



MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT 2025

FREE MEDIA FOR A FREE COUNTRY!



YEVGEN ZASLAVSKIY, CEO at Media Development Foundation

2025 was a challenging year for independent media in Ukraine, marked by decreasing support and growing uncertainty about sustainable funding. Against this backdrop, at Media Development Foundation (MDF) we focused on equipping independent newsrooms with resilience tools – managerial, financial, editorial, analytical, and community practices – so they could not only survive, but also maintain audience trust.

Our motto, “Free Media for a Free Country” took on a highly practical meaning in 2025: free media is not an abstraction, but the daily work of teams in frontline communities, conducting investigations, providing training, supporting young journalists, and exploring new funding models.

In this report, we present a frank assessment:

- the areas where we have strengthened media capacity;
- systemic risks that have become more visible in the media ecosystem;
- and how MDF’s strategy is helping newsrooms respond to these challenges.



OVERVIEW

The **Media Development Foundation (MDF)** was established in 2013, prior to EuroMaidan, by independent journalists in response to press repression under the Yanukovich regime.

Our work focuses on strengthening independent media through practical tools, professional training, and strategic support. MDF help newsrooms identify sustainable growth models, enhance their capacity to produce impactful content, and engage meaningfully with their communities to drive positive change.

Since the onset of full-scale military aggression by Russia, MDF has adapted its programs to safeguard independent, ethical, and professional journalism in Ukraine, ensuring that media organizations can continue to inform, connect, and empower the public in the most challenging circumstances.

MDF works with journalists, newsrooms, civil society actors, and public institutions across Ukraine and Central and Eastern Europe. Our work focuses on:

Supporting impactful journalism by developing the skills and capacities of regional and national media organizations.

Promoting high ethical and professional standards by raising awareness of their importance and sharing best practices.

Empowering journalists to drive change by supporting the creation of influential content and providing the training and resources to make their voices heard.

Building a sustainable media ecosystem by helping news organizations develop independent and resilient business models.

Strengthening media engagement with stakeholders, including public institutions and civil society, to enhance governance and social well-being.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

13 YEARS

of experience empowering independent local journalists and newsrooms

1500+

young journalists have taken part in offline internships, online mentoring, and other programs tailored to novice journalists

86 INDEPENDENT LOCAL MEDIA OUTLETS

from all regions of Ukraine are part of our community, reaching around 10 million unique viewers monthly

KEY NUMBERS OF 2025

86 MEDIA OUTLETS

graduated from or are currently participating in our programs and receiving support.

🔧 Local Media Relaunch Initiative

💪 Stronger Media Futures

🌐 Community Leaders

📍 FAIR Media Ukraine

31 PROJECTS

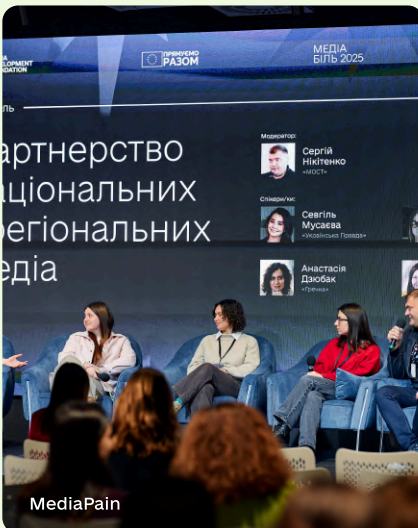
were implemented by our team during 2025

1,624 APPLICATIONS

from journalists and newsrooms were received for the MDF and its educational initiative Kyiv Media School programs

395 PEOPLE

attended our annual events



RESEARCHES AND 1 ANALYTICAL REPORT

MDF Research Lab conducted on the Ukrainian media market:

News Deserts (2nd Iteration)

State of Local News in Ukraine

Information Fatigue as a Window of Opportunities: A Chance for Regional Media During the War and Beyond

Black Swan of Donor Support: How Local Journalism is Surviving the Suspension of USAID Program Funding

11 OFFLINE LECTURES

were attended by 14 participants of the Mentorship School to strengthen their professional expertise



5 EXHIBITIONS

of “Anti-Corruption Journalism in Action” were held with support from EUACI

Locations: Ivano-Frankivsk, Dnipro, Cherkasy, Donbas Media Forum, and the XIV Civil Society Forum in Kyiv.



Exhibition at Donbas Media Forum

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS OF THE MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION (MDF)

DIRECTION 1: MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY

This direction focuses on supporting the development and growth of local media outlets across Ukraine, including frontline regions. Through in-depth training and re-granting programs for mid-career professionals and top managers, MDF helps newsrooms achieve long-term sustainability. The goal is to preserve independent local journalism in all regions – including de-occupied and temporarily occupied areas – by applying best practices and the highest standards of journalism.

DIRECTION 2: KYIV MEDIA SCHOOL (KMS) X JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE PROGRAM (JEP)

Kyiv Media School is an educational initiative of MDF that enables a new generation of media professionals to navigate rapid changes in the media landscape. KMS combines ethical principles with advanced practical skills, equipping participants to become leaders in modern, transparent, and professional media.

The Journalism Experience Program aims to support young journalists and emerging media professionals as they enter the field. JEP provides the tools, training, and mentorship necessary to improve journalistic knowledge, gain practical professional experience, expand networks, and become part of a community of like-minded peers. This program ensures that the next generation of media professionals is skilled, connected, and capable of producing impactful journalism.

DIRECTION 3: FELLOWSHIP FOR MEDIAMAKERS

Fellowship for Mediamakers strengthens the resilience and professional capacity of Ukraine's emerging media professionals through a comprehensive, individual-centered support model. The program integrates financial stipends, advanced training, psychosocial and medical assistance, technical resources, and access to collaborative workspace.

DIRECTION 4: MDF RESEARCH LAB

MDF Research Lab strengthens the knowledge base of Ukrainian, Eastern European, and Central European media by studying the processes and dynamics of the media ecosystem. Its research methods are primarily qualitative, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, surveys, and analysis of content and marketing indicators. By generating evidence-based insights, the Research Lab helps media organizations and the broader ecosystem make more informed strategic decisions and improve their overall effectiveness.

DIRECTION 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

This direction provides a platform for networking, collaboration, and partnership-building among media professionals. MDF organizes regular offline meet-ups, conferences, and online/offline activities to foster community engagement. Notable events include MezhyhiryaFest, The Bucha Conference, MediaPain, and the National Investigative Journalism Contest, MediaN. Additional initiatives, such as the online platform Stavsia Match (There's a Match) and regular newsletters, further connect professionals across Ukraine and the region.

DIRECTION 1: MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY

The **Media Sustainability** strategic direction aims to strengthen the resilience and long-term viability of independent Ukrainian media, particularly at the local and regional levels, including frontline and de-occupied territories. Through capacity-building, re-granting, consulting, and institutional support, MDF works to enhance newsroom management, operational processes, monetization strategies, and editorial quality, ensuring that communities across Ukraine retain access to independent, verified information.

This direction focuses on developing sustainable media ecosystems, strengthening newsroom leadership, reducing dependency on donor funding, and enabling media outlets to serve as trusted information hubs and accountability actors within their communities.

ACTIVITIES, RELEASED IN 2025

1. LOCAL NEWS RELAUNCH INITIATIVE / LOCAL MEDIA RELAUNCH INITIATIVE 2023-2025

The **Local News Relaunch Initiative** addresses the critical lack of independent local media in certain regions of Ukraine, often referred to as “news deserts”. Research shows that communities require at least two to three independent media outlets to ensure access to verified information and to support democratic processes.

