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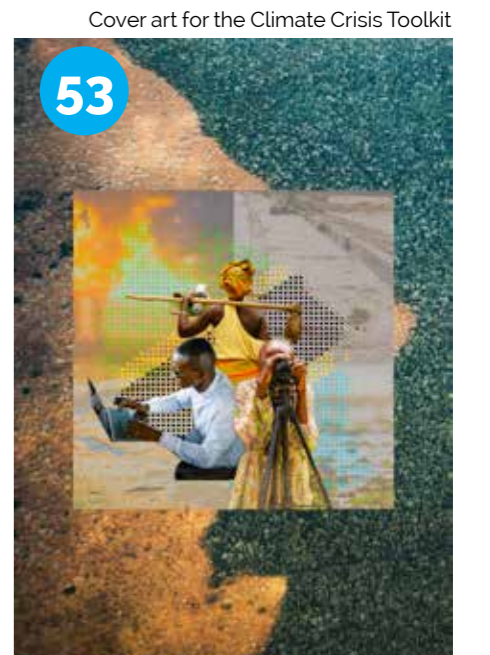
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Cover art for the Climate Crisis Toolkit

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What it takes...

Foreword: Lord Chandos, Thomson Foundation Chairman

This has been a hugely challenging year for media development organisations like Thomson Foundation as massive cuts to USAID funding, caused a ripple affect across the sector. I am happy to report that Thomson maintained charitable activity in line with its best previous year, a testament to the hard work of the whole Thomson team in London, Berlin and in the field and the focus and dedication to the mission of the organisation. And that mission is today more relevant than ever, with truth under threat and disinformation more present than before.

In this Annual Review, the breadth of work of the organisation is reflected. From supporting media in Sudan and Uganda combatting disinformation, to working with organisations in the Western Balkans, Central Europe and Latin America to build more sustainable businesses and developing a toolkit for UNESCO on Media and Information Literacy (MIL), it is work that supports healthy information ecosystems, particularly in challenging parts of the world. Thomson works long-term with key partners, news organisations and journalists on the ground, often after other players have left.

Thomson has also maintained a long-term commitment to supporting quality journalism through the Young Journalist Award at the

annual Foreign Press Association awards. It was won this year by the inspirational Kenyan journalist Tracy Onchoke, whose hard-hitting reporting on alleged corruption in Kenya's education system for aspiring lawyers, earned her the first prize. This reporting put Tracy in the firing line for abuse and threats, which she described to the Board of Trustees of Thomson Foundation, also reflecting on her commitment to report, undaunted by consequences.

The foundation invested in Research, Policy and Impact in 2025, strengthening its ability to articulate outcomes for donors and partners. The various research efforts it undertakes under a wide variety of global programming, have been coordinated under one coherent umbrella, to ensure consistency and long-term learning for the organisation and its beneficiaries.

Thomson started work during the year to streamline governance of the UK charitable entity, which should reach a conclusion in 2026 and provide the organisation with a simpler governance structure.

As ever, my thanks to CEO Caro Kriel and the whole Thomson team, wherever they are working to support independent journalism, my fellow trustees in London and the advisory board for Thomson Media in Germany, under the strong leadership of Christoph Lanz.



A Message from our Trustees

We asked, "Why is Thomson's work so relevant today?"

"As media business models globally continue to face acute pressures, Thomson's role is more vital than ever - partnering with media outlets, often in challenging markets, to help them reach new audiences, monetise content and become more sustainable commercial enterprises."



Katharine Campbell

"In the midst of the war in Sudan, Thomson is helping independent Sudanese journalists and media outlets to provide the public with access to verified information and to counter propaganda, disinformation and hate speech spread by the conflict parties and those seeking to prolong the war. Supporting independent media is an important contribution to ending what is now the world's worst humanitarian crisis and laying the foundations for a democratic transition."



Dame Rosalind Marsden



Sir Clive Jones

"As technology drives change through every media sector in the world, the need for strong, independent journalism has never been more important in every country and on every continent. Thomson's commitment to the underpinning ethics of good journalism, accuracy, education and training means we have a vital role in helping colleagues and organisations all around the globe as we enter a new era of communication."



Tanya Joseph

"In a world in which bad actors with ready access to powerful AI tools can so easily distort or even create fake realities, the need for well trained, well supported journalists is greater than ever. For over 60 years the Thomson Foundation has been equipping journalists across the world to tell the truth. The challenges change but the need to defend democracy remains the same."

"Access to trustworthy information is a cornerstone of democratic resilience. In the current zeitgeist, Thomson Foundation's work with journalists and media around the world has never been more critical to ensuring we are consuming information we can trust."



Dr Gerry Power

"Thomson Foundation plays an essential role in strengthening the Independence and ethical standards of journalists worldwide. It fosters media sustainability and professional integrity, thereby protecting the free flow of trusted information."



Christoph Lanz



Pamella Makotsi Sittoni

"Newsrooms and journalists across the world face monumental challenges — from threats to media freedom from anti-democratic governments to difficult business operating environments. Yet, more than any other time, the world needs a strong, independent and credible media to combat disinformation and misinformation, and hold governments and corporations accountable. It is gratifying to know that the foundation is making a difference through innovative programmes, impactful training, and evergreen courses."



Jane Corbin

"As a journalist myself reporting on global conflict and fighting disinformation I know how vital the work of the Thomson Foundation is. We operate in some of the world's most difficult environments, beset by war and challenges to democracy, empowering local media to speak fearlessly and truthfully."

Our Year in Numbers 2025

Strengthening Independent Journalism Worldwide

In 2025, Thomson worked with journalists, media organisations and civil society partners across the globe to strengthen independent media, improve professional standards, and support sustainable journalism in challenging operating environments.

Through training, partnerships and practical newsroom support, our programmes were delivered directly and online to media professionals and organisations in **more than 100 countries globally**, delivering lasting impact at both individual and institutional levels.

In the past year, the main focus of our work has been in the following areas:

- Supporting media and civil society to tackle disinformation and information manipulation
- Enhancing the viability of independent media through approaches that build audiences, diversify revenue and drive innovation, including media in exile
- Helping media outlets and journalists to maximise the benefits and opportunities of AI, while minimising the risks
- Strengthening the role of media in promoting Media and Information Literacy

Media Professionals Supported

1511 journalists and media professionals across **35 countries**

trained, mentored or supported through in-person training, guidance and workshops.

Thomson programmes equipped journalists, editors and media leaders with practical skills, professional knowledge and resilience needed to operate in rapidly evolving media environments.

Additionally, **3900** media professionals from **123** countries took courses available through our Journalism Now online platform.

Learning & Engagement

421 workshops, webinars and training events delivered.

From in-person newsroom training to international learning exchanges and online workshops, Thomson delivered capacity-building opportunities tailored to local media needs.

87 training courses provided online, covering AI, Disinformation, Media and Information Literacy and Environmental Journalism, and multiple courses covering core journalistic and media skills.

Strengthening Media Ecosystems

Beyond individual training, Thomson works directly with media outlets and partner organisations to strengthen newsroom sustainability, collaboration and long-term impact.

292 media organisations receiving direct support. Support included mentoring, training, grants, operational guidance and

targeted expertise to help news organisations strengthen editorial and business resilience.

Partnerships that deliver impact

304 partner organisations and expert consultants engaged. Collaboration with regional experts, trainers and delivery partners enabled programmes to respond effectively to local contexts and challenges.

Knowledge & Thought Leadership

95 reports, toolkits and public guidance resources published.

Thomson produced practical resources and research to share learning across the global media development community.

Together, these achievements reflect Thomson's continued commitment to supporting independent journalism, strengthening media ecosystems and enabling trusted information to reach communities worldwide.

To keep up with our latest stories, please click [here](#) or scan the QR to visit our website.



2025 IN NUMBERS

123

COUNTRIES REACHED GLOBALLY



1511

JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS REACHED IN PERSON



3900

MEDIA PROS TAKING OUR E-LEARNING COURSES



87

LEARNING COURSES PROVIDED ONLINE ON JOURNALISM NOW



292

MEDIA ORGANISATIONS RECEIVED OUR DIRECT SUPPORT



421

WORKSHOPS, WEBINARS & TRAINING EVENTS DELIVERED

304

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND EXPERT CONSULTANTS ENGAGED



95

REPORTS, TOOLKITS & GUIDANCE RESOURCES PUBLISHED



Reporting Through Conflict

For many journalists, repression is not a distant threat but a lived reality. Arrests, legal harassment, gender-based persecution and forced exile continue to silence voices and hollow out media ecosystems.

Thomson works with journalists and independent outlets operating under extreme pressure, including those forced to continue their work from exile. Our support prioritises safety, continuity and visibility, recognising that media freedom is not sustained by statements of principle, but by practical action.

Across Borders, Across Silence



Artwork by Matt Lott

Sudan's war has transformed the conditions in which independent journalism is produced.

Newsrooms have closed, journalists have been displaced and many reporters now work across borders or from exile, often with fragmented teams and limited infrastructure. Yet the demand for credible reporting has become more pressing as conflict, displacement and disinformation have made verification harder and public trust more fragile.

Thomson's Sudan Digital Resilience project combines investigative journalism support with digital security training for reporters and independent media organisations working on Sudan. The approach reflects a practical reality of conflict reporting today: the ability to investigate rigorously depends increasingly on the ability to work safely, protect sources and navigate misleading information.

In November 2025, 20 Sudanese junior to mid-career journalists, living in exile but still actively reporting on Sudan's conflict, took part in a five day in-person training programme in Kampala, Uganda, focused on investigative journalism and digital security. Selected from 108 applicants, the level of demand underlined both the pressure on the sector and the determination among Sudanese reporters to

continue producing public-interest journalism despite displacement and insecurity.

"The training gave us tools we can use immediately in our reporting", said one participant who wished to remain anonymous. "It showed us how to investigate complex stories while protecting ourselves and our sources."

The programme sought to ensure that training translates into published work. An investigative grants scheme was launched and 15 proposals were submitted by journalists and media outlets. They focused on disinformation narratives and media manipulation linked to Sudan's conflict, pointing to a strong appetite for reporting that can scrutinise the information environment as well as events on the ground.

Alongside support for individual journalists, Thomson has worked with the Sudan Media Forum (SMF) to strengthen the resilience of independent Sudanese media organisations operating largely in exile. In practice, this has meant helping outlets improve digital safety, verification processes and newsroom systems at a time when many are functioning across multiple countries and under persistent operational strain.

For the next stage in the programme, Thomson will work with 22 members of the Sudan Media

Forum concentrating on digital security and Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) based verification.

For Meriem Bahri, Thomson's Head of Programmes for the Middle East and Africa, the programme had been shaped by the realities Sudanese journalists now face. "Independent journalism on Sudan is being produced under extraordinary pressure, often by reporters and media organisations working far from home and with limited protection", she said. "Our role is to help strengthen the skills, systems and safeguards that allow that reporting to continue with rigour and credibility."

The longer-term aim is to help those skills spread across the sector. The programme is developing eight champions within the Sudan Media Forum network who will go on to deliver peer training in investigative journalism, conflict-sensitive reporting, gender-sensitive reporting and data journalism. "In a media landscape shaped by displacement, that kind of shared capacity matters", said Meriem. "It helps skills travel even when institutions are under pressure".

The Sudan Digital Resilience project is funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

"Independent journalism on Sudan is being produced under extraordinary pressure, often by reporters and media organisations working far from home and with limited protection" - Meriem Bahri, Thomson Foundation

FAST FACTS:

- **20** independent Sudanese journalists trained in investigative journalism & digital security
- **15** investigative proposals submitted through the grants scheme
- **22** Sudan Media Forum member organisations engaged
- **8** champions being developed within the SMF network to lead peer training

Journalism Under Gender Apartheid

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai met Thomson at the Frontline Club in London alongside Zahra Joya, founder of the Afghan news organisation Rukhshana Media. The conversation took place ahead of a panel discussion on the role of Afghan independent media under Taliban rule and reflected the Malala Fund's support for Rukhshana Media and the women journalists reporting under severe restrictions. What follows are edited highlights from the interview.

Thomson: Malala, you've been closely involved in supporting Rukhshana Media. Why does its work matter?

Malala: Rukhshana Media is playing a really critical role at this time because Afghan women are silenced and journalists are threatened. Female journalists are putting their lives at risk by telling the stories of Afghan women and what they are going through. Rukhshana Media is one of the few platforms that is actually the voice of Afghan women, despite the dangers and threats they face. It's important for us to amplify their voices, because they are bringing attention to the truth of what is happening on the ground.

