DO THE NEXT RIGHT THING

FOR MEDIA & DEMOCRACY

At a time of war on the EU's borders, polarisation, disinformation, climate change, and socio-economic challenges, independent and trustworthy media have never been more important.

Access to quality media allows people to hear diverse opinions, take informed decisions, and hold those in power to account. Public service media are at the forefront of creating diverse content for everyone in society, with a mission to inform, educate and entertain. This supports an open society where citizens can make up their own minds. It is an essential role for a strong democracy, while also building a sense of community.

Europe's commitment to expanding digitalisation brings many benefits, including a promise to reduce the digital divide. But new risks have emerged due to the overwhelming influence of online platforms, where algorithms are designed to serve only commercial objectives. This has resulted in the up ranking of sensational content and disinformation, also during elections. Audiences struggle to find the content which is most relevant for them or to identify the outlet behind the news, making it impossible to know if it is trustworthy or not. Even though generative Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to be a powerful tool that could be a great benefit to society, it can also amplify mis- and dis-information. Citizens need protections and guardrails to shield them against the harm of disinformation generated by AI tools.

Public service media are an essential part of Europe's media environment, now more than ever before. They work to deliver the highest quality content for the broadest audiences, across all genres and for all niches. This could be via radio, which remains one of the most trusted and reliable forms of media, TV broadcasts, apps, or social networks. Public service media advance media literacy every day, to help audiences make sense of the content they are seeing.

To ensure that public service media can continue their critical democratic, cultural, and social role, the EBU advocates that the EU includes these essential policy objectives.

SAFEGUARD INDEPENDENT MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

Rule of Law is a fundamental principle of the EU and acts as the basis for media freedom. When it falters, the doors open for threats to media independence and journalist safety. The EU must ensure that Member states respect the Rule of Law and properly implement EU laws which aim at protecting the freedom of the media in Europe. Notably, the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) includes key principles for independent and well-funded public service media.

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ENSURE THAT PEOPLE CANNOT MISS MEDIA THAT MATTERS

In today's competitive media ecosystem, apps and services, that people find highly relevant, can get lost, if they are not easy to find or discover. Prominence refers to situations where media is displayed on the home screen of a connected TV or car, appears on the first page of search results, or can be reached via a dedicated button on a remote control. Currently, purely commercial incentives prevail in decisions on which apps are pre-installed and which media outlets are shown prominently. This is particularly of concern for public service media, whose remit includes serving the entire population.

Citizens' ability to find or discover a diverse media offer, trustworthy information, as well as local and regional content must be guaranteed. This is why the EU must ensure that national or regional authorities mandate appropriate prominence of general interest media on key interfaces and devices. Time and effort should also be put into ensuring that meaningful prominence rules are developed and implemented.
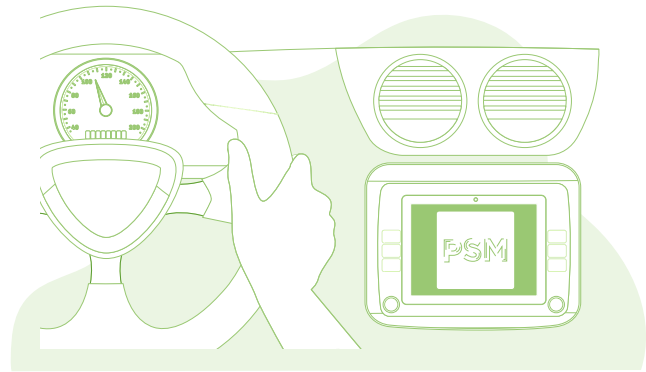
Further, for all audiences to enjoy what public service media offer, a technological backbone geared towards reliable and efficient distribution is indispensable. This inspires public service media to innovate, with both broadcast and broadband. Broadcast remains the most reliable and efficient method to access live television or radio. It also provides a lifeline in times of crises, which is why it must be protected and promoted. Offers from public service media also support the demand for broadband connectivity. EU policy on digital technology and connectivity must remember the value that media brings to people and ensure that Internet access stays open and free from undue discrimination.
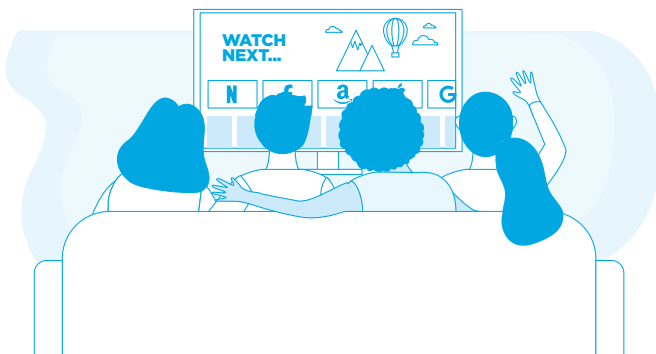
WALK THE TALK WITH HOLDING BIG TECH ACCOUNTABLE

The EU has developed a strong digital rulebook in its last mandate. Now we must see these new obligations being well implemented and enforced. In addition, the EU must remain vigilant for new concerns that will arise and not shy away from continuing to regulate the digital sphere.

In the Digital Services Act (DSA), Digital Markets Act (DMA) and EMFA, policymakers have ensured safeguards to address the overwhelming power of big tech. Digital gatekeepers must provide access to data and stop self-preferencing practices. They also must attribute media content to its source and ensure prior notice of media outlets and a right to react when they intend to restrict access to editorial content and services based on the platform's terms and conditions. Notably, the DMA should expand to cover all crucial gatekeeping activities, including virtual assistants and connected TVs.
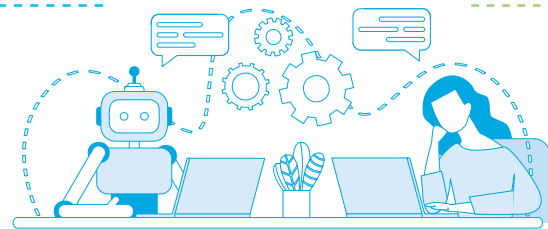
BUILD A TOOLBOX FOR AI AND THE MEDIA

Generative AI has a huge impact for audiences as well as media production and consumption. Most public service media use AI to optimise their workstreams and enhance their content. However, generative AI tools also raise serious concerns that are specific to the media sector, such as disinformation, the scraping of media content, and generative AI coming in-between media providers and their audiences.

The AI Act was a start, now the EU should work towards a comprehensive approach that sustains and protects media content while also offering guarantees for audience trust. Policies that support media innovation with trustworthy AI models are crucial alongside specific opportunities to enhance technological innovation and collaboration. Together, these can ensure that public service media remain resilient and benefit from the coming AI wave.

Now is the time for policymakers to take a stand in support of the diverse and pluralistic media sector in Europe. The EU needs policies that support people's ability to stay informed with reliable news and enjoy quality media. Independent public service media are ready and willing to be a key partner for the solution.