

UNESCO and World Association of News Publishers join forces to support survival of world's media

UNESCO and the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) are joining forces to address the impending global emergency facing independent journalism and the media organizations that produce it.

As the world continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact, the decimation of journalism in many areas of the world constitutes a growing threat, bringing existing challenges to a tipping point. Each month brings new reports of job losses in journalism and the closure of once-vibrant local media outlets.

“Professional, independent journalism is critical for providing populations with life-saving information during this crisis and plays an essential role in building and strengthening our democracies, justice and peace,” said the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay. “We are deeply concerned about the pandemic’s impact on local economies threatening the viability of local news media and we are committed to leading global efforts to overcome this challenge.”

As part of the new initiative, a number of joint activities will be undertaken in co-ordination with a range of partners, including governments, media, civil society, financial institutions, internet companies and other private corporations, philanthropic organizations, individual donors, advertisers and investors. Activities would include research into the full extent of the crisis across the globe and a series of regional consultations to produce recommendations about what needs to be done.

“Through this initiative, UNESCO and WAN-IFRA are committed to reaffirming the democratic norms essential to the functioning of society,” said the President of WAN-IFRA, Fernando de Yarza. “We hope to see the agendas of governments, major donors and public policy experts converge on the vital need to strengthen support for a free, independent press thanks to the solutions this work will propose.”

The objective is to help catalyse new forms of sustainable business models, especially for community media and those in the global South, and establish the appropriate mechanisms to ensure urgent support, while respecting media editorial independence and integrity.

Independent journalism will be more critical than ever in shaping the societies that emerge as the world rebuild following this global crisis. If independent journalism is lost as a public good, everyone loses. Without this initiative, much of the news media as we know it may disappear. Much of that which remains will likely be operating with reduced reach, fewer reporters and weakened professional standards and independence.

The two organizations, founded under the same spirit of democracy and historically linked through the promotion of shared values, also appeal to all those who share a common interest in seeing media plurality, journalistic independence, and quality journalism continue. Without it, we put at risk the news media’s important role empowering citizens to

make informed decisions about the future of their communities and shape our common understanding of the world around us.