Thomson: Zahra, the challenges your journalists face are immense. How are they managing to operate?

Zahra: I am working alongside almost 10 journalists on

the ground, mostly female. It's really hard to gather information from inside the country, but my colleagues are working independently and bringing first-hand information from inside. It's a risky job. My colleagues are taking their lives in their hands to gather information. Women of Afghanistan are forced to be silent. It's hard, but I think they are very brave, they are courageous, and they are working.

Thomson: The voices of Afghan women — and women in many other places — are not necessarily being heard. Why do you think that is?

Malala: It's really frustrating because we talk about women's rights, and then when women's rights are violated and under threat, we witness a silence. In moments like these, we need to test our true commitment to gender equality. Afghanistan is a country where the worst violations of women's rights are happening. Girls are banned from secondary education, and women are denied any public appearance, political participation, or role in work. If they dare to step outside these rules, they are punished. So they're paying a price for simply daring to have these rights. When I think about what Afghan women and girls are going through right now, it really makes me want to do something for them because I really admire their resilience and how they are doing their activism. So to all our friends, our colleagues who believe in gender equality

who are feminists should also join this call and share their solidarity with Afghan women in this most difficult time.

Thomson: You both use the term 'gender apartheid'. Why does that phrase fit?

Malala: Words like 'gender discrimination' and 'gender persecution' fall short in explaining the scale of oppression the Taliban are imposing on women and girls. They have issued more than 100 decrees and edicts, the majority targeting women, limiting their work, education, and any appearance in public life. That is such an extreme form of gender oppression that we have to call it "gender apartheid". This should be seen as a global issue, addressed on moral and legal international law basis.

Thomson: The international community has said that the Taliban should look at the way they treat women and should change it. Is that enough?

Zahra: No. The way that the Taliban are treating women is so harsh and so brutal. And as Malala mentioned, there's more than 100 decrees on edicts the Taliban issued, and most of them targeted women. From my perspective, it's a proper war against women and gender equality. This is not enough. That's why we and our friends like Malala are asking for recognition of gender apartheid. And I think this is the time to push for the protection of women's rights and human rights.

Thomson: Malala, is this the time?

Malala: This is definitely the time. I think on the one hand, we want countries, we want leaders to step up and recognise what's happening in Afghanistan as a gender apartheid, make it part of the Crime Against Humanity Treaty, and put it in the system, because it guarantees not only safety to the Afghan women, but to women around the world, that they could be protected against such extreme forms of gender-based discrimination. At the same time, I also think that it sends a message. Calling for support for

the Afghan women who are in the country or who are in exile at this time. We need to use everything in our capacity to support Afghan women journalists. We need to share their stories. We need to support the work that they're doing on the ground. Through Malala Fund, we are supporting activists who are providing education to girls through alternative learning platforms and who are bringing attention to the stories of Afghan girls and women. And doing everything in our capacity to echo the voices of Afghan women and really join their fight of resilience and resistance.



Malala Yousafzai on a panel discussion during the event at the Frontline Club, London



Zahra Joya speaking at the International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy

Zahra was also in conversation with Deborah Kelly, Thomson's Director of Training and Communications in a session at the 2025 International Journalism Festival in Perugia, Italy. In front of an audience of journalists and editors, Zahra described how she was forced to flee Afghanistan when the Taliban took control and now runs Rukhshana Media in exile in the UK.

She described a country where women are being systematically removed from education, employment and public life. "Being a woman in Afghanistan is like being

a second-class citizen, or worse," she said. Against that backdrop, Rukhshana Media remains one of the few independent Afghan newsrooms continuing to report on women's lives. Many of its journalists work under pseudonyms and strict security protocols, often without knowing the identities of colleagues, to reduce the danger of exposure. "We refuse to be erased", said Zahra.

Alongside convening conversations internationally, Thomson is working with Rukhshana Media providing strategic guidance on governance, operations and

financial planning to strengthen the organisation and support its long-term sustainability, so its reporting can continue.

Click [here](#) or scan the QR code below to view the full interview with Malala Yousafzai and Zahra Joya at the Frontline Club in London.





Media and Information Literacy in Practice

Thomson places Media and Information Literacy (MIL) for Media at the heart of the news ecosystem. The reason is simple. In an age of content manipulation, societal polarisation and media fragmentation, journalists need to provide audiences with the skills they need to assess information critically, recognise disinformation and engage responsibly with media.

We are supporting media organisations at a global, regional and individual level to do just that. We are helping them promote and use MIL through practical tools that strengthen audience trust and newsroom practice alike. MIL is no longer an educational add-on; it is a cornerstone of democratic resilience and as demonstrated through these examples of our work, it is also a way to support long-term media sustainability.

Thomson's Catherine Mackie moderating the UNESCO MIL Toolkit panel at Cartagena, Colombia

MIL for Media at a Global Level



Equipping journalists and media organisations with the media and information literacy (MIL) skills needed to thrive and survive in the 21st century information ecosystem was key to Thomson's work in 2025.

Throughout the year, we talked to editors, journalists, media managers and academics from around the world investigating how MIL for media can help newsrooms reconnect with audiences and drive long-term sustainability.

As part of this extensive work, Thomson was a key contributor to a groundbreaking Media and Information Literacy Toolkit for Media from UNESCO. The Toolkit is a practical resource designed to help newsrooms adopt a hands-on MIL approach and understand

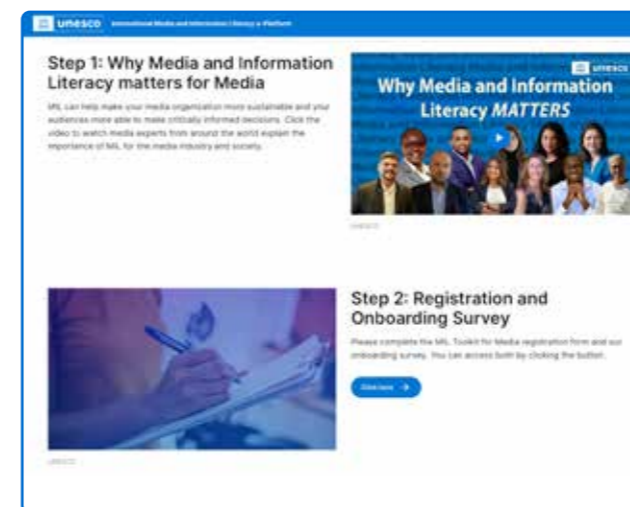
what MIL in media looks like. It offers bite-size case studies which illustrate how newsrooms globally are employing MIL using expert video clips and programme and content templates to help journalists and editors do the same. The first step is to ensure journalists, editors and media managers know and recognise MIL, know why they should care and know how it can help build trust with audiences. The Toolkit shows:

- **How MIL can encourage** audiences to think critically about information seen, read or heard
- **How MIL can support** audiences with informed decision-making
- **How MIL can help develop** practical skills for audiences themselves to find, assess,

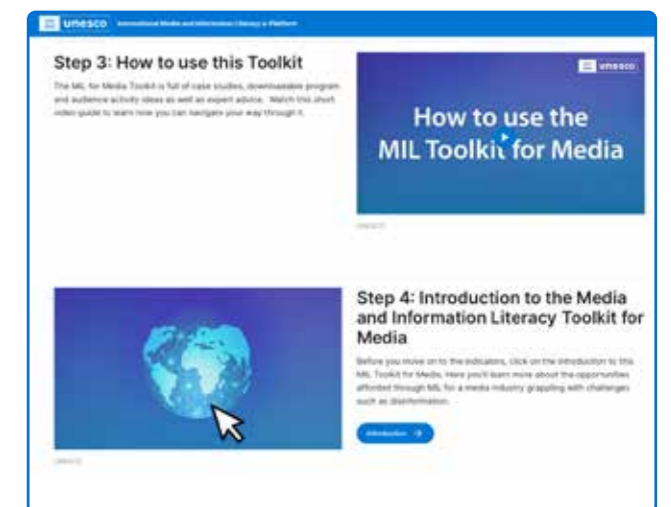
verify and create accurate information

- **How MIL can build** audience trust in media and an understanding of the role of professional journalism in democratic societies

The Toolkit demonstrates how media organisations can support these four central pillars of MIL in all aspects of their work. Some of the topics covered are how to integrate MIL into storytelling for empowerment, how to engage audiences through MIL, how MIL can be used to promote gender equality and how MIL principles can be applied when working with AI.



Step 1 of the UNESCO MIL Toolkit. Click [here](#) to view the video.

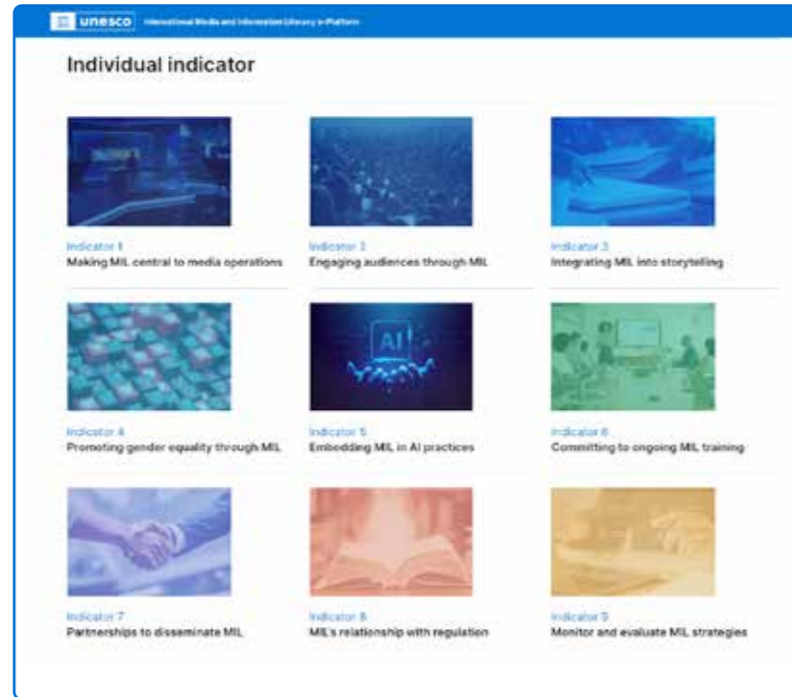


Step 3 of the UNESCO MIL Toolkit. Click [here](#) to view the video.

Toolkit resources

The resources within the Toolkit to help newsrooms achieve this include:

- Downloadable templates for programme, content and planning ideas which use and promote MIL
- Suggestions for audience outreach activities both online and face-to-face
- Case studies from media organisations around the world who are already engaging audiences through MIL
- Downloadable Means of Verification grids to help you demonstrate your organisation's commitment to MIL



The nine indicators within the UNESCO MIL Toolkit

Case studies

Rappler, Philippines: Pia Ranada, community lead, explains how they are cultivating civic empowerment through chat rooms linking audiences to journalists. Users must adhere to community guidelines to curb hate speech and disinformation.



Pia Ranada, featured in Indicator 1 [here](#)

The Nation Media Group, Kenya: James Smart, managing director for Broadcast and New Media explains how they are 'lifting the lid' and showing audiences how news works. For example, adding text boxes to investigations where a journalist explains why the story was chosen and how it was sourced.



James Smart, featured in Indicator 1 [here](#)

Maldita, Spain: Ximena Villagrán, chief operating officer, explains how they run short courses on WhatsApp for the public to test their skills, with daily challenges on common tactics used to spread disinformation.



Ximena Villagrán, featured in Indicator 2 [here](#)

“... it's more essential than ever that media organisations understand how they can use MIL to reignite public trust in professional journalism”

Deborah Kelly, Director of Training & Communications

MIL policy for media

The third step in the Toolkit guides editors on building their own bespoke MIL policy for media.

“With the advent of AI-generated content and the proliferation of disinformation and hate speech in public discourse it's more essential than ever that media organisations understand how they can use MIL to reignite public trust in professional journalism,” says Deborah Kelly who is Thomson's director of training and communications.

The MIL for Media Toolkit was unveiled during UNESCO's

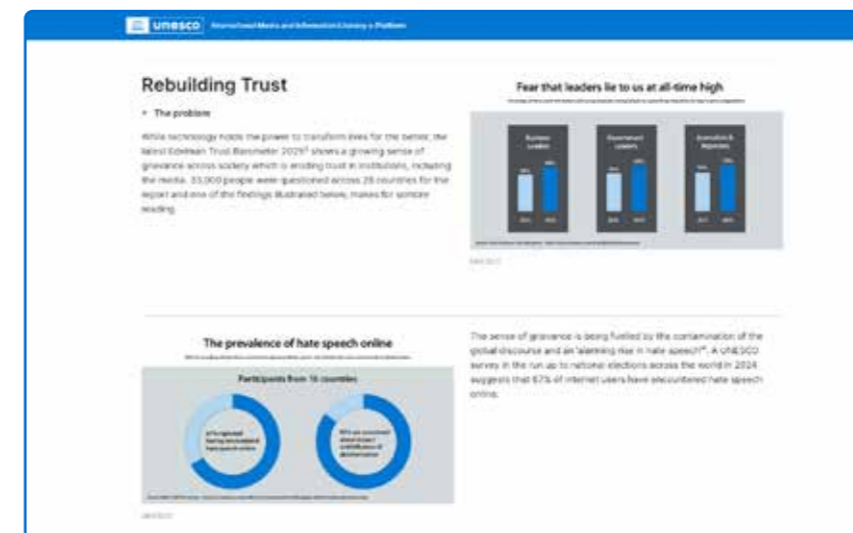
Global MIL Week conference in Cartagena, Colombia during a panel discussion where Thomson brought together newsroom innovators, editors and audience researchers from Kenya, the Philippines, Spain and Colombia.

Other MIL Events

• A media and information Literacy workshop organised by the African Union of Broadcasting and UNESCO in Mauritius. The event was attended by media executives and editors from

across the continent

- A webinar for global news leaders organised by WAN-IFA, the World Association of News Publishers
- A webinar for journalists and media executives organised by the ABU, Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union which serves more than half the world's population through its 220+ members in 65+ countries



UNESCO Toolkit image case study



UNESCO MIL toolkit homepage

FAST FACTS

- **66** case studies from newsrooms around the world
- **70** suggested audience activities around MIL
- **38** ideas for staff training and wider collaboration on MIL
- **30** downloadable templates
- **40** journalists, media executives and MIL experts interviewed



Click [here](#) or scan to access the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy: A Multimedia Toolkit for Media

MIL for Media at a Regional Level

"We launched this research to explain why people behave this way and how those habits can shape civic attention and political decision-making when elections intensify." - Davor Marko

Hooked on the Feed is a qualitative study published in 2025 by Thomson and the Media and Journalism Research Center examining how Facebook, TikTok and X shape information consumption in Eastern Europe. Rather than measuring clicks, it set out to understand routines: how people move through feeds, what they believe, what they ignore, and what that means for public understanding and civic life.

The research is based on 82 in-depth interviews with social media users across Romania, Hungary and Poland, plus the Hungarian community in Romania. What emerges is a picture of high platform use paired with shrinking attention, rising exhaustion and a widening gap between audiences and professional journalism.

The study's findings are informing how Thomson is supporting newsrooms adapt to a changing environment. It's an approach rooted in the dissemination of media and information literacy among journalists and audiences.

"We treated this research as a practical roadmap," says research coordinator and programme manager Davor Marko. "We used the findings to translate audience habits into our support programmes, helping newsrooms shift toward audience-led journalism,

strengthening long-term media literacy - especially for younger users - and informing policy discussions that protect independent journalism in politically volatile contexts."

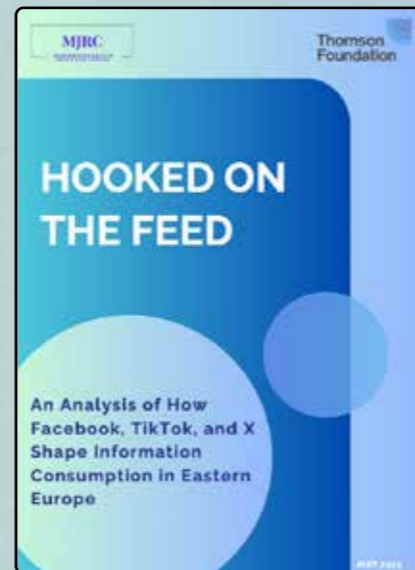
The trigger for this research was Romania's presidential elections, where TikTok-centred promotion nearly propelled a candidate to victory before his later suspension.

"As initiators, we proposed FCDO funding to help us move beyond assumptions and map what voters - especially younger ones - actually do on platforms, why they do it, and how those routines influence political choices during election periods," explains Davor.

Widespread use, shallow engagement

Across the interviews, participants describe a mode of consumption the study calls "blind scrolling": a passive, almost automatic habit of swiping through content without clear intent. It cuts across age groups and educational backgrounds and sits alongside a sense of being overwhelmed by the pace and volume of information. The study also records "social media fatigue". Many users recognise the negative impact on their wellbeing but still feel unable to disconnect.

"What looks like 'engagement' often turns out to be autopilot", says Davor. "We launched this



The cover for the report, "Hooked on the feed: An Analysis of How Facebook, TikTok and X Shape Information Consumption in Eastern Europe"



research to explain why people behave this way and how those habits can shape civic attention and political decision-making when elections intensify."

Distinct information cultures

The report's findings are not uniform across the region. They shift with platform design and local context:

- **Romania (TikTok):** TikTok dominates among younger users and is used heavily for entertainment and influencer-driven content. The study finds that political commentary from non-journalists can be treated as credible, particularly where mainstream media is distrusted or seen as part of "the system".
- **Hungary (Facebook):** Facebook remains central to maintaining personal and community ties, including among Hungarian communities. Its role as a social connector sits alongside frustration about what users feel is unavoidable political content.
- **Poland (X):** X is favoured by politically engaged users for fast-paced discussion and a less ad-heavy experience. It functions as a space for live debate and commentary, shaping how politically active users keep up with events.

These differences matter because they show why one-size-fits-all approaches to public information and media literacy fall short. The behaviours are shaped by the platform, not merely by the topic.

Distrust in media

A consistent thread across the interviews is a drift away

from professional news sources. Respondents cite perceived editorial bias, superficial coverage and political or corporate influence. In Romania, distrust can be especially sharp, with some participants describing the media as corrupt, elitist, or out of touch.

The report also highlights a growing confusion about who qualifies as a journalist, as creators, influencers and amateur commentators take on roles that audiences increasingly accept as authoritative.

Download the full study by clicking [here](#) or scan the QR code.



FAST FACTS

- **82** in-depth interviews
- Heavy platform use, "blind scrolling" & platform fatigue widespread, confusion about who counts as a journalist
- Trust in news low across three countries cited: Poland **30%**, Romania **27%**, Hungary **23%**



#* MIL for Media at a Local Level



For media organisations that host large online communities, Media and Information Literacy needs to be present in daily decisions, shaping how standards are applied, how abuse is handled and how open discussion is protected without becoming toxic.

Ringier Slovakia faced this challenge on “Pokec”, one of the country’s most active social networks. Users communicate in everything from slang to formal debate, often inventing new phrases to bypass moderation rules. Manual moderation alone could not keep pace. At the same time, any automated system had to keep user information securely on in-house servers and respect privacy requirements.

AI-powered

With Thomson’s mentorship, led by AI strategist Lukas Gorog, Ringier set an ambitious goal: to build an AI-powered content moderation system using Large Language Models (LLMs) by summer 2025. The intention was not to remove human oversight, but to allow moderators to focus on complex cases while clearly acceptable or clearly harmful content could be handled automatically.

The early phase focused on groundwork. The team manually labelled 1,000 real messages to train and test the system, then evaluated different models for accuracy, speed and cost. From this, they designed a three-stage approach: approve safe content, block harmful content, and send borderline material for human review.

Spotted in milliseconds

Finding the right balance proved to be the defining challenge. Too strict, and legitimate content would get blocked. Too lenient and hate speech would slip through. Through months of testing, they found the sweet spot that minimised pending reviews while maintaining accuracy, in a process that required refinement to ensure the system reflected Ringier’s editorial standards rather than simply applying blunt automation.

By late summer, the system was not only accurate but fast enough for real-time moderation. Response times were reduced to around 60 milliseconds, allowing harmful content to be intercepted almost instantly without slowing the user experience.

The project then evolved further. By August, the team recognised the potential to expand beyond Slovak. English, German and Polish were added and by November 2025 Small Language Models (SLMs) were introduced to identify languages automatically, making the system genuinely multilingual and scalable across Central Europe.

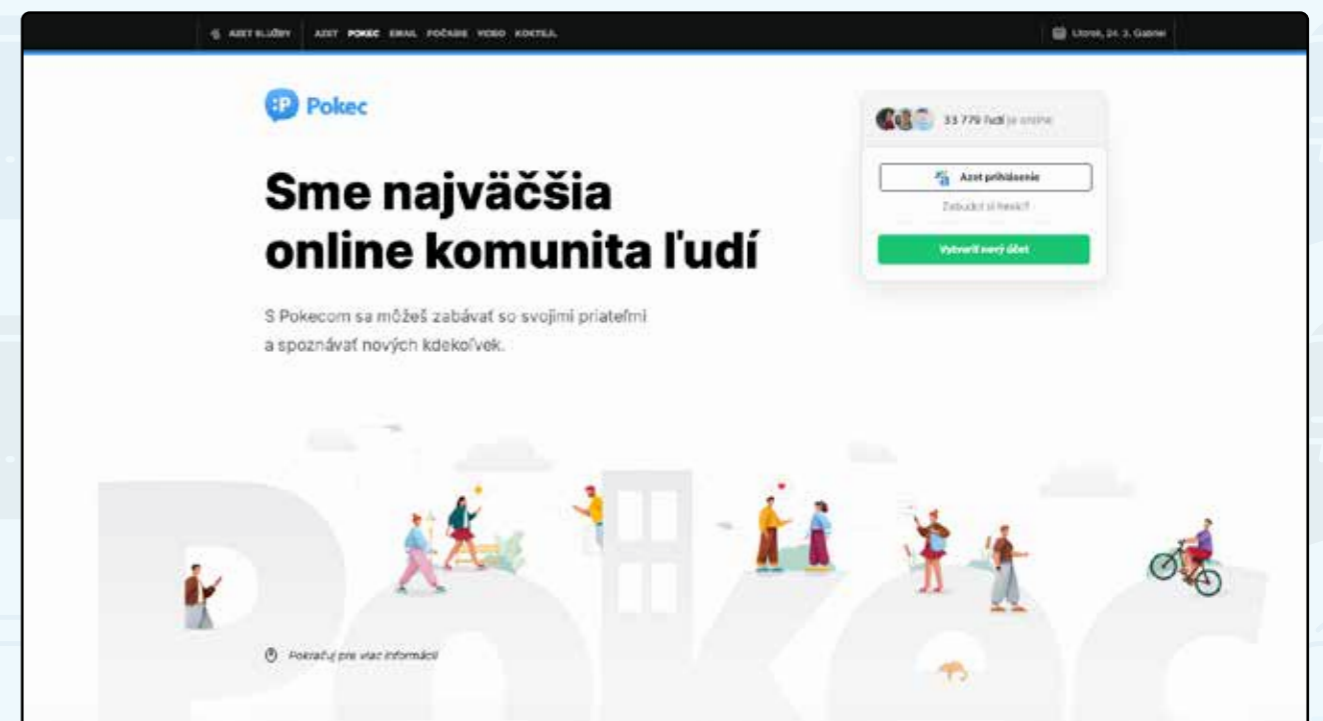
Apply at scale

The impact was clear. Moderation effort reduced from 24 hours a day to 12, freeing around one and a half full-time roles to focus on higher-value tasks. More importantly, the system has strengthened Ringier’s ability to apply its standards consistently at scale. *“Thanks to this mentorship, we are now able to filter out hate speech in milliseconds, and we are integrating AI into many more processes across our company”* says Ringier’s project manager Katarina Mikundova. *“We also exceeded our goals and developed this solution for other languages in Central Europe—an important achievement since hate speech and inappropriate content continue to grow, and we are able to fight it efficiently.”*

“Thanks to this mentorship, we are now able to filter out hate speech in milliseconds, and we are integrating AI into many more processes across our company”
Katarina Mikundova, Ringier’s project manager



A mentorship session for Ringier led by AI Strategist Lukas Gorog



Pokec's homepage, the popular Slovakian social network

FAST FACTS

- Moderation time cut by **50%** from **24** hours to **12**
- Harmful content flagged by real-time AI moderation in **~60 milliseconds**
- **3** new languages added in a year: **English, German and Polish**

Building Information Integrity

False narratives are now travelling at scale and reshaping public debate often before facts have a chance to catch up. In elections, in conflict and across polarised societies, disinformation undermines trust gradually and decisively. For journalists, the consequences are immediate, be it reputational harm, legal exposure, physical risk or a shrinking space for independent reporting.

Responding to this environment demands systemic resilience. Across regions affected by conflict, political pressure and digital manipulation, Thomson connects research, newsroom practice and global thought leadership to strengthen media's capacity to analyse and respond.

Understanding Sudan's Information War

In Sudan, the war has been fought not only through military force, but through competing efforts to shape what people know, believe and fear.

In a report conducted under the FCDO-funded Sudan Digital Resilience project, Thomson examined that contested information environment, with one of its most important conclusions that online manipulation has offline consequences.

Eroding trust

The report, *Information Manipulation in Sudan: A baseline Assessment of Actors, Narratives and Tactics*, warns that false narratives can precede violence on the ground and can also disrupt humanitarian work by creating confusion, fuelling suspicion and eroding trust in reliable sources of information.

The research was conducted in collaboration with the multi-media and research platform Andariya and Sudanese journalists and civil society organisations. The

result is a detailed picture of how false and misleading narratives are being produced, circulated and exploited in ways that affect civilians, journalists and the wider prospects for peace.

The report shows that information manipulation in Sudan is not incidental to the conflict. It has become part of how the conflict is sustained and understood. Drawing on desk research, interviews and social listening across digital platforms, the study found that coordinated campaigns are being used to influence public opinion, discredit opponents, inflame existing grievances and complicate efforts to establish verified accounts of events. It also shows how these narratives move across platforms, often shifting from one format or audience to another as they spread.

Traditional media collapse

This has unfolded in a media environment already devastated by war. The report describes the collapse of much of Sudan's

traditional media infrastructure since April 2023, with newspapers, radio stations and television outlets shut down or severely disrupted, journalists displaced, and many media professionals left without work. In that vacuum, social media, messaging apps and informal digital networks have become primary channels for information sharing. These spaces can provide urgent updates and maintain community links, but they are also highly vulnerable to rumour, hate speech and coordinated disinformation.

Manipulation & intimidation

The research links inflammatory and deceptive content to intimidation, ethnic hostility, atrocity denial and the targeting of journalists and civil society organisations.

That dynamic became especially visible in the report's monitoring of online discourse during military operations in El Fasher in September and October 2025. Over that two-month period, researchers reviewed 6,348 posts classified as information

manipulation, with a combined potential reach of more than eight hundred and ninety million (890,225,854) and 45,870 engagements. The monitoring captured how digital campaigns intensified around military developments and how manipulated content, including AI material, could be used to

intimidate communities, muddy the evidential record and shape perceptions in real time.

"The findings confirm that information manipulation is not a side effect of Sudan's war but part of its strategy," said Thomson's Head of Programmes for Middle East & Africa, Meriem Bahri. "In a country

where the information space has itself become a site of conflict, understanding how manipulation works is part of protecting the public's right to reliable information."

Click [here](#) or scan the QR code to read the full article and download the report.

FAST FACTS

- Thomson's report shows that **21 print newspapers, 36 radio stations, 8 satellite TV stations & 13 local TV stations** stopped operating.
- **80% of journalists lost their jobs**
- Nearly **2,000** journalists were displaced or relocated.



A Framework for Action

What does it take to push back against disinformation when attention is fragmented, trust is low and powerful systems shape what people see?

That question framed the fifth Thomson *Talks* session, held at the Cambridge Disinformation Summit 2025, organised by the Cambridge Judge Business School and held in the university's historic debating chamber. The discussion brought together journalism, technology, academia and public policy to focus on what is working, what is falling short and where action is needed.

The report that followed the discussion *Disarming Disinformation in the Media: What Works, What Doesn't and Why*, captures the debate and organises the proposed responses around three pressure points: how newsrooms operate, how audiences consume information and how social media platforms are governed. It also raises a fourth challenge that shapes all the others: agreeing what success looks like and how it should be measured.

From reacting to anticipating

A clear message from Cambridge was that reactive fact-checking cannot keep pace with the speed and scale of today's information flows. Speakers argued for newsroom strategies that anticipate narratives before they harden and spread, including systematic "pre-bunking" that explains the tactics and incentives behind recurring falsehoods.



Madhav Chinnappa moderating the event in the world-famous Cambridge debating chamber

The report also frames disinformation as an ecosystem with financial and political drivers that can be investigated. Instead of treating each claim as an isolated problem, speakers urged journalism to follow the money, map networks and expose the machinery behind coordinated campaigns.

Trust, they suggested, is built as much through method as message. The report highlights the value of "show your work" reporting, where audiences can see how conclusions were reached, which sources were used and how verification was carried out. It also stresses the role of empathy and context, particularly when reporting to communities who feel ignored or caricatured by mainstream coverage.

Building resilience beyond news

The report argues that a healthier information space cannot be delivered through journalism alone. News consumption is fragmented, shaped by fatigue, emotion and identity. Participants called for

stronger and more consistent media and information literacy, including the idea of a national curriculum that returns to these skills year after year from primary school onwards.

Speakers also underlined that credible responses must be culturally grounded. That means working with communities, not speaking at them, and recognising the "offline-online continuum" where influence and trust are formed. The report points to coalitions that link journalists, educators, civil society groups and, where possible, platforms, so responses can be localised and rapid without losing sight of rights and safeguards.

Interventions and accountability

A third strand of the discussion focused on platform power. Speakers argued that voluntary self-regulation has not delivered meaningful accountability and that fragmented oversight allows bad elements to exploit jurisdictional gaps. The report outlines a set of interventions that rely on stronger

external governance, user prompts that reduce harmful sharing and reforms to digital advertising systems that enable the monetisation of disinformation.

It also highlights calls for algorithmic accountability, with some participants pushing for clearer top-down rules that address how ranking systems reward outrage and engagement, regardless of accuracy. Existing frameworks such as the EU Digital Services Act

and the UK Online Safety Act were referenced as potential levers, particularly where independent regulators have the authority and resources to enforce transparency and compliance.

Defining success & measuring it

The report's closing challenge is also its most strategic. Without clear objectives and shared metrics, interventions risk

being inconsistent, untested, or counterproductive. As Thomson's Chief Executive Caro Kriel warns, "Without clarity on goals and accountability, the risk is that well-meaning interventions may not go far enough or may even backfire." She adds: "No single sector, whether media, government, civil society or tech, can tackle this alone. Progress will depend on sustained cross-sector collaboration."

"I think the starting step is to engage with audiences to understand what their needs are." **Mitali Mukherjee**, Director - Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism



"Misinformation is here to stay. It has always been here. It only changed the way it manifests and this way it manifests today is much faster to propagate and with huge influences on societies." **Alexandru Giboi**, The European Alliance of News Agencies



"There's no solution that can exist without cooperation and participation from all parts of that ecosystem." **Yoel Roth**, Head of Trust and Safety - Match Group



"...the system of information that dominated the 20th century...has been supplemented now by another system, which is a many to many, peer to peer system..." **Eliot Higgins**, Author and Founder - Bellingcat



"...what is the goal that we're trying to achieve? How do we build the information ecosystem that we want that really is helpful to everyone throughout society." **Madhav Chinnappa**, Senior Executive Consultant - Moderator



Watch the insights video summarising the event [here](#)
Download and read the full report by scanning the QR code.



Battle for the Ballot



Photo from one of the university pop-up events lead by the Love Facts initiative. Photo Credit: Media Challenge Initiative (MCI)

As Uganda moved towards its January 2026 general elections, the struggle over political information was playing out as much on phones and social feeds as in rallies and public debate. Social media had become a primary space for campaigning, persuasion and public argument, but also for false claims, coordinated manipulation and increasingly polarised narratives. In that environment, protecting electoral integrity meant more than correcting isolated inaccuracies. It required stronger systems for verification, better public understanding of how misleading content spreads and closer coordination across the wider information ecosystem.

Through the *Strengthening Electoral Integrity and Resilience to Disinformation in Uganda* project, Thomson worked with the non-profit Media Challenge Initiative to respond to those pressures from several angles. The project combined research, narrative monitoring, journalist training and youth-focused media literacy activities.

A central part of this work was the publication of *Electoral Integrity Under Threat: Mapping Disinformation Threats in Pre-Election Uganda*, a substantial baseline study of Uganda's digital information environment ahead of the vote. Drawing on desk research, the study identified

recurring patterns in online political discourse. These included gendered disinformation directed at women in politics, corruption allegations used to discredit political figures, anti-Western narratives framing democratic engagement as foreign interference and coordinated campaigns aimed at particular individuals. It also highlighted the growing influence of TikTok, X and WhatsApp in shaping political discussion, particularly among younger audiences.

That research gave journalists, civil society organisations and partners working on election integrity a clearer picture of how manipulation was taking shape online. It also informed the next stage of the

project: sustained monitoring of the narratives circulating during the electoral period. Four *Information Integrity Watch* reports tracked shifts in online discourse, documenting misinformation trends, coordinated hashtag activity and spikes in harmful narratives around key political moments. This created a more consistent basis for understanding emerging risks and responding before misleading claims gained wider momentum.

Alongside the research and monitoring work, the project invested in practical newsroom skills. A Training of Trainers programme strengthened journalists' abilities in verification, open-source investigation and digital inquiry, while also preparing them to pass those skills on to others. Reported gains in knowledge were significant, including stronger understanding of fact-checking structures, improved literacy around platform policies and increased familiarity with verification tools. Journalists went on to run peer-led sessions including in West Nile, Kampala and

Northern Uganda, helping extend the project's reach.

The project recognised that electoral resilience depends on the habits of audiences, not journalists alone. With more than 70 per cent of Uganda's population under 35, young people are among the country's largest consumers of political content online. Through the Love Facts Initiative, a series of Pop-Up events at universities and community spaces, the project worked with digital creators to make media literacy more accessible and culturally relevant. Using humour, storytelling and public engagement, the initiative encouraged audiences to pause, question and verify before sharing information.

One student who took part in a university activation captured the value of that approach: "Today I have learnt that before you deliver any message on any social media platform, you have to make sure that you know the source of where it is coming from."

Together, these activities show that strengthening information

integrity during elections is not a matter of one intervention or one constituency. For Thomson Chief Executive Caro Kriel, "it depends on research that clarifies emerging threats, monitoring that tracks them in real time, journalists who can verify and investigate with confidence and audiences who are better equipped to question what they see".

The Strengthening Electoral Integrity and Resilience to Disinformation in Uganda project is funded by the Hewlett Foundation.



Photos from the Love Facts initiative pop-ups

FAST FACTS:

Training of Trainers programme:

- Understanding of fact-checking structures increasing from **33.3%** to **85.7%**
- Facebook policy literacy increasing from **14.3%** to **85.7%**

Love Facts Initiative:

- **342** participants engaged through in-person activities
- Over **717,000** impressions on X, reached more than **127,000** unique accounts

Growing and Showcasing Talent

Quality journalism does not emerge by accident. It grows when talent is recognised, standards are reinforced and journalists are given room to develop their craft. In a media environment shaped by pressure, speed and shrinking resources, that process matters more than ever. At Thomson, we do this by investing in opportunities for journalists to be seen, supported and developed. Competitions and awards showcase outstanding work to the world, giving reporters greater visibility while bringing important issues to wider audiences. Our online learning platform, Journalism Now extends that support further, opening access to skills for journalists often working in parts of the world where training is hard to access or not readily available.



Our three finalists: Wangu Kanuri, Tracy Bonareri Onchoke and Godwin Asediba

FAST FACTS

- **227** journalists entered the Young Journalist Award competition
- From **60** different countries
- **681** stories submitted

African storytelling triumphs in Young Journalist Award

A new generation of African journalists is being celebrated for their courageous investigations and impactful storytelling that is winning them worldwide attention.

All three finalists for Thomson's prestigious Young Journalist of the Year Award in 2025 were from the African continent. The winner Tracy Bonareri Onchoke is from Kenya along with runner-up Wangu Kanuri. The second runner-up Godwin Asediba is from Ghana.

They were among dozens of young African voices who dominated this year's competition which Thomson runs in partnership with the UK's Foreign Press Association. Of the 227 young journalists who entered, 58 were from countries across the African continent. The top three for applications were Kenya with 19, Nigeria with 12 and Rwanda with four.

The three finalists submitted powerful stories which ranged from an investigation into why law students were failing the bar exam, the impact of climate change on school children and an exposé from a hospital morgue where corpses were left to rot. What is clear from all three is a desire to build trust with audiences and to give a voice to people whose voices often go ignored. Both aims are central to the promotion of media and information literacy which seeks to empower the public with the information and skills needed to make informed choices.

The challenges for journalists

trying to do that was exposed by the competition's overall winner Tracy Bonareri Onchoke. Accepting the award, she said she has seen how the spread of mis- and disinformation was impacting lives in Kenya, silencing voices and undermining democracy, and she praised the ordinary people who continue to speak to journalists like her. *"Every story I tell carries their courage, their vulnerability and their hope."*

Daring to be different

These young journalists are part of a storytelling renaissance in Africa that's spread in recent years with less emphasis on stereotypical narratives such as poverty, war and corruption and more on nuanced, diverse and positive stories that better represent a continent made of up of 54 countries and over a billion people.

Thomson has been part of that drive having partnered with Africa No Filter and bird story agency to deliver the free e-learning course Africa Stories: A guide for journalists on how to tell better stories about Africa. It's an approach that is helping young journalists deliver stories with impact – which is certainly true of the three finalists.

Competition runner-up Wangu Kanuri travelled for two days to speak to school children and see first-hand how they're suffering in extreme heat. For her fellow runner-up Godwin Asediba,

storytelling is also about going that extra mile. He says young journalists should 'dare to be different' and pitch ideas that haven't been done before.



Wangu Kanuri in the field, in one of her submission photos for the competition



Tracy Bonareri Onchoke interviewed, for one of her submission photos for the competition



Godwin Asediba in the field, in one of his submission photos for the competition

Brave reporting by Young Journalist winner



A still from Tracy's acceptance speech, that was played at the award ceremony

"...to every young reporter from my country and beyond, keep showing up. Keep asking difficult questions. Keep fighting for accuracy, for humanity and for stories that hold power to account. Our work matters. Perhaps now more than ever."

Tracy Bonareri Onchoke



Scan the QR code to watch Tracy's acceptance speech

At 26, Kenyan investigative journalist Tracy Bonareri Onchoke was named the Thomson Foundation Young Journalist Award (YJA) winner at the Foreign Press Association's awards ceremony in November 2025. Working at Africa Uncensored, she stood out for reporting marked by rigour, range and public purpose. The judges described her as "a very engaging all-rounder who tells hard-hitting stories about Kenyan life without sensationalism and in a very brave way".

That combination of accountability and humanity runs through the way Tracy speaks about her work. Asked what kinds of stories matter to her, she said she is drawn to what she calls "passion projects" and to reporting on women, children and gender minorities, subjects that can carry social stigma as well as journalistic risk in Kenya. "If I feel it in my heart, then I'm going to do it," she

said, describing the instinct that tells her a story is worth pursuing.

Humanising issues

Her route into investigative journalism was shaped by the example of leading Kenyan reporters. Tracy credits her current boss John-Allan Namu as an early influence, recalling how she watched him "humanising issues that were rarely discussed" and following stories through in search of accountability. That example helped shape her own understanding of what investigative reporting could do, not simply expose wrongdoing, but bring neglected experiences into view.

Collaboration across borders

Winning the award also sharpened her sense of where journalism could take her next. Tracy said the recognition had

made her think more about collaboration between reporters facing similar pressures across borders. "We all have similar problems and reporting on them together is something I'm really looking forward to," she said. She also spoke about opening doors for younger journalists, building on outreach work already under way through university campus tours in Kenya.

For Thomson's Director of Training and Communications Deborah Kelly, Tracy's win reflects the wider importance of backing reporters with the skill and conviction to pursue difficult stories. "Tracy represents a generation of journalists who are asking hard questions, listening closely to the communities they report on and producing journalism with real impact," she said. "This award recognises that achievement and the promise of what comes next."



Tracy's award winning story, click the image to view



Tracy's winning speech at the FPA ceremony



One of Tracy's submission photos where she's speaking at an event

Scan the QR code to watch Tracy's full Q&A video



Reporting That Reveals

Maja Jovanovska and Bojan Stojanovski's investigation for North Macedonia's Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL) won the 2025 regional first prize in the EU Investigative Journalism Award for exposing serious corruption in public procurement around the country's state-owned power plants. Their story titled "A postal clerk protected the power plants of ESM from ash, while the state budget was left 'ash-covered'", showed how inflated contracts, weak oversight and politically connected actors drained public money through the purchase of chemical additives at far above market price.

Multi-million-euro deals

When Maja and Bojan began

examining procurement contracts linked to the power plants, they were responding to growing concern over irregular spending. "There were early indications that state contracts for chemical additives used in power plants were irregular," Maja said. What first appeared to be a limited problem soon pointed to something wider: companies with no relevant background were securing multi-million-euro deals, while prices ran three to four times above market value.

Anonymous sources

The reporting combined procurement records, official announcements and pricing analysis with interviews, expert input and insider testimony. Access to information was not straightforward,

and some of the most significant leads came from sources who could not be named. As Maja explained, "Insider sources, some of whom requested anonymity, provided context that numbers alone could not show." Their evidence helped the journalists trace relationships behind the contracts and test whether the paperwork reflected a broader pattern of abuse.

What emerged was more than a story about wasteful spending. The investigation showed how procurement systems could be manipulated in ways that damaged both public finances and public trust. It also raised serious questions about the involvement of senior figures who should have been guarding against corruption rather than enabling it.



Artwork from the winning article, credited to Luka Blazev. Click the image to view the article in the original Macedonian

Criminal charges

The impact was immediate. The story prompted strong public reaction and wider media coverage, helping to push the issue beyond specialist scrutiny and into broader public debate. More importantly, it contributed to institutional action: prosecutors opened a formal investigation, which later resulted in criminal charges against 31 individuals and five companies.

Reflecting on the work, Maja emphasised persistence, verification and trust-building with sources. Above all, she returned to the public purpose of the reporting: "Always keep the public interest at the centre of your reporting, because the stakes are real and your work can make a difference."

The EU Investigative Journalism Award 2025 was part of the project "Strengthening Quality Journalism in Western Balkans and Türkiye

II." It was funded by the European Union and implemented by Thomson in a consortium composed of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network – BIRN Hub, Central European University (CEU), Association of Journalists (AJ) Türkiye, University Goce Delčev Štip (UGD), Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM), Media Association of South-East Europe (MASE), and BIRN Kosovo.



Joint winners Maja Jovanovska and Bojan Stojanovski accepting their award

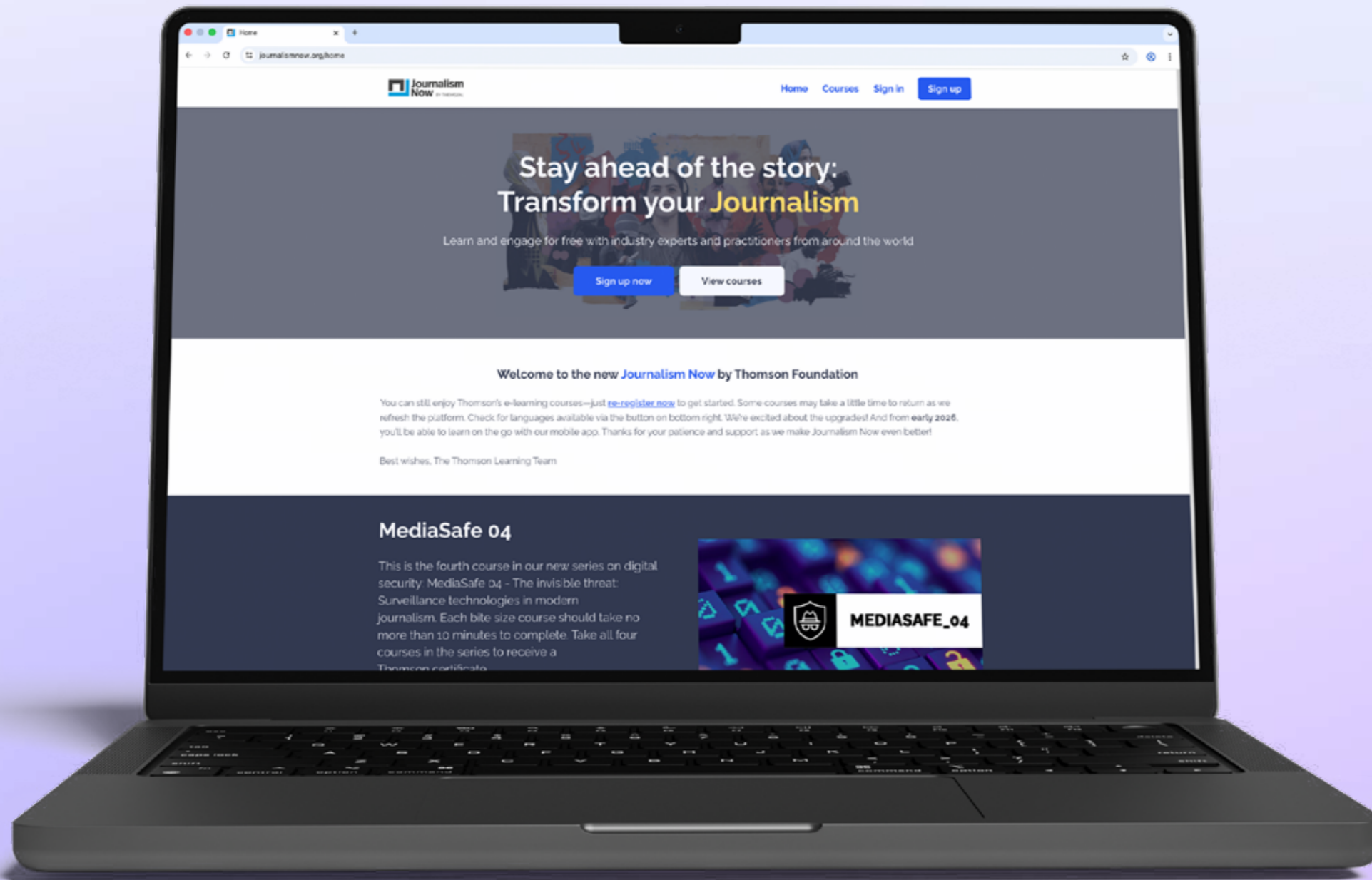
Scan the QR code to see the full list of award winners



FAST FACTS:

- Record **284** applications received across **7** countries
- More than **270** individual journalists entered
- Over **120** media outlets represented

Journalism Now Upgrade: Thomson's New Look



The current Journalism Now homepage, available to view now at journalismnow.org

Early 2026 saw the relaunch of Journalism Now. Since 2017 Thomson's e-learning platform has provided online learning for journalists and communicators across the globe. The free courses tackle the important subjects of the day such as disinformation and the ethical use of Artificial Intelligence using innovative learning techniques and in multiple languages.

Thomson's Digital Learning Developer Ramita Lehrungwichian is excited about new additions to the updated platform. "(It) supports a mobile app, available on both Android and iOS. This makes our courses far more accessible, allowing users to learn anytime and anywhere they want."

Design refresh

Journalism Now has been redesigned for ease of navigation while retaining its original style. Every course page has been refreshed, allowing users to thoroughly explore the contents of each course before committing to learning. The majority follow a modular style where we can design and swap out components whenever we want to refresh the site, such as for promoting new courses or events on the homepage. We allow guest visitors to

browse through the site and preview courses without signing up, so they can decide for themselves if they want to enrol in a course.

Thomson's Digital Content Producer Matt Lott played a key role in the update of the platform: "We wanted to make sure that during the transition to the new platform, no users would be left behind, and once the platform was relaunched, it would not only be the best-looking version to date but could also be accessed from anywhere on any device, with any type of internet connection."

Blended learning

Since its launch in 2017, Journalism Now's blended learning approach has positively impacted the lives of thousands, reaching journalists working in remote regions and becoming a pivotal part of Thomson's blended digital and face-to-face learning approach.

Journalism Now has more than twenty-eight thousand users. Thomson launched "Mediasafe" a four-part bite size course series on digital security for journalists in January 2026. The Journalism Now App is launching in 2026.

Popular courses (Click to view each course on Journalism Now)



[News Writing: The art of storytelling](#)



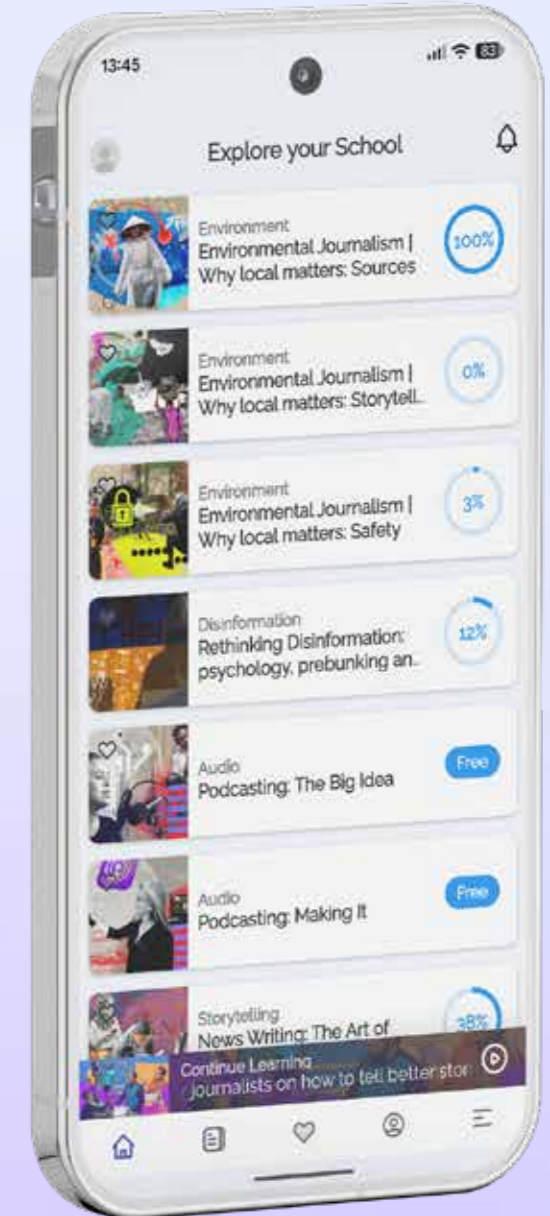
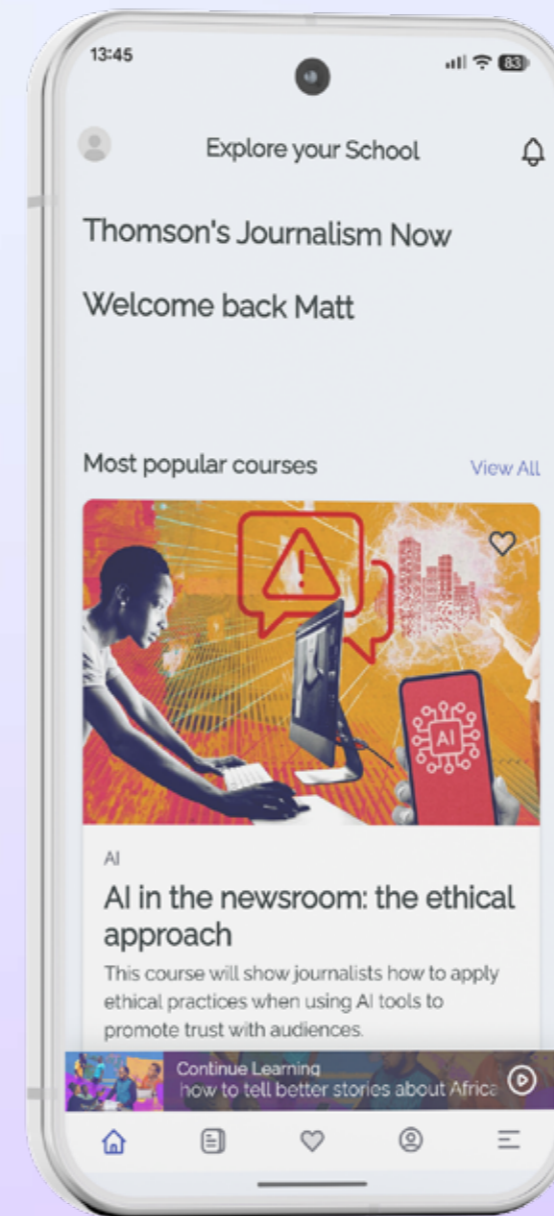
[African Stories: A guide for journalists on how to tell better stories about Africa](#)



[Rethinking disinformation: psychology, prebunking and other tactics to halt the spread](#)



[MEDIASAFE - Our newest four-part course on digital security](#)



The Journalism Now app, which we are launching in 2026.

FAST FACTS:

- **28,000+** users on the platform
- Available in over **10 different languages**
- **59 courses** to choose from, with more on the way
- Users from over **130** countries



Scan the QR code to visit Journalism Now and sign up

Helping Media to Thrive

Independent media operates within an unforgiving economic reality. Revenue models are unstable. Audience habits change rapidly. Political and legal pressures add further strain.

Across Europe, Latin America and beyond, Thomson is working with media organisations to test business models, understand audience behaviour and improve leadership skills and strategy while aligning investment with evidence. Grounded on ethical principles and measurable outcomes, our methodology ensures innovation and growth without ever compromising on editorial integrity.

AGILE: Rethinking Revenue

Independent media in Brazil and Colombia are operating under severe strain. In both countries, outlets face unstable revenue, heavy dependence on external support and a worsening risk environment. Thomson's audience landscape studies and security assessments, commissioned in Brazil and Colombia in 2025, found widespread financial vulnerability, with 63% of digital-native outlets in Colombia not yet financially self-sustaining and 60% of participating organisations in Brazil earning under 500,000 Brazilian Reals (approx. 96,300 USD) a year.

That work sat within AGILE - Advancing Global Innovation

and Learning Effectively to Build Resilience in Independent Media - a global project co-funded by the European Union and delivered by a consortium led by Internews Europe, with partners Thomson Media, ARTICLE 19, Fojo Media Institute and CFI Media Development. In Brazil and Colombia, Thomson commissioned audience landscape studies which involved comprehensive research into consumer behaviours, demographics and media consumption habits and security assessments. It also implemented the business sustainability support designed to respond to what that research

found through a Resilience Incubator, a three-month programme offering intensive mentoring, strategic guidance and hands-on tools to help media organisations grow their audiences, diversify revenue and build sustainable business models.

The premise was practical. If independent media is expected to keep serving the public under economic pressure, it needs time to think, evidence to guide decisions and business models that are strong enough to reduce dependence on unpredictable funding.

Two cases stand out.

CASE ONE - Mutante, Colombia

Mutante was already known for a distinctive editorial model. Based in Colombia, it sees journalism not as a finished product but as the start of a conversation, using participatory methods to bring audiences into reporting and public debate. That model gave it a strong identity, but not immunity from the wider crisis facing independent media. As international funding tightened and the effects of the USAID shutdown rippled through Colombia's media ecosystem, Mutante was under pressure to find new ways to sustain work that was valuable but difficult to monetise.

Its pitch to AGILE grew from a simple question: could the expertise behind Mutante's journalism become a service that others would pay for without compromising its editorial independence? The outlet had many ideas, but it needed the time, the space and

structure to decide what was worth pursuing.

"AGILE had a very important impact in enabling us to sit down and think about this, in a moment in which there was no time to sit down and think, because we were in Survivor Mode", said Mutante's Projects and Impact Manager Maria Paula Murcia Huertas. "We were in a dire funding and organisational scenario and AGILE gave us the space to breathe and organise our ideas."

The mentorship helped Mutante focus on turning the knowledge generated through its audience engagement into a product for outside organisations. The result was a reformulated pitch for a "Collective Intelligence Report", a service that would analyse the conversations sparked by Mutante's journalism, combine them with social listening and identify patterns, concerns and opportunities emerging from public debate.

The mentorship helped Mutante "refine our focus on what would be something useful", said Maria Paula, and then test that against two further questions: whether it could be delivered without excessive effort and whether it would be "interesting for organisations to pay for."

That discipline mattered. Mutante's journalism is built around participation, comment analysis and community response. Those strengths are rich editorially, but they do not automatically translate into revenue. AGILE helped the team identify where its distinctive method could also become a viable offer. Rather than chase a model imported from elsewhere, it clarified how Mutante's own practice could generate income.

What comes next is testing. Mutante is now working through the economics and workflow of the product, including how to cost social listening and how to identify the right partners for the reports.



The Mutante team in Colombia

CASE TWO - Gênero e Número, Brazil

In Brazil, Gênero e Número came to AGILE from a different starting point. The organisation had spent years building authority in data, journalism and strategic communication on gender, race and sexuality. It was not starting from scratch. But like many independent media organisations in Brazil, it was operating in a funding environment shaped by shrinking philanthropy, unstable support and the constant challenge of diversifying income without drifting from its mission.

Gênero e Número was founded with institutional philanthropic support and for years relied heavily on it. That has changed. Funding from

philanthropy, once effectively the whole model, has fallen to around half. The problem was not simply replacing lost income. It was building something more deliberate and durable in response.

“The most impactful lesson from the AGILE mentorship was understanding that the data-based initiatives we already have need to be thought of as products” said Vitória Régia da Silva, Gênero e Número’s Executive Director.

That change in thinking proved to be crucial. The mentorship helped them develop “Lab GN”, through which they will promote and sell their expertise in research, data analysis, journalism and strategic communication. The aim is to help clients understand inequalities and inform public debate,

while also creating a stronger revenue stream for the organisation.

Gênero e Número is now putting in place the infrastructure needed to run Lab GN, including a landing page, a weekly newsletter, free bulletins and a roadmap for paid products and customised projects. It is also building more active partnerships with civil society organisations, foundations, universities and other media outlets so that the lab can operate as a visible offer in the market.

The ambition is substantial. “We want 40% of the organisation’s revenue to come from the Lab,” Vitória said. The target, built during the mentorship, has now been translated into a concrete business plan.



Photos provided by Gênero e Número

FAST FACTS:

AGILE’s findings:

- Colombia: **63%** of digital-native media are **not financially self-sustaining**
- Brazil, **25%** of organisations participating in the research **reported no revenue**

Security threats:

- Colombia: **high levels of physical risk**
- Brazil: **judicial harassment & legal intimidation**

AI - the Business Case and Ethics

Grappling with the opportunities and challenges of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within newsrooms was a key ingredient added to much of the training and mentoring sessions conducted by Thomson in 2025.

The business case behind the need to maximise its use but at the same time recognise the potential risks were explored in a training programme for Taiwanese media leaders, editors and journalists.

Thomson had commissioned an extensive study which exposed the scale of disinformation during Taiwan’s Presidential election the previous year. Much of the false content circulated was AI-generated, or a blend between facts and manufactured fiction.

The 2025 two-phase training programme started with a virtual session for media leaders, exploring how newsrooms around the world are meeting the challenge of these emerging technologies, exploiting their growing potential and navigating the ethical issues presented by the various forms of AI tools.

Studies have found that business leaders are often unaware

of the level of usage of AI in their newsrooms and struggle to keep pace with the speed of advances.

During a follow-up face-to-face session in the Taiwanese capital Taipei, the leaders shared their concerns connected to the introduction of AI tools and processes within the newsrooms and discussed developing a comprehensive policy for the ethical use of AI in their newsrooms.

This was followed by a practical session where journalists were introduced to a wide range of AI tools including image generation and verification.

“Journalists are keen always to know about the latest tools, particularly with the increase in disinformation from within and outside of Taiwan” said Deborah Kelly, Thomson’s Director of Training and Communications. *“But also, there was a distinct interest in AI driven revenue models, audience engagement and profitability from the media leaders.”*

The programme “AI & Media: Building capacity of key media actors in Taiwan in ethical use of AI in the newsrooms” is funded by the Westminster Fund for Democracy.

FAST FACTS:

Taking part:

- **12 media leaders**
- **40 journalists and editors**
- **4 expert-led sessions**

Validation Booster: Making Ideas Happen

Thomson's Validation Booster is a six-month, expert-led accelerator program helping European media creators test, refine, and validate innovative digital business ideas before launching. It focuses on market feasibility through workshops and mentorship to turn concepts into sustainable ventures.