This program, **implemented with the support of the European Union**, aimed to launch or relaunch independent local newsrooms in underserved regions and provide them with sustainable financing models and development support. Through training, mentoring, and financial assistance, MDF supports new and revived media outlets in building viable editorial and business structures, fostering long-term sustainability.

KEY NUMBERS OF THE PROGRAM

21 media outlets participated in the media launch and relaunch program.

- 7 media outlets were launched from scratch.
- 14 media outlets were relaunched.



2,397+ hours of individual and group consultations were delivered by program experts (including workshops and training sessions).

36 mentors and experts engaged with program participants.

370+ business documents were jointly developed to support and formalise media outlets' development trajectories.

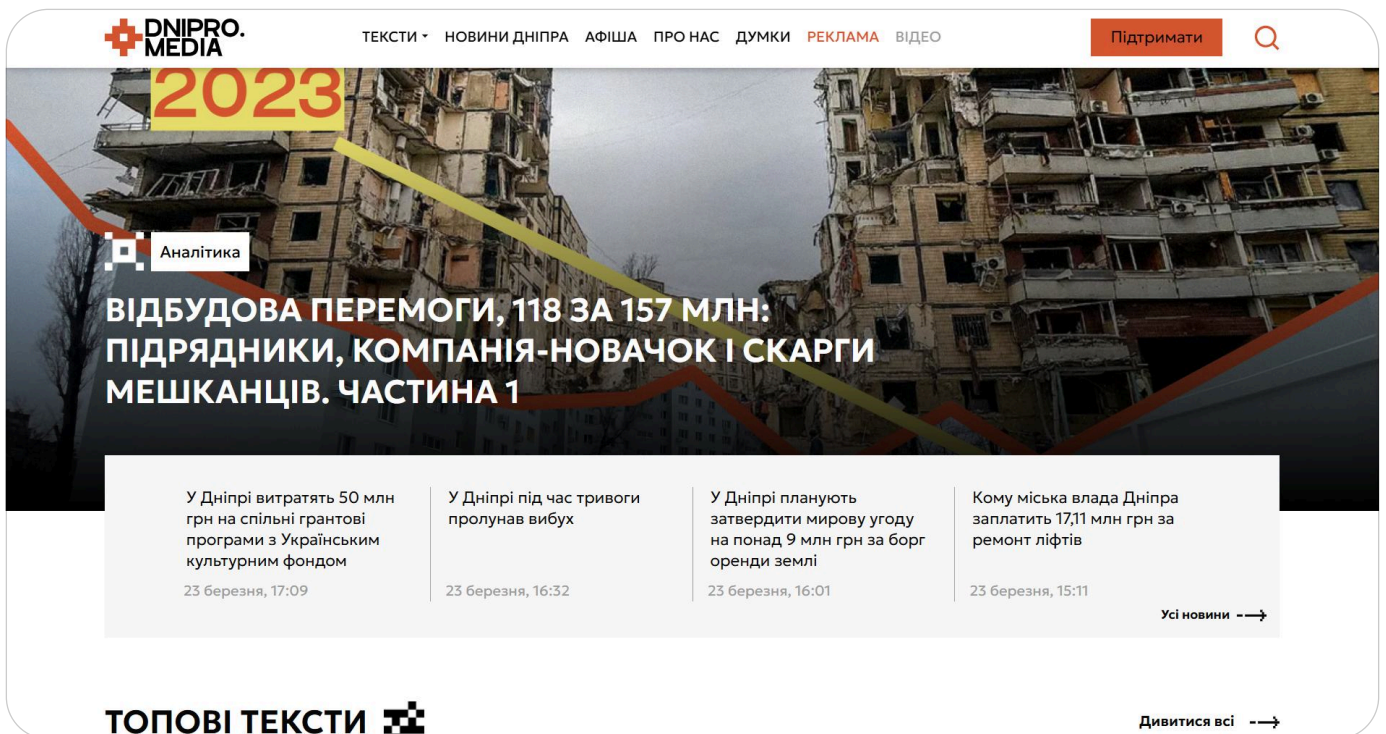
16 external experts conducted in-depth assessments of media websites and social media pages.

20 media outlets received visual identities developed by art directors Marharyta Hariyazha, Kateryna Starovoitova, and Inna Alimova.



20 media outlets received newly developed websites.

The website of "Dnipro.media," developed as part of the program



51,331 pieces of content were produced by participating media outlets with MDF support.

2. COMMUNITY LEADERS 2023-2025

The activity, **implemented with the support of the European Union**, is aimed to turn independent local media outlets into community leaders. Local media outlets helped make recovery processes more transparent. They also monitored the use of financial aid provided to affected regions to ensure it was spent properly and in accordance with international legislation. Participants of the Community Leaders program strengthened their skills in content production, content distribution, management, and product development. The training program engaged leading experts, mentors, and consultants in these areas.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROGRAM

24 regional media outlets completed the Community Leaders program

12 newsrooms participated as guest auditors

370+ strategic documents were developed by media outlets through the program

14 media outlets launched commercial departments within the program

3,700+ hours of individual, group, and psychological consultations – including workshops and trainings – were held for participating media

65 mentors provided guidance to participants

5 formats were included in the program:

- mentorship
- individual consultations
- group trainings and workshops
- comprehensive programs
- networking and thematic research

23 media outlets presented their strategies

3. STRONGER MEDIA FUTURES 2025-2026

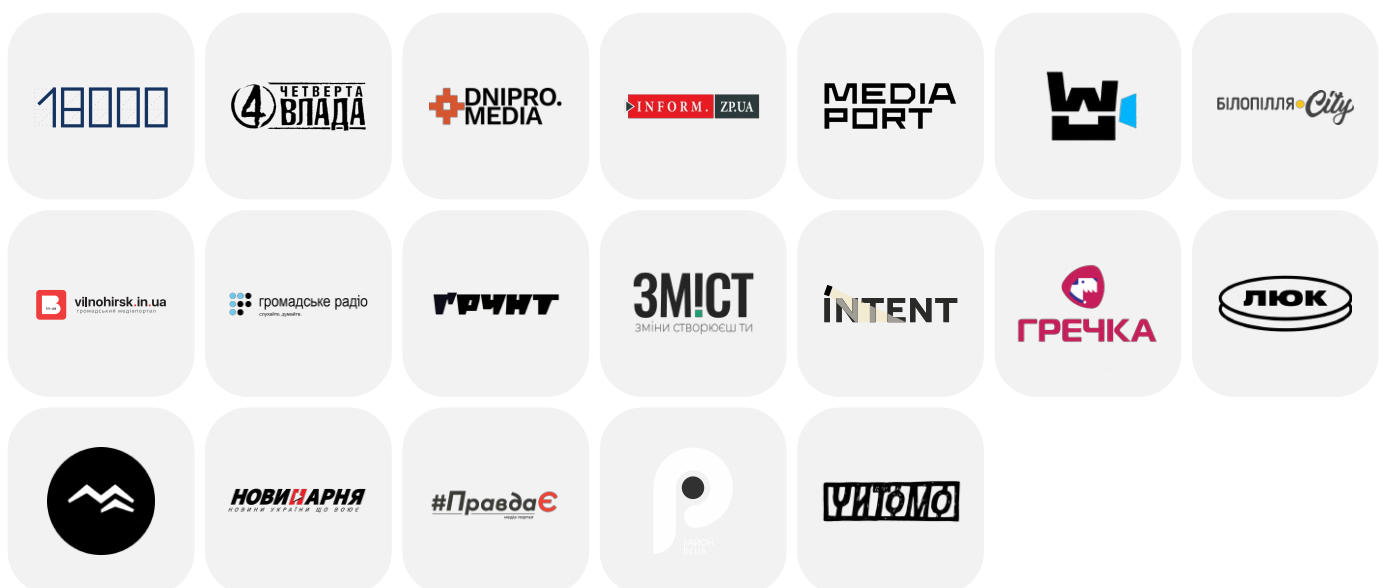
Stronger Media Futures is a one-year program implemented **with the support of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED)**. The program aims to strengthen operational processes and commercial sustainability of Ukrainian media organizations.

A key feature of the program is its consulting-driven approach, allowing participating media outlets to define their own priorities and select tailored support formats and services. Within the program, MDF supports newsrooms in:

- improving operational and organizational processes;
- launching or relaunching monetization models;
- developing strategic and operational documents;
- strengthening managerial and editorial competencies;
- reducing donor dependency and increasing the share of non-donor revenue.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROGRAM

20 media outlets are participating in the program



MDF conducted 19 assessments to identify growth opportunities for these media outlets

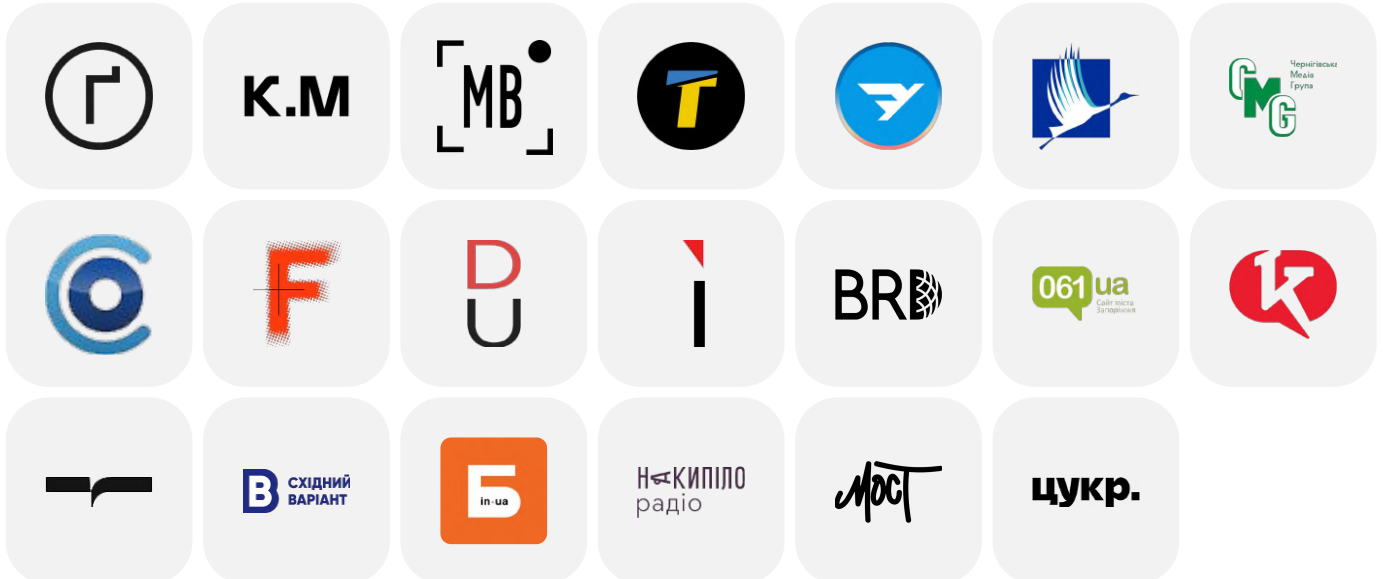
4. FAIR MEDIA UKRAINE 2025-2026

The Support to Frontline Media and Investigative Journalism (FAIR Media Ukraine) project aims to strengthen independent frontline and investigative media across Ukraine. **The project is funded by the European Union and implemented by Internews International in partnership with the Media Development Foundation (MDF).**

Within this project, frontline media outlets receive institutional grants to continue providing critical, life-saving information to local communities, especially vulnerable groups that rely on trusted local sources. Participating newsrooms also receive mentoring, specialized training, and expert консультації from MDF to enhance their institutional capacity and sustainability.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROGRAM

20 frontline newsrooms are participating in the program



Participating media outlets receive **4 core support streams** from MDF:

- needs assessments to identify key newsroom priorities;
- individual mentoring support;
- tailored consultations for editorial and organizational development;
- training delivered by Kyiv Media School.

19 mentors are working with participating media outlets on content development, community monetization, and commercial strategies.

DIRECTION 2: KYIV MEDIA SCHOOL (KMS) X JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE PROGRAM (JEP)

Kyiv Media School is an initiative of the Media Development Foundation (MDF) that fosters a new generation of media professionals in response to rapid changes in the media landscape, combining ethical principles with advanced practical skills.

The School's mission is to empower the next generation of Ukrainian media professionals by equipping them with practical competencies, strong ethical standards, and innovative approaches necessary to lead in a transparent and modern media environment.

Currently, Ukraine's media industry faces severe challenges, exacerbated by martial law and the economic downturn caused by the ongoing Russian invasion. To contribute to a resilient and thriving Ukrainian media landscape that upholds truth, counters disinformation, and strengthens democratic values, Kyiv Media School has developed a comprehensive, solution-oriented approach.

Kyiv Media School operates to overcome and mitigate the three most critical issues identified in the industry:

1. Funding and Managerial Crisis in the Media Industry
2. Local Talent Shortages
3. News Deserts and Disinformation Threats

The KMS strategic directions have been forged considering these challenges and aim to strengthen the resilience, professionalism, and sustainability of Ukrainian media.

KEY NUMBERS OF INITIATIVE

13 courses launched

540+ hours of lectures delivered

1,698 course applications from
media professionals

35 newsrooms applications for
the Emergency Support program

2 waves of Emergency Support
for Investigative Media

540+ hours of lectures delivered
304 course completion
certificates awarded

160+ lecturers sharing their
expertise

KMS COURSES LAUNCHED IN 2025

In 2025, Kyiv Media School (KMS) launched four major training programs aimed at strengthening professional media skills across journalism, media business, storytelling, and digital content creation:



1. Media Growth II. Business Edition

A continuation of the Media Growth course focused on business models for media organizations, addressing challenges such as declining donor funding, shrinking advertising markets, and retaining audience and staff. Participants learned strategies for monetization, sustainable growth, and healthy newsroom culture. The course was supported by **ERSTE Foundation**.

68 applications MDF received for course



2. "The Truth about YouTube: From Idea to Monetization"

This practical course, offered in partnership with **Ukrainska Pravda** and supported by the **ERSTE Foundation**, guided participants through building and growing a YouTube channel – covering how the platform works, common pitfalls, audience development, use of YouTube Studio and analytics, content strategy, and monetization.

162 applications MDF received for course



3. How Is This Written? A Practical Course on Literary Reportage"

The course was developed in cooperation with **Kyiv Media School**, in partnership with **The Ukrainians Media**, with support from **NED**. The curriculum was co-created and curated by **Marichka Paplauskaite**, editor, writer, media manager, and co-founder of **The Ukrainians Media** group, editor-in-chief of the **Reporters** print magazine, and a leading ambassador of literary reportage in Ukraine, as well as **Vira Kuryko**, reporter, editor, and author of documentary and fiction books, editor of publishing projects at **The Ukrainians Media**, and a recipient and finalist of several major Ukrainian journalism and literary awards.

140 applications MDF received for course



4. Fundamentals of News Reporting 2.0

An updated and improved version of the Fundamentals of News Reporting course, supported by **ERSTE Foundation**, this program focused on practical news skills and newsroom best practices for journalists and editors. It emphasized creating engaging, clear news content and adapting reporting techniques to complex media environments.

79 applications MDF received for course

5. Students' Projects and Cases

KMS Community – the network of students and alumni – demonstrates the measurable impact of the School's practical, hands-on training. Student-generated work includes in-depth investigations, feature stories, and reports that have been published across leading Ukrainian media outlets, reaching wide audiences and informing public discourse. Notable examples include:



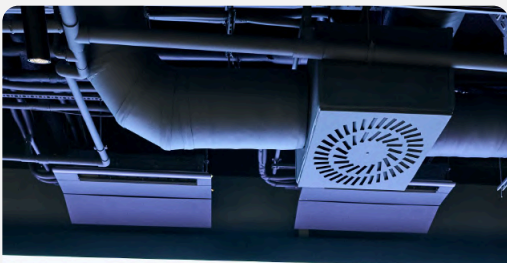
Case 1

Oleksandra Zakharchenko, Director of the Digital Content and Social Media Department at the Public Broadcaster, developed her capstone project as part of the Media Growth course by revitalizing the multimedia project [“Collider”](#) for teenagers. Through the course, she introduced innovative formats and storytelling approaches that expanded the project's reach and engagement.



Case 1

As a result, [Collider](#) became a standalone department. It continues to produce compelling, socially relevant content for Ukrainian youth, helping counter Russian-language media aimed at this audience." І ще була одна думка: чи англомовний читач, погано знайомий із нашим контекстом, зрозуміє чому треба "to counter Russian-language media". Може додати якесь коротке пояснення, типу "In the context of Russia's hybrid war against Ukraine, Russian-language media have often served as channels for propaganda and disinformation aimed at influencing public opinion.



Case 2

In his investigation "[Pirates of the Azov Sea](#)" Maksym Dudchenko, a graduate of the School of Investigative Journalism, conducted an in-depth analysis of the logistics behind the illegal grain export scheme. The story uncovers how Russia's occupation of two Ukrainian ports on the Sea of Azov enabled the large-scale export of pillaged Ukrainian grain – an act that legal experts describe as a war crime. By taking control of the ports in Mariupol and Berdiansk, Russian authorities effectively repurposed critical Ukrainian infrastructure to channel stolen agricultural commodities into international markets for Russia's benefit.

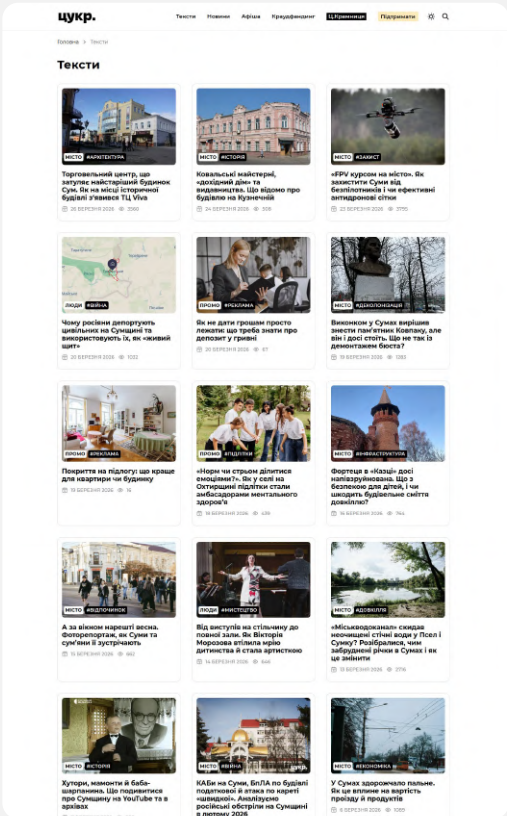




Case 2

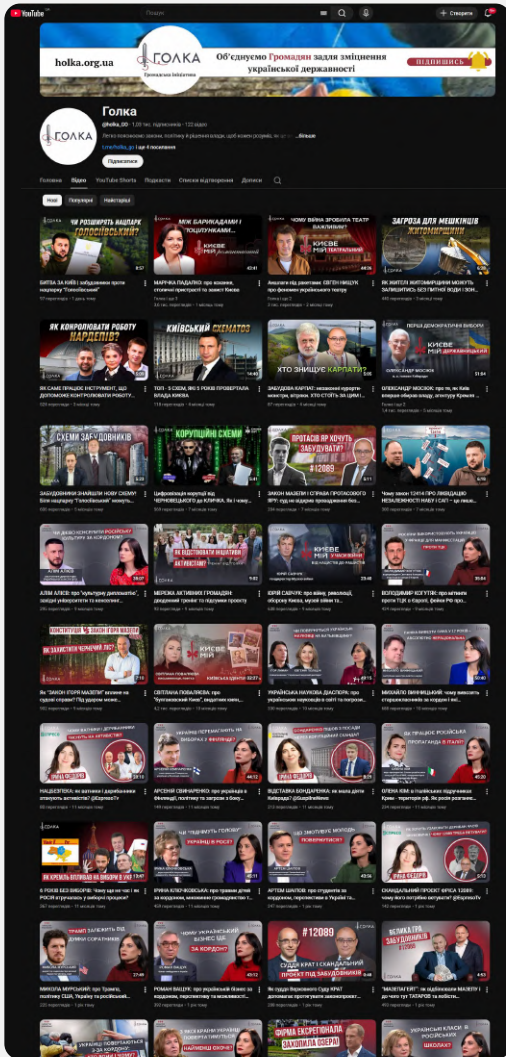
The reporting reveals that some of these grain exports involved Western participation. Evidence suggests that an affiliate of a major Danish company may have played a role in facilitating the trade, raising serious questions about due diligence, sanctions compliance, and corporate responsibility.

The investigation was recognized for its excellence and included in the portfolio of the 2025 National Investigative Journalism Contest, highlighting Maksym’s ability to produce high-impact, socially relevant reporting.



Case 3

Vladyslava Huseva, a deputy chief editor at Cukur (Sumy) and a graduate of **Local News Fundamentals** course, developed during the course the project of re-thinking Cukur’s news department and increasing news coverage by 50%. In one month (being the month she started together with the mentor), the team has already exceeded their quantitative KPIs set up to the end of spring. In the framework of the project, Vlada leveraged together with the team a new form of video news relying on UGC and developed new formats such as “Why Cukur writes about that”.



Case 4

As part of the educational program “The Truth about YouTube: From Idea to Monetization”, course graduate Valeriia Sokotyuk, SMM manager of the public initiative “Golka”, worked on developing a YouTube channel whose goal is to clearly explain laws, politics, and government decisions so that the audience can see how they affect everyday life. In the video presented at the graduation, the team talked about the schemes that the Kyiv authorities have been implementing over the past five years and their consequences.

These projects highlight how KMS programs equip novice journalists with the skills to produce high-quality, socially relevant journalism, contributing to a stronger and more resilient media landscape in Ukraine.

6. Participants` Feedback

Participants across KMS programs praised the practical orientation, expert led sessions, and real world applicability of the curricula:



“For me, the course ‘Fundamentals of News Reporting 2.0’ was my first comprehensive training in journalism. Beyond the in-depth study of topics and conversations with experienced speakers, I also got the chance to become part of an amazing community. I especially want to thank the organizers for the convenient schedule and format, which made it easy to balance work and learning,”

Anastasiia Rybenko, News editor at Happy Monday

“

“The **‘Media Growth’** course highlighted new opportunities for hromadske’s development and inspired us to experiment with monetization models. The case study module was especially valuable – it showed that while it’s challenging for everyone, systematic work and persistence yield results.”

Vita Halko, Head of the Advertising Department at hromadske

“

“**‘The Truth about YouTube: From Idea to Monetization’** is a course packed with practical knowledge, featuring lecturers who are truly ‘in the know’ and, most importantly, willing to share insights from their own experience. Every session of the course is an incredible source of inspiration – both from the lecturers and from the participants, among whom I was fortunate to be.”

Sofia Lazarova, Analyst at the Chesno Movement

7. Community Engagement: MediaN 2025

Participants across KMS programs praised the practical orientation, expert led sessions, and real world applicability of the curricula:

In December 2025, KMS organized MediaN 2025, a three day “unconference” for media managers and donor partners. The event, supported by ERSTE Foundation, used Open Space Technology to foster collaborative discussions without pre set agendas.

The agenda included strategic media management, newsroom mental health, talent development, audience fatigue with news, community building, and trends shaping 2026. The open format encouraged peer learning, honest experience sharing, and collaborative forecasting for the future of media in Ukraine.



“

“The format itself encourages everyone to help each other. There is no competition here, everyone shares their experiences – both good and bad. This is incredibly useful because it allows expertise and ideas to be shared, developing the entire industry”, said Yevhen Safonov, head of YouTube at Ukrainska Pravda.



JOURNALISM EXCHANGE PROGRAM (JEP)

This stream of work aims to support young journalists and media professionals as they enter the media field, providing them with the necessary tools needed for their development. JEP programs help new generations of media professionals improve their knowledge of journalism, acquire practical professional experience, increase professional network, and become a part of a community of like-minded young journalists.

1. Offline internship

Through JEP internships, students, recent graduates, and young journalists can gain first-hand experience in journalism through placements at leading Ukrainian media outlets. The internship can be held both in the newsroom or in the commercial department. Thus young professionals can not only improve their skills in creating content but also in management, multimedia, research and data. This program is implemented with the support of **NED (National Endowment for Democracy)**.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROGRAM

30 participants were selected by MDF for media internships

180 applications were received by MDF for the Journalism Exchange Program, an internship program for young journalists

6 media outlets collaborated with us and took participants on internships

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The internship was conducted in Kyiv, with regional participants engaging in a hybrid format that combined remote participation with the opportunity to attend in-person sessions in Kyiv several times per month.

Upon completion of the program, one participant, Yevhen Nazarenko, [was offered continued collaboration with the media outlet](#). He subsequently began contributing a regular column to Ukrainska Pravda, where he had undertaken his internship.

“

“I appreciated the opportunity to work on creative topics and long-form content. During the internship, I was able to improve and develop skills in fact-checking news and working with information sources. The program also provided the chance to explore new topics related to history and sports, which allowed me to expand my professional toolkit and experiment with a deeper approach to content creation. As a result, I was offered the opportunity to continue collaborating after the internship by contributing a regular column”.

Yevhen Nazarenko, Freelance Journalist



2. Mentorship

Mentorship involves an active exchange of knowledge from experienced media professionals to young journalists who are just starting their careers. Young journalists receive a chance to work individually with their mentors, leading specialists from various foreign, national and local media receiving practical knowledge and advice from them. This program is implemented with the support of **NED (National Endowment for Democracy)**.

In 2025, MDF conducted two waves of the Online Mentorship program. The first wave (June–July 2025) was successfully completed by 22 participants. Over the course of two months, interns collaborated with leading specialists from various local and national media outlets, gaining practical knowledge and professional guidance. For this period, young journalists had direct access to experienced mentors whom they could approach with questions related to their specialization whenever needed.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROJECT

83 proposals were received by
MDF

22 participants successfully
completed mentorship

The second wave of the Online Mentorship program (August–September) was successfully completed by 24 participants. Over the course of two months, interns collaborated with leading professionals from local and national media outlets, gaining hands-on experience as well as practical insights and guidance.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROJECT

89 proposals were received by
MD

24 participants successfully
completed mentorship

PARTICIPANT'S FEEDBACK



“We analyzed my texts with Toma Balaeva in detail and went through all the essential components of the work: how to find and focus a topic, how to interview a key source for the story, and notice the details that make a story engaging; how to build a strong structure and, ultimately, craft a compelling narrative with a clear rhythm that captivates the reader. Toma gave excellent advice and shared many examples – this helped me fully grasp the lecture topics. The homework assignments were engaging and truly reinforced the knowledge I gained”.

Sofia Korotunenکو, freelancer



3. Journalism Summer Camp 2025

Offline camp for young journalists that combines a training program with a retreat. In times of war, the journalists are working on news almost 24/7, and it can lead to severe mental and physical health disorders and exhaustion. Journalism Summer Camp suggests a great opportunity to relieve accumulated stress and, of course, deepen their knowledge in various areas of journalism. This program is implemented with the support of **NED (National Endowment for Democracy)**.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROJECT

200+ applications MDF have received from young journalists for the Journalism Summer Camp training and retreat program

The first wave included **10 young** media professionals with up to one year of experience in independent media or no experience at all

The second wave included **10 participants** with one to three years of experience in independent media

17 lectures were conducted by experts in digital journalism

3. Participants` feedback



“This was an incredibly rich and valuable experience. The most useful for me were the practical tips on creating video content for social media. I discovered new possibilities of an ordinary smartphone and realized that good sound and light often matter more than an expensive camera. I especially appreciated the focus on storytelling – the idea that every frame should carry a compelling story truly resonated with me”.

Ihor Michurin, Audio Editor at NGO “Holos Zmin”

“I cannot help but highlight the final day of training with Olha Oborina and Heorhii Shabaiev. It was interactive, engaging, and extremely informative – even for those who may not choose investigative reporting or video production in the future. The lectures gave me a broader perspective on how modern journalism combines visual storytelling with investigative tools, and I left with practical knowledge I can apply in my current work. The overall organization of the Camp also impressed me: the balance of theory and practice, as well as the openness of speakers to dialogue, created an inspiring learning environment”.

Rostyslav Shvanyk, journalist at “Volynska Hazeta”

4. Inna Kuznetsova Fellowship

The **Inna Kuznetsova Fellowship**, established in partnership with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and supported by the **Prague Civil Society Centre**, provides early-career journalists with a three-month paid internship across several bureaus.

The program includes three months of mentorship and work in the Kyiv bureau. Under the guidance of experienced editors, scholars produce and publish content on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty platforms, gaining practical experience in independent journalism, developing unique content, and expanding their professional network. The scholarship provides financial support of approximately €1,000.

The fellowship received 107 applications. The selected recipients were:

- **Oleksandra Levchak**, Junior Analyst at CHESNO Movement
- **Halyna Hychka**, journalist at the online media outlet Varosh
- **Olha Tkach**, journalist, reporter, and producer at URSA.MEDIA





“It was an incredible experience. In just three months, I learned far more than I had in my entire previous professional career. I kept detailed notes to keep up with all the new tools and advice Heorhii Shabayev (a journalist of the Skhemy project (Schemes)) shared every day. He was always available, answered all my questions, and, most importantly, generously shared his own experience. This not only gave me practical skills but also constant support, which boosted my confidence even when tackling tasks that were new to me. On top of that, just watching Heorhii at work was inspiring – his passion and professionalism are truly motivating”.

Oleksandra Levchak, Analyst, CHESNO Movement



DIRECTION 3: FELLOWSHIP FOR MEDIAMAKERS

The Fellowship for Mediamakers is a joint project of **Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT)** and MDF, implemented as part of the Hannah Arendt Initiative and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. It is a comprehensive scholarship and support program for young media professionals up to 30 years old, offering a 4-month media training program, 2.5 months of individual psychological support, optional English language classes, and an autumn school in Berlin for selected fellows.

In 2025, MDF conducted two cohorts of the **Fellowship for Mediamakers** – the sixth and seventh editions.

In total, MDF received 388 applications (195 for the sixth cohort and 193 for the seventh). Each cohort included 30 participants, along with a few additional auditors, bringing the total number of mediamakers involved to 64.

KEY NUMBERS OF PROJECT

10 participants received emergency support for replacing damaged equipment, covering medical expenses, and purchasing gear for war reporting;

280+ hours of consultations by psychologists for Fellowship participants;

4 in-person events were held: two kick-off meetings and two graduation ceremonies;

48 participants received English language training as part of the program;

34 lectures attended by participants;

22 experts delivered lectures and workshops;

1 study trip to Berlin.



Kick-off event for 7th cohort.



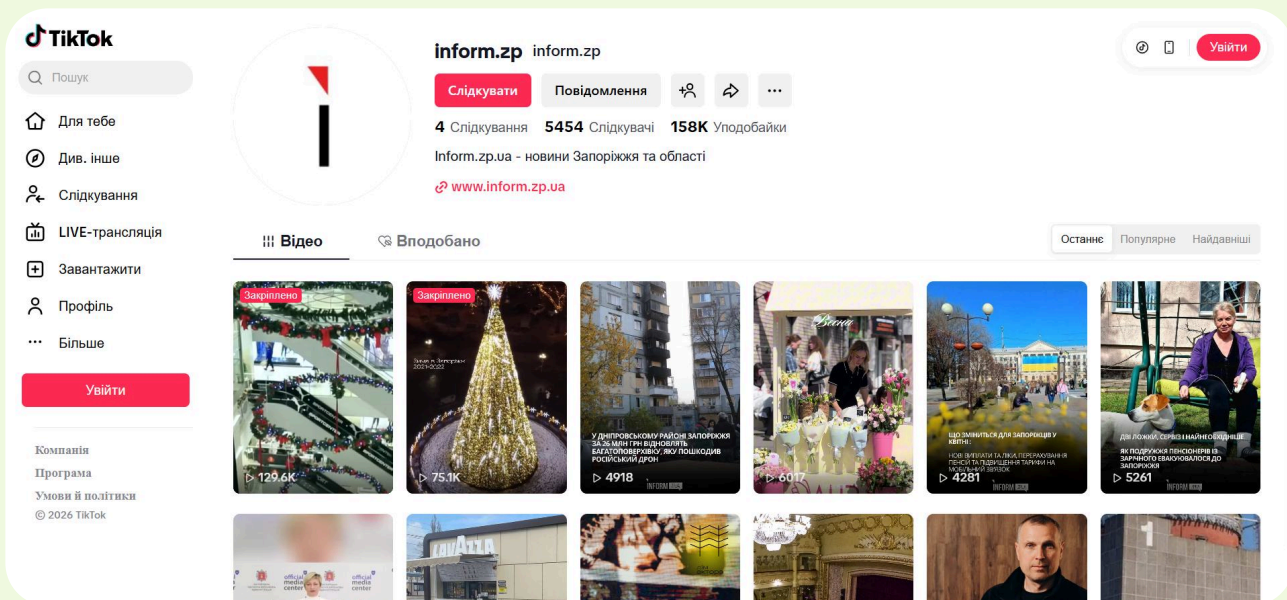
Autumn School in Berlin 2025.

Case 1

Two program participants, Karyna Sinko and Yelyzaveta Moskvina, launched TikTok accounts for media outlets and are successfully developing them following their participation in the program. The TikTok account for the media outlet Inform.zp.ua, launched by Karina Sinko, has already reached over 4,000 views. The team plans to continue experimenting with content and formats.

“ Karyna Sinko

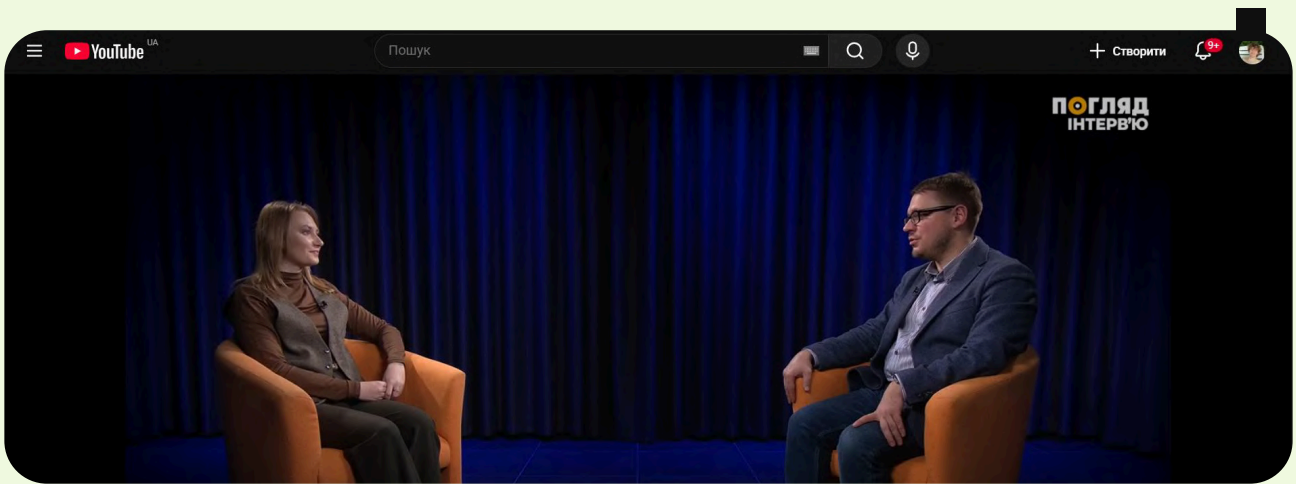
“One thing is simply to see a finished product elsewhere and try to analyze it on your own; another is to receive advice from those already working in this area, ask questions, and get answers. The program included a module on social media and video content, and at that time our editorial team was already planning to start publishing videos on TikTok. Each lecture gradually provided a better understanding of what to focus on, how to ‘catch’ people’s attention, and where to start”.



The lectures in the Fellowship for Mediamakers also helped participant Yelyzaveta Moskvina develop an effective TikTok growth strategy for Vilne Radio. Her plans include establishing a consistent content schedule, gaining momentum, and later adjusting the strategy, possibly testing live broadcasts.

Case 2

Program participant, journalist, and host of the regional media outlet “Pohlyad”, Mariia Marchuk (Shchedrina), launched the YouTube channel Pohlyad Interviews with support from the **Fellowship for Mediamakers**. The channel focuses on in-depth conversations with figures from Kyiv and the Kyiv region, including artists, musicians, civic activists, volunteers, lawyers, environmentalists, photographers, veterans, politicians, and others.



Participation in the **Fellowship for Mediamakers** provided Maria Marchuk with several key benefits that supported the launch of the YouTube channel:

- Practical knowledge and tools, from structuring interviews to video production and content planning;
- Inspiration and confidence that long-form, portrait-themed video interviews could develop into a standalone project;
- Financial support through the program scholarship, which allowed her to rearrange her work responsibilities and focus more on launching and growing the YouTube channel.

“**Mariia Marchuk (Shchedrina)**, Journalist and host, regional media outlet “Pohlyad”

“Participation in the program allowed me to focus specifically on producing interviews for the channel without being distracted by other major tasks. The practical knowledge I gained has also been valuable and is already being applied in my work.”

DIRECTION 4: MDF RESEARCH LAB

In 2025, the Research Department of the Media Development Foundation was transformed into MDF Research Lab, marking a new stage in the development of MDF’s research direction. This transition enables the team to expand the scope of research topics and analytical products, strengthening MDF’s role as a knowledge hub for the Ukrainian media sector.

The mission of MDF Research Lab is to identify and explain key challenges in the media environment through research and to develop evidence-based solutions that support the sustainable development of independent journalism in Ukraine.

In 2025, MDF Research Lab conducted three studies and one analytical report on the Ukrainian media market:



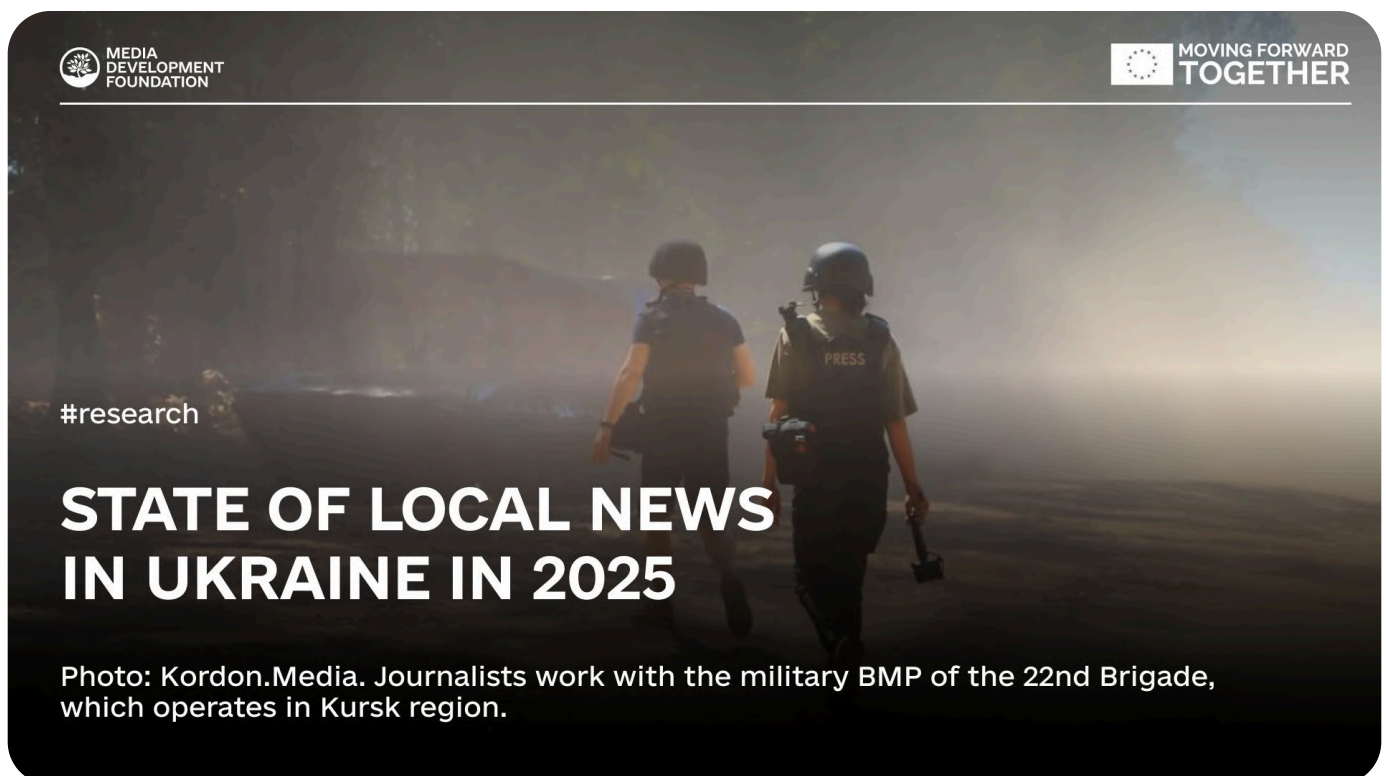
- [NEWS DESERTS 2025 \(II ITERATION\)](#)

In spring 2024, the then MDF Research Department published the first iteration of the News Deserts study, analyzing the media landscape in 11 frontline and border regions most affected by military hostilities. The study

provided an initial understanding of the scale and specific characteristics of news deserts in areas where information gaps have significant social and security implications.

In the second iteration of the study, MDF Research Lab expanded the geographical scope of the analysis to cover the entire territory of Ukraine. In the second phase of the research, the team conducted interviews with representatives of local newsrooms. This data collection method enabled researchers to validate previous findings on the structure of media landscapes across different regions of the country and to better understand the underlying causes of the emergence of news deserts.

The “News Deserts” study was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Media Development Foundation and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



- [STATE OF LOCAL NEWS IN UKRAINE 2025](#)

In 2024, Ukraine’s regional media continued operating under the conditions of the third year of Russia’s full-scale invasion, facing ongoing security risks, staff shortages, and financial instability. Despite these challenges, local

newsrooms sustained their work, documenting the war while increasingly covering everyday life topics in response to audience needs.

The study is based on a survey of 60 independent local media outlets, 11 in-depth interviews, and expert interviews on media management, content, distribution, and HR processes. The report analyzes key risks, newsroom management practices, financing, content production, and distribution, and provides recommendations for stakeholders to support the sustainable development of regional media.

The study was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Media Development Foundation and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Norway
 Sweden Sverige
 EDNANNIA
 ASKOLD AND DIR
 MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Photo: "CUKR".

Research 🔍

“Information Fatigue as a Window of Opportunities: A Chance for Regional Media During the War and Beyond”

The MDF Research Lab team explored why Ukrainians are avoiding the news and what media outlets can do in response.

- [INFORMATION FATIGUE AS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITIES: A CHANCE FOR REGIONAL MEDIA DURING THE WAR AND BEYOND](#)

In the study **“Information Fatigue as a Window of Opportunities: A Chance for Regional Media During the War and Beyond”**, the MDF Research Lab team analyzed how and why Ukrainians deliberately limit their consumption of news about the war—and, most importantly, what this means for local media.

The goal of Media Development Foundation was to identify the scale and underlying reasons behind selective news avoidance, as well as to determine how local newsrooms can adapt to audience information fatigue. The Foundation also aimed to develop practical recommendations to help local media not only retain their audiences in challenging conditions but, where possible, expand them.

The study was conducted by the Media Development Foundation with the support of the Askold and Dir Fund, administered by ISAR Ednannia as part of the project “Stronger Civil Society of Ukraine – a Driver of Reforms and Democracy”, funded by Norway and Sweden.

