

Declining local media is producing media deserts, jeopardizing local democracy and community cohesion: Report

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A new report has highlighted how a decline in local and community media is producing a growing trend of "media deserts" across Europe

that is undermining local democracy and inclusivity.

For centuries local news has played a key political role in safeguarding local democracy through their reporting and holding local politicians and authorities to account. They have also been instrumental to a region's social and cultural development, disseminating information that helps to foster community cohesion, build local identity, and even preserve local history. But local and community media are now experiencing a series of challenges that threaten their existence.

In her report, "[Local and Community Media in Europe](#)," Agnes Gulyas, Professor in Media and Communications at Canterbury Christ Church University, has identified the key issues facing local and community media in Europe, and offers policymakers recommendations to help support the industry.

Professor Gulyas said, "Local and community media have essential roles in a functioning democracy and in fostering inclusive communities. Over the past two decades, however, these sectors have encountered significant challenges due to digital transformation and economic downturns that have hindered their capacity to fulfill their political and social functions.

"One of the implications of the declining legacy local news media sector is the emergence of local news deserts as a result of the closures of local news outlets and/or declining [local content](#). This has the potential to cause severe disruption to our local democracies and cohesion of communities."

Of the issues facing regional media, the main cause for concern was financial sustainability. Local and community media are more vulnerable financially, especially during economic downturns, such as the 2018 financial crisis or the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the advent of the

digital-era and reduction in reliance on print has seen two key areas of income decline dramatically over the last 20 years for the industry: print sales and advertising.

Print circulation has plummeted and advertising has shifted to online platforms. Although online audience figures have grown for local news outlets, the majority of readers are not prepared to pay for access to the [news](#) online.

There are also concerns about working conditions for local journalists. Although similar to those of national journalists, including job insecurity and work pressures, evidence shows that across the EU local journalists often face more precarious conditions and increased risks to their safety and well-being.

Recommendations made by the report for local and regional authorities include:

- Initiatives to gather comprehensive data about local and community media that will provide a foundation for evidence-based policy-making and a better understanding of the subnational media landscape.
- Subsidy and support systems.
- Enhancing political independence and diversity of media outlets.
- Establish a comprehensive legislative framework and support system to empower community and non-profit local media organizations.
- Improved working conditions for local journalists.
- Address the issue of [local news](#) deserts.

A second report, which Professor Gulyas contributed to, was presented at the 45th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities last month. This report, "[Local and regional media: watchdogs of](#)

[democracy, guardians of community cohesion](#)," looks at the similar issues of declining local and community media across different countries in Europe.

In its adopted Resolution, the Congress encouraged local and regional authorities to take action to support regional media and called on governments of EU States to develop media policies taking into account the information needs of local communities, with particular attention to rural and disadvantaged communities which are at increased risk of becoming local media deserts.

Furthermore, the Congress committed to supporting the Council of Europe's campaign on the Safety of Journalists "Journalists Matter" and asked member States to consider local and regional [media](#) in their campaign activities.

More information: Report: [Local and Community Media in Europe](#)

Provided by Canterbury Christ Church University

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