually undermined journalism's credibility as a democratic institution.

The digital revolution has democratized expression and accelerated information flow, but it has also fragmented audiences, intensified competition, and blurred the boundary between journalism and opinion. Yet despite these challenges, the research reveals strong foundations for renewal. Citizens and media professionals share a vision of journalism that is ethical, socially engaged, and independent, suggesting that reform is not only necessary but possible. Kosovo's media still serve as a cornerstone of democracy—holding power to account, exposing corruption, and shaping public debate.

Despite widespread concerns about bias, political pressure, and declining standards, citizens expressed a measured optimism about the future of journalism in Kosovo. Many believe that credibility can be restored through a renewed commitment to accuracy, independence, and ethical reporting. Younger participants, in particular, emphasized the need for journalism that “speaks the truth without fear” and serves the public rather than political or commercial interests. In their view, the future of Kosovo's media will depend on rebuilding trust and sustaining journalism as a critical democratic good.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations outline the key actions needed to strengthen media integrity, enhance public trust, and support a more resilient and independent media landscape in Kosovo, targeting policymakers and institutions, media organizations and professionals, as well as donors and the international community.

Despite widespread concerns about bias, political pressure, and declining standards, citizens expressed a measured optimism about the future of journalism in Kosovo.

For policymakers and institutions

- State institutions should guarantee legal and institutional protection for journalists by strengthening enforcement mechanisms for attacks and threats against journalists through faster judicial follow-up and public transparency of case outcomes.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with the media community, should integrate journalist safety protocols into police and prosecutorial procedures, while respecting judicial independence.
- The central government and municipal authorities should ensure transparent and fair allocation of public funds by adopting clear criteria for the distribution of state and municipal advertising, in order to prevent political favouritism.
- An independent monitoring body should be established, supported by public institutions but governed jointly by civil society, academia, and the media sector, to track government-media financial relations.
- The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation should promote media literacy as a public policy priority by integrating media and digital literacy into school curricula from primary to tertiary education.
- The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, together with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and in partnership with civil society and media organizations, should support public campaigns that promote fact-checking, critical thinking, and responsible information sharing.

For media organizations and professionals

- Media outlets, editors, the Press Council of Kosovo, journalism associations, and journalism schools should rebuild ethical and editorial standards by reinforcing newsroom mentoring and editorial hierarchies to restore verification and accountability, by expanding self-regulation by strengthening the capacity and visibility of the Press Council of Kosovo, and by encouraging collaboration between newsrooms, journalism schools, and watchdog organizations to establish a culture of peer learning and ethical reflection.
- Media organizations, universities, professional associations, and media development organizations—supported by donors— should invest in professional training and education by: Creating continuous professional development programmes on AI, data journalism, and investigative methods; and Revitalizing journalism education through partnerships with universities and media development organizations to connect theory with practice.

- Media owners, donors, and industry partners—with transparent public support where appropriate—should diversify and secure media financing by: Developing sustainable funding models that combine commercial revenues, state support, and international grants under strict transparency conditions; and Encouraging audience-supported models, including memberships, crowdfunding, and micro-subscriptions, to reduce dependency on donors and advertisers.

For donors and the international community

- International donors and media development organizations should shift from short-term grants to systemic support by: moving beyond project-based assistance to long-term institutional funding that ensures editorial continuity and staff development; and supporting regional initiatives promoting cross-border cooperation, investigative journalism, and resilience against disinformation;
- International donors, media development organizations, and technology partners should encourage innovation and ethical use of technology by: funding experimentation with AI-driven tools for verification, fact-checking, and content analysis while maintaining strong ethical oversight; and supporting digital transformation initiatives that enhance newsroom sustainability and transparency rather than displace journalistic labour.

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Annex 1 - Description of the focus groups

Focus Group 1

Date: 5 June 2025
Location: Prishtinë
Participants: Citizens (18–35)

1. Female, 19, Prishtinë
2. Female, 21, Fushë Kosovë
3. Male, 23, Prizren
4. Male, 25, Podujeva
5. Female, 27, Ferizaj
6. Female, 28, Gjiilan
7. Female, 30, Lipjan
8. Male, 20, Prishtinë
9. Male, 22, Peja
10. Female, 32, Prishtinë

Focus Group 2

Date: 12 June 2025
Location: Prishtinë
Participants: Citizens (36–65)

1. Female, 38, Prishtinë
2. Female, 42, Ferizaj
3. Female, 45, Malishevë
4. Female, 53, Pejë
5. Male, 39, Deçan
6. Male, 39, Podujevë
7. Male, 44, Gjakovë
8. Female, 36, Prishtinë
9. Male, 41, Prizren
10. Female, 45, Mitrovicë

Focus Group 3

Date: 13 June 2025

Location: Prishtinë

Participants: Media Professionals

1. Brikenda Rexhepi, Editor-in-Chief, Koha
2. Arsim Lani, News Editor, TV 7
3. Muhamet Hajrullahu, Editor-in-Chief, Telegrafi
4. Agon Sinanaj, Editor, Buletini Ekonomik
5. Gentianë Pacarizi, Managing Editor, Kosovo 2.0
6. Visar Duriqi, Journalist, Insajderi
7. Mentor Gjergjaj, Editor-in-Chief, Reporteri
8. Imer Mushkolaj, Press Council of Kosovo

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeton Mehmeti is a researcher and lecturer specializing in media policy. He earned his BA from the International University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, an MA from Central European University in Vienna, and is pursuing a PhD at the University of Graz in Austria. From 2010 to 2022, he contributed to IREX's annual reports as the country author for the Media Sustainability Index and the Vibrant Information Barometer. His research focuses on media regulation, hate speech, and disinformation. Mehmeti is affiliated with the American University in Kosovo and has served as Vice President of the Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities and Chairman of the Independent Media Commission of Kosovo.

JOURNALISM UNDER ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND DIGITAL PRESSURE

The Future of the Media in Kosovo – Considerations by Key Actors

This publication is the result of research undertaken as part of the project **“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarization and promote dialogue.”** The second research cycle was conducted in the thematic framework titled “The Future of the Media in the Western Balkans and Turkey” in 2025 and focused on analysing the views and opinions of media professionals regarding the current situation and trends in media and democracy in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey.

The project **“Our Media: A civil society action to generate media literacy and activism, counter polarization and promote dialogue”** is jointly implemented by nine media development organizations from the Western Balkans and Turkey, with the financial support of the European Union. The coordinator of the three-year project is the Foundation Mediacentar Sarajevo. Partners in the project are the Albanian Media Institute in Tirana; bianet in Istanbul; the Macedonian Institute for Media in Skopje; the Montenegro Media Institute in Podgorica; the Novi Sad School of Journalism; the Peace Institute in Ljubljana; the Press Council of Kosovo in Pristina; and the South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM).