

ACTIONING MEDIA VIABILITY FOR INFORMED AND RESILIENT SOCIETIES



25TH CENTRAL ASIA MEDIA CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This document summarizes key takeaways from the 25th Central Asia Media Conference “Actioning Media Viability for Informed and Resilient Societies” organized by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 13-14 November 2025, and sets out recommendations by the RFoM for State bodies, the journalistic community, civil society organizations and academia, stemming from discussions held during the conference.

The conference convened over 130 participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia representing diverse sectors including journalists and editors, media owners and private-sector representatives, civil society organizations, academia, government bodies, legal counsel, and international experts from broader OSCE region.

The conference provided a trusted and inclusive platform for dialogue on the growing challenges to media freedom and viability in a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem. Media viability was selected as a central theme in response to mounting evidence that independent journalism is becoming unsustainable due to fragile business models, declining advertisement revenues and growing economic pressure on media outlets that serve the public interest. Furthermore, international standards emphasise that media freedom hinges upon sustainable and supportive economic environment for journalism, safety guarantees, and enabling legal frameworks.

Across plenary discussions, thematic panels, and interactive workshops, participants exchanged experiences, shared innovative practices, and identified policy and practical responses to safeguard independent, public-interest journalism as a cornerstone of democratic resilience, social cohesion, and informed societies.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS – KEY CONCLUSIONS

Session 1: Navigating challenges to public-interest journalism in the age of Big Tech and AI

This session focused on the growing pressures independent journalism faces due to the influence of Big Tech platforms and the deployment of AI technologies. Panellists discussed the risks to editorial independence and the commodification of content in the context of power imbalances brought about by the Big Tech, as well as the opportunities for innovation and intersectoral collaboration. The session emphasized the need for regulatory, policy-based, economic, and institutional responses to mitigate the impact of these technological challenges. It concluded that fostering healthy online information spaces requires proactive reforms, including measures to support media visibility and financial

viability, promote decentralized and interoperable information systems, and build an independent, pluralistic media ecosystem capable of sustaining democratic debate and societal resilience.

The session also placed emphasis on the need for self-regulation efforts in response to the growing use of AI in journalism. Findings from a regional survey on AI use in newsrooms illustrated widespread but largely unguided use of AI tools, revealing significant gaps in internal policies, and professional training. The discussion emphasised that responsible AI integration requires robust newsroom-level strategic approach, clear editorial guidelines, transparency towards audiences, and sustained investment in professional standards to preserve trust and credibility while using the possibilities offered by modern technologies.

Session 2: Media freedom policy and legislative frameworks to enable viable media in Central Asia

This session explored legislative developments and existing regulatory frameworks across the region, including new media and AI-related laws in Central Asian countries. Panellists noted persistent challenges such as legal actions against journalists and bloggers including cases brought under extremism-related charges, limited access to public information, restrictions on foreign investment in the media, widespread cyber-attacks against journalists, particularly following critical reporting, and burdensome mandatory registration requirements for various types of media. Across the region, there is a need for stronger involvement of media communities and legal experts in legislative processes, and measures to ensure editorial independence while maintaining operational viability.

The session highlighted broad agreement among panellists on the core legal and policy gaps that continue to undermine media freedom and viability in the region. Discussions converged on the need for clearer and fairer accreditation frameworks for both national and foreign media, legal precision around the notion of “false information” to prevent arbitrary or disproportionate application against media professionals, and robust protection against cyberattacks, targeted disinformation campaigns, and other forms of pressure on journalists. Addressing these systemic issues was identified as essential for fostering a safer, more resilient, and legally predictable environment for independent media across Central Asia.

Session 3: Safety of journalists as a prerequisite for free and independent journalism

The safety of journalists was highlighted as a fundamental precondition for media freedom, in line with OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/2018 on the Safety of Journalists, which calls for comprehensive measures to ensure the protection of media professionals. Discussions addressed physical threats, digital harassment, surveillance, and legal intimidation, with particular attention to gender-based online violence targeting women journalists. Panellists and participants stressed that insecurity directly fuels self-censorship and weakens public-interest reporting.

The discussion further examined recent research findings showing that journalists’ safety is closely linked to legal constraints, digital vulnerabilities, and working conditions. Panellists identified the lack of comprehensive legal guarantees for the protection of confidential sources as a major risk, often compounded by pressure from law-enforcement authorities, creating a chilling effect for the coverage of sensitive topics. The broad application of state and official secrecy regulations was also noted as limiting access to public-interest information, particularly for investigative reporting. While legal norms on journalist safety and freedom of expression exist across the region, panellists highlighted persistent

gaps in implementation, thus the need for stronger enforcement, gender-sensitive safeguards, enhanced institutional support and capacity building for the members of the judiciary and prosecutors on journalists safety issues, as well as legal assistance for journalists.

Interactive Session: Ten tips on using AI tools responsibly in the newsroom

This session addressed the growing integration of artificial intelligence in journalistic practice, exploring both opportunities and ethical challenges. Facilitators in this session included AI and journalism experts from Norway's *Schibsted Media*, a leading media group specialized in the use of AI tools in journalism and digital news production, Germany's *Deutsche Welle*; and an independent expert on AI integration from Tajikistan.

Based on concrete examples from their work, the panellists illustrated practical approaches to using AI in content generation, fact-checking, audience engagement, and workflow automation, while ensuring journalistic integrity and public trust. Emphasis was placed on newsroom practices, including transparency, accountability, and editorial independence. The experts and audience also explored implications for policy makers and media freedom advocates, highlighting how AI can support credible and ethical journalism without undermining professional standards.

Session 4: Engaging audiences – media literacy as a frontline response to disinformation

This session examined media and information literacy (MIL) as a long-term response to disinformation, propaganda and other harmful information. It was also considered as a core societal competence, enabling individuals to critically assess information and participate meaningfully in democratic processes. The session showcased several key regional initiatives aimed at engaging audiences and strengthening media and public resilience against disinformation campaigns.

The panel discussion also showed key challenges hindering the development of a holistic approach to media and information literacy (MIL). Experts noted the growing securitization of media literacy within national security and defence frameworks, alongside an overemphasis on digital and technical skills at the expense of critical thinking competencies. While efforts to foster critical skills through both formal and informal learning are recognized, gaps remain in consistently supporting quality journalism as a pillar of information integrity. In addition, uneven cooperation between state and non-state actors across countries, coupled with limited resources for regular evaluation of MIL initiatives, constrains the development of comprehensive, evidence-based strategies and the systematic exchange of promising practices. Participants, including younger media professionals, shared peer-based perspectives and practical capacity-building approaches, such as training-of-trainers.

Session 5: Presentation of the RFoM's and UNESCO's publication "Reporting the Environment: A Practical Guide for Journalists"

Discussions at this Session centred on the state of environmental journalism in Central Asia and key challenges journalists face in this field. Regional panellists spoke about threats ranging from physical, legal, and online attacks to difficulties accessing information, scarce scientific expertise in newsrooms, widespread disinformation, and limited audience interest. They also pointed out the strain in communication between journalists and scientists and the use of lawsuits, including Strategic Litigation against Public Participation (SLAPPs), to intimidate environmental reporting.

Panellists unveiled the new publication *Reporting the Environment: A Practical Guide for Journalists*, developed jointly by the RFoM's Office and UNESCO, and to be made available online soon. They noted that the new publication provides extensive guidance on the issues raised by other speakers, offering strategies to enhance journalist safety, access information for investigative reporting, and apply effective storytelling formats. The Guide also includes relevant scientific background and the international legal framework on environmental protection. Panellists recommended fostering newsroom cultures that prioritize climate and environmental coverage, exploring human rights angles, producing explainers and innovative formats like podcasts, and highlighting solutions as well as problems. The session concluded with a call for OSCE RFoM and UNESCO to facilitate greater regional cooperation among environmental journalists in Central Asia.

Session 6: What works for media? Media Viability Manifesto in action

In this session, participants examined the [Media Viability Manifesto](#) (MVM) a strategic framework developed by a coalition of media development organizations, built on global lessons for sustaining media as a public good. Developed through extensive field experience and dialogue with media actors worldwide, its aim is three-pronged: to foster conceptual clarity, to strengthen strategic collaboration between multiple stakeholders, and to align practical implementation in the field of media viability. Regional and international experts at this session shared views about how the Manifesto can be leveraged in the region for strengthening media business models, diversifying revenue streams, improving audience engagement while maintaining editorial integrity.

Panellists also highlighted key challenges faced by the media in the region, including declining revenues, limited advertising markets, difficulties in audience engagement, political pressures faced by independent/investigative journalism, and pressures caused by digital transformations. Participants explored ways in which the Manifesto's strategies can be applied to address these obstacles as well, enhance media resilience, and support professional independence, emphasizing the importance of both practical tools and policy-level interventions to strengthen media viability in Central Asia.

Session 7: Interactive workshop on safeguarding media freedom in the age of Big Tech platforms and AI

This hands-on workshop presented the RFoM's new [Policy Manual on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of Big Tech Platforms and AI](#), which highlights how the current digital information ecosystem has become increasingly captured in ways that undermine media freedom, and offers an analysis and recommendations of steps to reduce systemic dependencies and mitigate harms. The recommended mitigation measures cover three key areas: visibility of journalism and public interest information online; media viability and funding models that support public interest information; and vigilance, or the online safety of journalists.

The workshop provided participants with practical guidance on protecting media freedom amid the growing influence of Big Tech and AI technologies. Experts and panellists guided attendees through concrete case studies, strategies, and tools to address emerging risks to editorial independence, content visibility, and public-interest journalism. The session concluded by emphasizing the need for a coordinated, multi-stakeholder and proactive approach in the region, where legal safeguards, newsroom policies, and digital best practices work together to foster resilient, independent media.

RFoM's CAMC 2025 reaffirmed that media freedom, journalists' safety, and viability are inseparable. Without sustainable economic models, fair access to digital markets, effective legal protections, and safe working conditions, independent journalism cannot fulfil its democratic role. The conference demonstrated strong regional demand for practical solutions, inclusive policy-making, and continued multi-stakeholder dialogue. Participants underscored the shared responsibility of all actors to create enabling environments in which trusted, independent media can thrive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

State Bodies

1. Leveraging the expertise offered by the RFoM's [Policy Manual on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of Big Tech Platforms and AI](#) (2025), develop and implement comprehensive, rights-based policy frameworks that address the influence of the Big Tech and AI technologies on information ecosystems, by requiring platforms to ensure transparency and accountability in algorithmic content governance, while supporting the visibility and viability of independent media, and enhancing the capacity of relevant agencies to respond to emerging risks faced by journalists in the digital environment.
2. Promote a legal and regulatory framework that protects media freedom and pluralism, safeguards the confidentiality of journalistic sources, and aligns laws including burdensome registration requirements for the media, restrictions on foreign funding, and vague notions of "false information" or "extremism" with international standards, to prevent undue restrictions to freedom of expression and freedom of the media.
3. Ensure transparent, non-discriminatory accreditation procedures for domestic and foreign media - free from administrative barriers and political pressure.
4. Guarantee free access of journalists to government-held information by providing timely and complete information, and that secrecy and classification rules are applied only in strictly necessary and exceptional cases, as set forth in international freedom of information standards.
5. Establish an independent oversight mechanism for access to information, with a clear mandate to monitor implementation, review refusals, and ensure accountability for unjustified denials, including through effective complaint and liability systems.
6. Develop comprehensive National Action Plans for the safety of journalists with clear timelines, assigned roles for implementation and monitoring mechanisms, covering physical, legal, and digital threats against journalists, with gender-sensitive measures. Design and implement clear protocols based on a three-pronged approach to prevent attacks, protect journalists at risk, and to prosecute and punish those responsible for crimes against journalists, drawing upon the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists 3/2018.
7. In close cooperation with media freedom organizations and international actors, provide regular training for the law enforcement, prosecutors, and members of the judiciary on freedom of expression and safety of journalists to strengthen understanding on international standards and good practices in this field.

8. Create conditions that ensure equal access of media outlets to public funding, reduce editorial dependence on state-commissioned content, and guarantee that the allocation of public resources for media support is conducted through transparent, open, and fair procedures.
9. Support media and information literacy as an essential civic competence distinct from merely technical skillset, by promoting critical thinking, understanding of media freedom, and the role of independent journalism in democracy and social cohesion, through education policies, programmes, in cooperation with media, civil society, academia and international actors.
10. Facilitate cross-border co-operation to address transnational disinformation and digital threats.

Journalistic Community and Media Organisations

1. Develop and adopt clear internal policies governing the ethical, transparent, and accountable use of AI in newsrooms, including editorial oversight, disclosure practices, and safeguards to prevent bias, manipulation, or undermining of journalistic standards.
2. Invest in continuous professional development and training to enhance newsroom skills to understand and use AI tools, data-driven journalism, and niche reporting including on environmental topics based on RFoM/UNESCO guidebook on this topic, and investigative techniques, ensuring journalists can adapt to technological change while upholding public-interest reporting.
3. Strengthen comprehensive newsroom safety protocols that address physical, digital, and legal risks faced by journalists, including cybersecurity measures, legal preparedness, emergency response procedures, and access to psychosocial support for journalists facing harassment, trauma, or sustained pressure.
4. Diversify revenue models while safeguarding editorial independence, drawing on the strategies offered by the MVM presented at the conference, ensuring transparency in funding, advertising practices, to maintain pluralism and reduce reliance on dominant digital platforms.
5. Engage proactively and transparently with audiences through open communication, participatory formats, and accountability mechanisms that strengthen trust, credibility, and public understanding of journalistic processes.
6. Foster inclusive newsroom cultures that enhance diversity, gender equality and guard against harassment and discrimination.
7. Enhance cross-border collaboration and peer exchange to share resources, expertise, and best practices, particularly in investigative journalism, digital innovation, and responses to transnational challenges affecting media freedom.
8. Integrate media and information literacy principles into journalistic content and practices, helping audiences better understand news production, identify disinformation, and engage critically and constructively with information in the public sphere.

9. Strengthen fact-checking practices by integrating verification workflows into daily reporting, investing in digital and open-source investigation skills, and collaborating with trusted peers and regional networks to counter disinformation while maintaining editorial independence and public trust.
10. Promote a newsroom culture that includes and, whenever relevant, prioritizes the coverage of climate and environmental stories. This should include efforts to reach diverse audiences through the development of different formats (podcasts, explainers, newsletters, etc.) and focus on solutions to environmental challenges, in order to give audiences agency. Integrating environmental coverage in the coverage of other issues has also proven successful in reaching audiences.

Civil Society Organisations and Academia

1. Conduct independent, evidence-based research on media viability, platform governance, and the impact of AI technologies in the regional context, producing actionable recommendations to policymakers, legislative bodies, government authorities and other actors.
2. Monitor and systematically document violations of media freedom and threats to journalists, including physical, digital, and gender-based risks, by developing standardized reporting tools, maintaining accessible databases, and sharing findings with regional stakeholders to inform advocacy and policy responses, leveraging the tools offered in RFoM's [Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists online](#).
3. Provide legal, technical, and psychosocial support to journalists at risk, including rapid-response mechanisms, digital security guidance, and mental health resources, in coordination with local and international media freedom organisations.
4. Design, implement, and evaluate media and information literacy programmes that promote the critical thinking skills for diverse age and social groups, and strengthen their understanding of media freedom and its role in democracy, using evidence of impact to adapt programmes for schools, universities, and community-based initiatives, drawing upon the [RFoM's report Fostering Media Freedom Literacy across the OSCE region](#).
5. Facilitate structured dialogue between media, policymakers, civil society, and the public on issues of media freedom, ethics, editorial independence, and public trust, using workshops, forums, and online platforms to bridge knowledge gaps and foster collaborative solutions.
6. Promote interdisciplinary collaboration between journalism, technology, law, and social sciences, encouraging joint research, co-designed projects, and policy experimentation that address emerging challenges in the media and information environment.
7. Support independent fact-checking and disinformation monitoring initiatives by conducting systematic analysis of information manipulation, coordinated influence efforts, and other harmful information practices, particularly those affecting public interest and social cohesion, and by engaging with media, educators, and communities to promote evidence-based responses and informed public dialogue.

8. Create opportunities for regional cooperation between environmental journalists in Central Asia, in response to the fact that many environmental issues are cross border.