All photos: Validation Booster session at the Media Innovation Festival. Credit: Maja Ilieva Janevska

Thomson's Validation Booster programme hit a milestone in 2025. After proving itself in a Western Balkans pilot, eight of the 17 media organisations involved raised a combined €249,656 to take their projects forward. The programme also expanded into the wider European market, continuing its focus on helping media test ideas with real audiences, refine their propositions and develop a credible case for funding and implementation.

Thirty seven media organisations and individual creators

completed the programme bringing a range of challenges reflecting the pressure points many newsrooms are facing. They ranged from audience engagement and monetisation to new content formats and practical uses of AI in the newsroom.

Concepts interrogated

A defining moment came at the Media Innovation Festival in Vienna, where Thomson hosted pitch sessions and workshops designed to put fundraisers and

media innovators in direct conversation. With the straightforward goal of closing the gap between those with ideas and those with resources, the sessions created a space where concepts could be interrogated properly, with hard questions and practical scrutiny.

What emerged most strongly, though, was less about any single project and more about how participants described the shift in their working habits.

"The biggest value of Validation Booster was the mindset shift it brought," said Jan Vitasek, Publisher

at news website EU-Media (EurActiv.cz) in the Czech Republic. "This programme taught us to test ideas early, challenge our assumptions and shape concepts with the audience."

Methodology & confidence

The change was commercial as well as editorial. Tassos Morfis, Co-founder of audience engagement platform for newsrooms Curio in Greece, said the programme prompted a reassessment of fundamentals. "It has helped us open new markets and rethink the fundamentals of our business. It has pushed us to listen more closely to our customers' needs and problems and build something tailored to their needs."

Mariia Pachkovska, Media Executive and Co-Founder of AI-powered newsroom automation platform TotalCast in Ukraine, described the impact in terms of confidence and method: "Validation Booster gave me the methodology and confidence to validate TotalCast with European customers. I learned to test assumptions systematically, not build based on my own experience."

That adaptability matters because validation does not always end with a green light. Maria Malcheva, founder of civil society association For The Children of Veliko Tarnovo in Bulgaria, highlighted the value of learning that survives a failed test. "What I appreciate most about the Validation Booster is its versatility. The insights can be applied far beyond the initial project. Even if the project you applied with isn't validated, the knowledge gained allows you to pivot or pursue other opportunities with a stronger foundation."

Concepts to clear propositions

The programme's 2025 delivery was supported through three projects: Media Innovation Europe 2.0, Deepening Digital: Reinforcing Resilience and Greening the Narratives: Advancing Awareness of the Green Transition in the Western Balkans. Together, they underpinned the coaching, testing and pitch support that helped participants move from early concepts to clearer propositions, with a stronger chance of securing funding and reaching implementation.



Please click [here](#) or scan the QR code to read the Validation Booster article on the Journalift website.

How to Build a Future in Times of Crisis

For independent media in Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, 2025 brought a sharper test of resilience. The withdrawal of USAID funding reshaped the donor landscape and heightened uncertainty for outlets that have long relied on external support. At the same time, rapid AI change has altered how journalism is discovered and consumed, affecting search visibility, audience engagement and the traffic patterns many publishers depend on.

Against that backdrop, Thomson's Executive Learning Programme set out to help leaders make tough decisions with clearer options in view. The Breaking the Mould: Sustainable Business Models for Independent Media masterclass series ran in Bucharest (1–2 November 2025) and Sofia (22–23 November 2025). It brought together leaders from across 10 countries, combining Central and Eastern Europe with the Western Balkans in a shared conversation about sustainability, independence and public value.

Diversification

The format was practical and intensive, geared towards senior and mid-level managers, founders, editors and strategic decision-makers. Participants moved from market analysis to priority-setting, then into the hard mechanics of change: cost



Photos from the executive learning programme in Sofia

optimisation, audience revenue development and the testing of new revenue ideas using frameworks such as the Business Model Canvas and the Lean Innovation approach.

A central theme was diversification. Many newsrooms in the region still lean heavily on advertising, leaving them exposed when markets dip or platforms change their rules. The masterclasses put audience revenue at the centre of the discussion, tackling how to clarify value propositions, segment audiences, and build strategies that are owned across editorial, marketing and product teams.

Structured-space

The programme considered concrete income options, spanning newsletters, paywalls, membership and donations, alongside advertising, events, services,

education and content licensing or syndication. The aim was not to prescribe a single model, but to help leaders identify which combinations are realistic in their own markets and what it takes to execute them.

For many leaders, the peer exchange was as valuable as the content. The programme created structured space for participants to test assumptions, compare revenue tactics and pressure-test thinking in an environment where scepticism is common and resources are tight.

Bektour Iskender, Development Manager at From the Republics in Poland, said: *"This was extremely inspiring, to learn how people earn money on media in an environment where everybody was sceptical that people would ever earn any money."*

Participants also practised building audience personas, explored membership tiers and

platform choices, and examined tools and workflows that can turn strategy into routine. Martina Novotna, CEO and Managing Director of Women in Action, Slovakia, reflected that practical focus: *"I learned a lot of new skills, especially when we are talking about membership models, platforms, and different tools we can use."*

Shark tank

A highlight was the "Shark Tank" revenue pitch format, which pushed participants to articulate their plans clearly, anticipate risks and respond to challenge. It was designed to mirror the scrutiny leaders face when pitching to funders, boards, partners, and increasingly, their own audiences.

For trainer Peter Erdelyi, from the Center for Sustainable Media in Hungary, the sustainability question starts with the relationship between newsroom and audience. *"I think that audience engagement models are most important for sustainable business models,"* he



said. *"Therefore, you need to find out how to best serve your audience. That takes time, but it is possible."*

Davor Marko, Thomson's Programme Manager for Central and Southeast Europe, framed the wider purpose in a region where funding pressure, technological change and "captured environments" collide. *"At a time when journalism is facing a funding crisis, rapid technological change, and increasingly frequent captured*

environments, the key question is no longer only how media can survive, but how they can build the future," he said.

The 2025 Executive Learning Masterclasses were part of Thomson's Deepening Digital: Reinforcing Resilience project, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in Central and Eastern Europe.

"This was extremely inspiring, to learn how people earn money on media in an environment where everybody was sceptical that people would ever earn any money."
Bektour Iskender, Development Manager at From the Republics

FAST FACTS

Breaking the Mould brought together:

- **21 media leaders**
- **20 newsrooms**
- Participants from **10 countries**



Securing the Leadership Succession

As the media industry faces rapid technological shifts, audience fragmentation and increasing pressure on journalistic credibility, Thomson's training programmes are central in the pathway to preparing and inspiring emerging leaders.

CME Media Group, which consists of six commercial broadcasters based in seven central and eastern European countries, is employing our expertise as part of a 12-month cross regional initiative to strengthen editorial leadership and innovation within its newsrooms, sports departments and "umbrella" streaming service, Voyo.

CME's TV Channels reach 49 million people with leading channels in most of its markets.

As well as securing an internal succession path, improving the skills and introducing innovative approaches, CME sees

an opportunity to strengthen its community and encourage the exchange of expertise amongst the editorial teams.

Thomson's role in the year long programme is to lead a series of editorial leadership masterclasses. The first three-day masterclass, "The future of media and the audience, visual stories for all platforms and breaking news" took place in October in Bucharest, Romania in two back-to-back sessions for a total of 40 journalists.

The next two sessions in the editorial masterclass series on "The digital revolution – automation in the newsroom platforms and data" and "Mobile Journalism – the smartphone as the journalists' essential tool" take place in 2026.

CME Media Group broadcasters include: Pro TV Romania and Moldova, RTL Croatia, Nova and

Oneplay in the Czech Republic, bTV in Bulgaria, Markiza in Slovakia and Pro Plus (POP TV) in Slovenia. Voyo is CME's streaming on demand platform which operates across all its broadcasters.



Masterclass One – learning outcomes

Day 1: Understanding the Media Landscape and Visual Storytelling

- Analyse** current and emerging trends in global media, including the impact of technology, evolving business models, and the societal value of journalism.
- Identify** key characteristics of the target audience and apply principles of trust-building, accuracy, transparency, and verification in their reporting.
- Evaluate** the elements of compelling human visual storytelling across platforms and apply practical techniques to tell stories that resonate emotionally and visually.

Day 2: Multi-Platform Storytelling

- Be able to Adapt** journalistic content for diverse platforms including TV, online, mobile, social media, podcasts, reels, blogs and infographics, understanding the unique demands and opportunities of each.
- Be able to apply** platform-specific storytelling techniques through hands-on exercises, producing tailored content for multiple formats.

Day 3: Breaking News and Crisis Reporting

- Know how to respond** effectively to breaking news scenarios, incorporating best practices in verification, safety, staffing, copyright, and resource allocation.
- Be able to utilise** digital tools and workflows for planning, communication and content sharing during high-pressure news events.
- Know how to integrate** crisis reporting strategies with multi-platform storytelling skills in a simulated breaking news exercise.

FAST FACTS:

- **40** emerging leaders trained
- **6** European commercial broadcast companies
- **3** masterclass series



CME NEWS MASTERCLASS



Sustainable Newsrooms



Photos of Sarajevo Workshop. Credit: Kayla Goodson/CNTI



“You won’t be replaced by AI, but you will be replaced by someone who uses AI,” the words of project manager Sami Kçiku from the Koha Group in Kosovo.

He was voicing the concerns felt by many journalists about their roles being replaced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) when he attended a two-day workshop led by Thomson and the Center for News, Technology and Innovation (CNTI) in Sarajevo, Bosnia in October 2025. *Journalism and AI: Building Resilient Newsrooms for the Future* brought together media organisations from the Western Balkans and Central Europe at a moment when business survival is increasingly shaped by how newsrooms use technology, earn trust and manage risk.

Sami went on to explain how the Koha media house has developed a custom GPT to improve SEO and social media practices and uses an external AI tool for transcription.

The workshop considered AI as a business question as much as an editorial one: where it can cut time spent on routine work, strengthen distribution, support new formats and protect revenue by safeguarding credibility. Participants also raised the costs of implementation, skills gaps and uneven adoption inside teams, alongside concerns about governance and audience communication.

Custom LLMs

Several small media teams explained how they are using AI to stretch scarce capacity. The Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia, with a team of 10, built a custom large language model to analyse nearly 10 million pieces of data on healthcare wait times, accelerating analysis while keeping human review in place. In North Macedonia, the Skopje-based outlet Vidi Vaka created “KiberFlow”, an AI co-worker that turns reported



Responsible AI

stories into rap-style videos, designed to reach a younger audience that tends to avoid traditional media. *“For us, AI is not a shortcut; it’s a collaboration,”* journalist Angela Petrovska said. *“People follow KiberFlow not because it’s AI, but because it tells real stories made by good journalists.”*

Speakers also pressed newsrooms to define their competitive edge as AI changes discovery and distribution. Niamh Burns of Enders Analysis warned: *“AI will undoubtedly change how news is created, distributed, noticed and funded. This is really a moment where you [journalists] should all be thinking about what your value add is.”*

Ethics & transparency

The workshop highlighted the people side of sustainability:

building skills, changing culture and reducing operational risk. At N1 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, executive multimedia producer Tatjana Sekulic described uptake ranging from rejection to over-reliance, prompting newsroom-wide training. *“It’s very important to teach them how to use AI in the proper way,”* she said. *“We’re investing in our knowledge and our people.”*

Above it all, ethics and transparency remained at the heart of the discussion. *“Our sector cannot afford to ignore AI, but nor can we afford to adopt it without strong principles,”* said Thomson Chief Executive Caro Kriel. *“What we saw in Sarajevo was a commitment to experimentation that is rooted in ethics. AI can strengthen journalism, but only when journalists remain in control of the choices that shape their work.”*



FAST FACTS:

AI innovations explored:

- **Custom GPT** for SEO and Social Media
- Custom LLM analysing **millions** of pieces of data
- AI co-worker producing rap-style videos

Bringing the Climate Crisis into View

The climate crisis is one of the defining stories of our time, yet some of its most important dimensions remain under reported. Complex policy language, scientific detail, misinformation and the pressure of crowded news agendas can all make environmental coverage harder to commission, harder to frame and harder to sustain.

