

## **Expert Report Syndicate 1: Diversity, equality and inclusivity in a diverse and polarized world**

**Expert:** Anne Leppäjärvi, President EJTA

**Chair:** Milica Pesic, Executive Director MDI

**Rapporteur:** Nadia Vissers, Director EJTA

Organized by EJTA and MDI, this syndicate will explore how journalism education can be reimagined to better address diversity, equality, and inclusivity in today's increasingly polarized and multi diverse societies. The syndicate will discuss current challenges and produce recommendations for rebooting j-education in 2025 and beyond.

In an era in which the world and journalism are changing completely, journalism education needs to focus on how to use multiple and diverse perspectives, how to offer a balance for 24/7 journalism and how to practice unbiased reporting by breaking with the stereotypical representations. When students of journalism learn how to report in an inclusive and participative way and how to understand reality from diverse cultural and social angles, they will be able to approach societal diversity in the light of universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality, and solidarity. Only then inclusive journalism effectively functions as a tool for depolarization.

Concerns about trust in news media are intricately linked to worries over societal polarization. The aggressive discourse characteristic of new media ecosystems raises fears about social cohesion and the decline of pluralistic public debate. Apathy towards democracy and institutions that reinforce it, such as journalism, can open pathways toward alternative, less democratic forms of governance.

Research indicates that distrust in news media is primarily rooted in audiences' perceptions of biased representation rather than misinformation per se. Moreover, in addition to quantity, it is crucial to understand how and why trust diverges among diverse groups. The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report shows that around the world, young people, women, ethnic minorities, and political activists often feel underrepresented or misrepresented in the media.

The European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), which brings together over 80 higher education institutions and lifelong learning organizations that train journalists across

more than 30 countries, has in recent years emphasized diversity, depolarization, and inclusivity as goals of journalism education. EJTA members are committed to a list of 50 professional, research-informed learning objectives, updated every seven years, known as the Tartu Declaration. Currently, a third revision of these objectives is underway, and inclusivity and work for democracy are being articulated in new ways and integrated into the updated goals. For example, a new formulation for "Be critical of sources" is suggested to be "Critically evaluate sources, information, and narratives and be independent of any interests." With this formulation we want journalism students to become more aware of whose story they are telling, and to consider whether some perspectives are entirely left out of a particular narrative.

Furthermore, EJTA has had an Inclusive Journalism Task Force for several years, whose main purpose is to gather and synthesize the work that member institutions have already undertaken. The task force seeks to define what we really mean by inclusive journalism today and to collaboratively determine the next steps needed to deepen our understanding and further develop this field.

Final outcome would be to introduce a new curriculum unit and to facilitate cross-border collaboration.

One of the best practices is the European project 'Invisible Cities' <https://invisible-cities.eu/>, coordinated by AP University of Applied Sciences Antwerp. The project 'Invisible Cities' wants to make the voice of those who aren't heard in society audible and to make the often-unseen people in the cities visible by means of online productions and constructive interviews made by journalism students from different European countries. The aim is to teach students of journalism how and why to communicate with diverse audiences and not about them.

The ways journalism training and education has been developed to provide support for the process of democratization go beyond university gates. The Media Diversity Institute's (MDI's) experience in working with media industry and media educators in transition countries is an illustrative example. A London based non-governmental organization, MDI was founded in 1998 and for more than 25 years have been working internationally to encourage and facilitate responsible media coverage of diversity, by providing hands-on production-oriented training and by working with media educators through development of Inclusive journalism curriculum in almost 80 countries.

From 2011-2024 it jointly ran a Media and Diversity MA Course in cooperation with the University of Westminster (UK). The MDI work is illustrative because it highlights a wide range of possibilities for linking journalism training and education with one of the most pressing issues today: the issue of social, political and cultural diversity.

Organizations such as MDI fill in the gap made by academia and industry. Its flagship project of Inclusive Journalism aims to prevent the media from intentionally or unintentionally spreading prejudice and intolerance which can lead to social tensions, disputes and violent conflicts involving both curriculum development and production of teaching material. The Media Diversity Institute's Curriculum Development Programme, a series of workshops-cum-mentoring have been running at the universities in the South East Europe, Caucasus, Indonesia, the MENA region, and Nigeria. It reveals the ways journalism scholars in transition societies try to align the content of journalism education and the happenings in heterogeneous societies.

The MDI work includes professional support for journalists, training for civil society organizations, production of manuals and resource materials, and development of Global Media Diversity Network, but it focuses on the Inclusive Journalism Curriculum Program to pose a question of the relationship between educating journalists and rebuilding democracy. Namely, how to develop journalism curriculum that provides students with the knowledge and understanding of the world outside of university gates; how to equip students with skills to competently enter the industry where they will actively contribute to public life; and how to develop students' awareness and sensitivity towards diversity, being political, ethnic, religious, class, age or any other. We use the MDI international experience to argue that political, economic and cultural insecurity pose particular challenges to the journalistic sector of media and that long-lasting media's contribution to social cohesion and the strengthening of democracy should start with a careful (re)consideration of the ways future and current journalists learn and understand media's role in representation, interpretation and construction of diversity.

The **central question** the members of this syndicate will discuss and answer is: ***"What are the most striking needs for journalism educators working with inclusive journalism in 2025?"***