We work to change that by helping journalists and media organisations turn complex climate issues into reporting that is clear, relevant and rooted in public interest. That means supporting stronger storytelling, practical tools and spaces where media leaders can think seriously about environmental sustainability both as an editorial priority and as an organisational one.

From Seed to Story



For many journalists, climate coverage fails for a familiar reason: the story struggles to compete. It can be technically dense, politically charged and buried beneath language that reads like a policy memo rather than a public-interest story. The challenge becomes sharper when the assignment is the Just Green Transition.

What is a Just Green Transition?

A Just Green Transition ensures the shift to an environmentally sustainable, low-carbon economy is fair, equitable and inclusive, leaving no workers or communities behind. It is frequently wrapped in policy-heavy terminology and institutional phrasing that can be hard to translate into reporting audiences recognise.

That translation gap was the starting point for Thomson's Greening the Narratives: Advancing Awareness of the Green Transition in the Western Balkans, a project built to help journalists turn complex transition policy into clear, publishable public-interest journalism, without stripping away the detail that makes it accountable.

Greening the Narratives was the first project to apply Thomson's innovative "Wheel of Change" model. Rather than treating journalism support as a one-off training moment, the "Wheel of Change" functions as a newsroom-style pipeline: it identifies promising ideas, tests and sharpens them, then backs the strongest with the time, mentoring and funding needed to publish. In practice, it links discovery, validation and

Photo from a mobile journalism workshop in Skopje



production, using the audience response as evidence and taking away the guesswork.

How it worked:

- Finding the Talent (The Innovation Hub). A regional talent search. The goal here was simply to discover creative people with fresh voices and new ideas.
- Media Innovators (The Validation Booster). We selected five of the most promising ideas of products or business models – like podcasts or niche platforms – from step 1 and put them into a five-month testing phase. Their final step is then to take the audience data they gathered during testing and pitch their business ideas to an external donor panel to secure long-term, future funding.
- Content Creators (The Fellowship).

Journalists apply for production grants funded by our project to produce and publish high-impact investigative stories.

What changed for journalists

For many participants, the work was about converting institutional language into reporting that lands. Fellow Mihail Milosheski described that shift directly: "I learned how to bridge the gap between heavy bureaucratic terminology and the daily reality of citizens," he said. "This has fundamentally changed how I approach environmental reporting."

In North Macedonia, a cross-border investigation by Bojan Blazhevski examined the unused opportunity of geothermal energy in Kochani. After publication, UNDP announced it would finance technical documentation for a local geothermal system. Similarly, Bosnian journalist Nikola

Bačić saw real impact from his work. "The story revealed the gap between official energy policies and the real possibilities for citizens," Nikola explained. "One particularly valuable source from inside the system reached out, which enabled me to continue the investigation and publish a follow-up."

Audience response is often the deciding factor when editors weigh whether to back complex transition reporting. For Serbian podcaster Marija Dedić, the Validation Booster phase produced that evidence: "The scale of the reach and positive reactions reassured me that the idea resonates and that I shouldn't give up on it."

Greening the Narratives: Advancing Awareness of the Green Transition in the Western Balkans was supported by Open Society Foundations – Western Balkans (OSF-WB).

FAST FACTS:

The Wheel of Change model produced measurable output and reach:

- Public awareness reach: target 30,000, achieved **350,000+**
- Expected output nearly doubled from 5 to **9** investigative stories
- High demand: **102 applications** received for 32 spaces



Photo from the Subotic Innovation Hub



Embedding Sustainability within Media Organisations

Conscious of the challenges facing journalists getting their stories on the climate crisis up the news agenda, Thomson's Director of Training and Communications Deborah Kelly joined a panel at the yearly Building Bridges event which urged the media to prioritise sustainability within their organisations.

The event in Geneva is organised by the Building Bridges Foundation, an alliance of

institutions from the financial sector, public authorities and Geneva based international organisations. It has a shared objective to transform how private capital is mobilised to achieve positive social and environmental impact.

The panel discussion sought to demonstrate the business case for embedding sustainability within media organisations. It delved into the practical challenges and opportunities to do this,

and what it might take to make news organisations investible for impact investors.

Deborah was joined by panelists Dr. François Nel, University of Lancashire, Dr. Marja Heinonen, Independent researcher and senior associate Media Innovation Studio (Finland) and Truus Huisman, Independent advisor and senior associate Media Innovation Studio (Belgium).

The Building Bridges website showing some panellists from the 2025 event in Geneva

BUILDING BRIDGES 2025
30 SEPT-2 OCT
GENEVA

Innovative Solutions and Investment Opportunities in Sustainable Finance.

From 30 September – 2 October 2025, Building Bridges returns to Geneva for its sixth edition at a pivotal moment for sustainable finance.

This year's edition builds on proven formats that enable collaboration to drive capital towards real-world impact, sharpen the investment case for sustainability, and strengthen collaboration across sectors. With growing urgency and complexity defining the global landscape, Building Bridges is doubling down on action—spotlighting scalable finance solutions that address systemic risks and unlock long-term value. Organised by the Building Bridges Foundation on behalf of its Founding Partners—a unique alliance spanning the financial sector, public authorities, and Geneva-based international organisations—this flagship event is a launchpad for investment-ready ideas, strategic alliances, and high-impact partnerships.

Wajibika Climate Crisis Toolkit

How to tell the story of the climate crisis remains a critical question that newsrooms globally are trying to address. Extreme weather events are cited as the most severe risk facing society across the next decade by the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report for 2026. Not far behind is mis- and disinformation. False information about climate change is rampant and Thomson is continuing to show journalists and newsrooms ways to engage audiences on this important topic.

The Climate Crisis Toolkit for Media in Tanzania is designed to help journalists explain the science

and empower audiences through impactful storytelling that gives them the information they need to do more to protect themselves, their families and their homes. The lives and livelihoods of people living in this east African country are being heavily impacted through climate change with longer and more extreme flooding and droughts.

To create the Toolkit we have partnered with the Tanzanian Media Foundation, Climate Action Network Tanzania, Tanzanian Association of Community Radio Stations, the Network of Online Media Practitioners and the Journalists' Environmental

Association of Tanzania (JET). It's part of the Wajibika programme (meaning 'to be accountable' in Swahili) in Tanzania, led by Oxford Policy Management which is being funded by the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development office (FCDO) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

The Toolkit will be available on Thomson's Journalism Now e-learning platform and as a downloadable pdf in both English and Swahili. Click [here](#) or scan the QR code below to access Journalism Now.

FAST FACTS:

- 14 example news stories of best practice
- 5 key storytelling ingredients to engage audiences
- 1 downloadable audience survey



Cover art for the toolkit



Looking Ahead to 2026

Thomson's direction for 2026 is already visible in the key themes in this Annual Review looking back at the extraordinary work this organisation, its staff and partners have done in 2025 often under difficult circumstances. The funding landscape is challenging, disinformation rife, pressure on journalism and journalists ever increasing often in countries usually seen as beacons of media freedom and tech advances like generative AI, although a great opportunity for journalism, risks disrupting business models already under pressure, especially in countries where truth is under threat.

Working against this backdrop at Thomson makes us more determined in attitude and nimbler in approach to support independent media supplying trusted information to local communities. Not only is this at the heart of our mission set out in the original Articles of Association when the organisation was established almost 65 years ago by Roy, Lord Thomson of Fleet, but it's at the core of our belief that trusted journalism and information is a good thing for societies - a necessary building block for decision making, democratic processes and civic engagement.

Our work at Thomson is wide ranging but 2026 will see us double down in three areas: supporting media to combat disinformation, building sustainable businesses and support for audiences and stories on the margins.

Global risk assessments consistently identify disinformation as one of the most urgent threats



Thomson Foundation's Chief Executive Caro Kriel

facing governments and societies. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2025 warns that misinformation and disinformation remain the top global risks, emphasising their power to erode trust, amplify social division and destabilise governance structures. At Thomson, we have seen the power of technology, partnership and network in combating disinformation through our work with media networks in Uganda pre-election and in Sudan supporting journalist networks in exile, as their home country is ravaged by war and information distortion. Our work in Uganda with the Hewlett Foundation was an excellent example of how the various threads in tackling this problem come together: research identifies the threats, monitoring tracks how

they surface and influence, journalists with the right skills verify the information and an audience more attuned to identifying false narratives consume information they trust. While there is no simple solution to the disinformation challenge of our age, this programme in Uganda is a good example of how with narrative monitoring, training of journalists and targeted youth media-literacy campaigns success can be achieved.

We are very excited to take our flagship Thomson *Talks* thought leadership event back to the Cambridge Disinformation Summit 2026 - a gathering of academia, thinkers and policy makers at an event fast becoming one of the foremost discussion arenas for the global challenge of disinformation. In a discussion titled

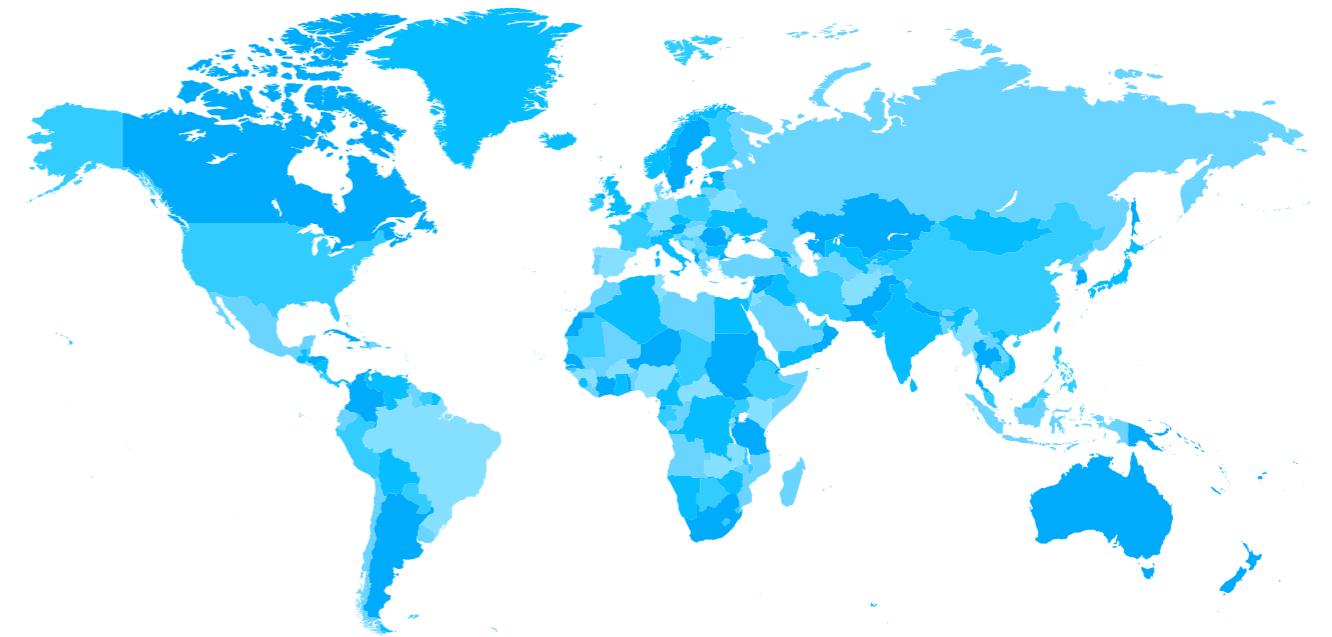
Effective responses to information manipulation: lessons from fragile contexts, we will lead a conversation on what we've learnt working on this problem in hugely challenging parts of the globe and what can be learnt for those living in countries often considered more stable and resilient.

It is heartening to see through this Annual Review how Thomson's methodology around media viability,

honed by our team in the Western Balkans and Central Europe, working with more than 60 media outlets over the past five years, is being replicated under the AGILE project in Latin America working with media in Colombia and Brazil, already showing impressive results. And 2026 will see these methodologies around experimentation, audience identification and monetising content

taken to Central Asia and beyond.

It's unlikely that the outlook for information resilience as well as funding in our sector will change significantly in the medium term. But I am confident that at Thomson, we have the people, focus and agile attitude to adapt quickly to these challenges and to deliver for the beneficiaries, partners and funders who's support we so value.



"2026 will see us double down in three areas: supporting media to combat disinformation, building sustainable businesses and support for audiences and stories on the margins." - Caro Kriel, Chief Executive at Thomson Foundation

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