The content of this publication is the responsibility of the Media Development Foundation and does not necessarily reflect the views of the governments of Norway, Sweden, or ISAR Ednannia.



- **BLACK SWAN OF DONOR SUPPORT: HOW LOCAL JOURNALISM IS SURVIVING THE SUSPENSION OF USAID PROGRAM FUNDING**

The report analyzes the current situation and forecasts how the freeze of financial support from the US government will affect Ukrainian regional newsrooms.

DIRECTION 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING

This direction focuses on creating a shared platform for the media community to foster networking and develop meaningful partnerships through regular offline meet-ups, conferences, and both online and offline activities. In recent years, MDF has organized numerous events for diverse audiences of media professionals, including MezhyhiryaFest, Bucha Conference, MediaPain, the National Investigative Journalism Contest, MediaN (by KMS) among others.

Media Development Foundation also launched online initiatives such as Mediamaker and regular newsletters. In 2025, Mediamaker was closed. This decision was difficult; however, like many other organizations, the MDF was affected by funding cuts earlier in the year, and the situation did not improve. As a result, certain team positions were reduced, and the Mediamaker project was suspended.

1. MEDIAPAIN

MediaPain is an annual one-day conference for the Ukrainian media community, organized by the Media Development Foundation conducted with the support of the European Union. The event features three panel discussions where speakers address the latest challenges facing the media industry.

Traditionally, the conference takes place in Kyiv at the end of the year, serving as a platform to reflect on the experiences of Ukraine's independent newsrooms. It gathers around 300 participants, including leading media managers, journalists, and editors.

The year 2025 marked the beginning of an era in which support diminished while control intensified. Yet it was precisely then that a unique opportunity emerged: to reconnect with audiences, transforming them from mere observers into allies—before anyone else claimed their version of reality as the “truth”.

The program featured several panels addressing key topics for regional media:

- 1. Who Was a Regional Leader** – On our Community Leaders programs, the main goal was to transform media outlets into leaders within their regions. While each newsroom in the program worked according to its own strategy, there were shared criteria for being recognized as a regional media leader. These criteria were discussed during the first panel of the MediaPain conference.
- 2. Media Relaunch and Startup** – in May 2023, the first cohort of the Local Media Relaunch Initiative for media in frontline regions was launched. During the program, 10 editorial teams successfully relaunched their outlets, and 5 teams developed projects from concept to fully operational media, setting up all newsroom processes even under wartime conditions.
- 3. Partnerships Between Regional and National Media** – discussing collaboration models and ways to strengthen connections across media landscapes.



2. BUCHA JOURNALISM CONFERENCE

The Bucha Journalism Conference is an annual international convening of journalists, editors, war correspondents, human rights advocates, and leaders of democratic institutions in Bucha, held in partnership with Ukrainska Pravda. The closing element of the program is an award recognizing Ukrainian journalists and newsrooms whose work strengthens accountability and advances justice (investigations, documentation, verification, protection of the rights of those affected). The prize builds on the conference’s established tradition of honoring Ukraine’s strongest public-interest journalism. Due to reduced funding and the challenging media market following the end of USAID support, the Bucha Conference did not take place in 2025. The conference is planned to return in 2026.

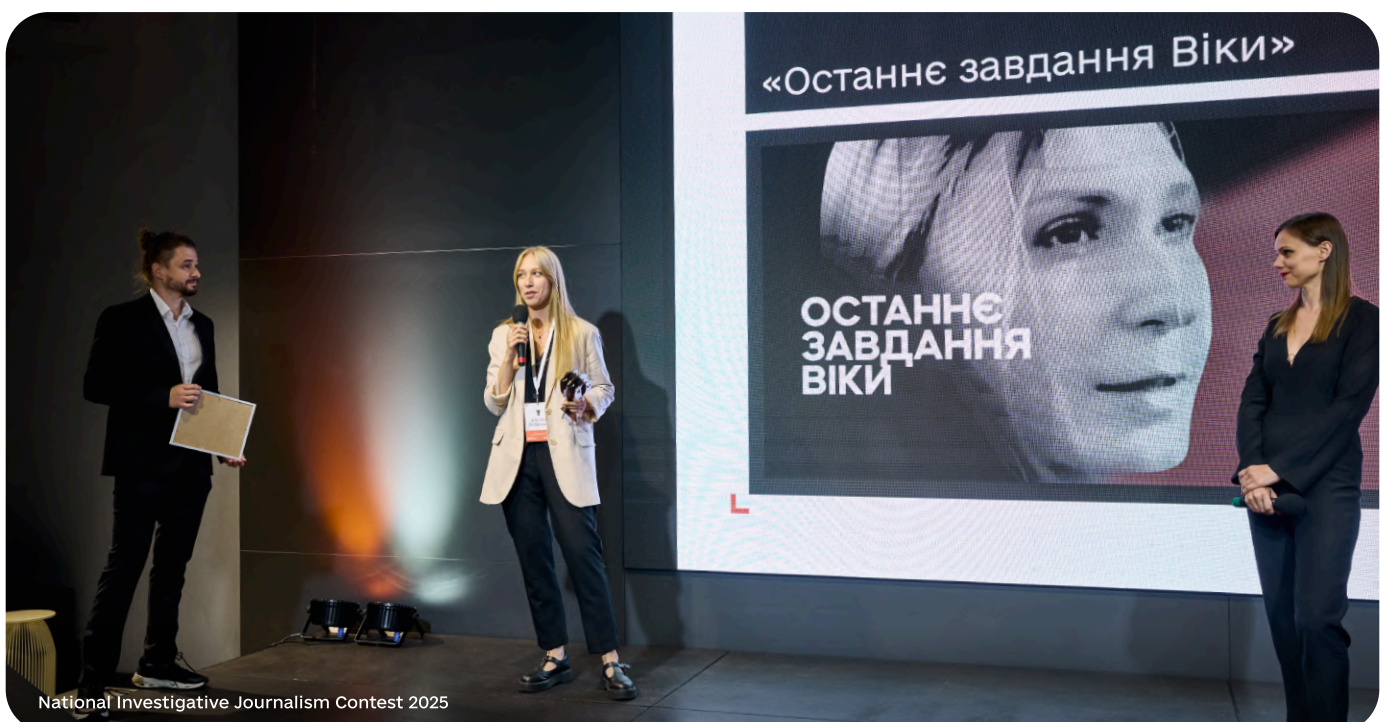


3. NATIONAL INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM CONTEST

The National Investigative Journalism Contest was established in 2014 by the YanukovychLeaks initiative and the Media Development Foundation. It emerged following the escape of former President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014. At that time, a group of investigative journalists from various media outlets, united under the YanukovychLeaks project, obtained more than 24,000 pages of documents. The need to present this information to the public led to the launch of MezhyhiryaFest, a conference for investigative journalists, along with an awards ceremony recognizing the best investigative works.

The National Investigative Journalism Contest 2025, held with the support of OCCRP, recognized outstanding investigative reporting in Ukraine. The winning entry was Slidstvo.Info’s investigation [“Vika’s Last Assignment” by Yanina Korniyenko, with co-authors Anastasia Stanko, Anna Perepelytsia, and Anna Babinets.](#) The team received the Proxy Prize statuette and a €1,000 certificate.

The investigation documented the journey of Ukrainian journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna to Russian-occupied territories, her detention, and the torture she endured, revealing previously unknown crimes committed against her while performing her professional duties.



A special award was presented to Schemes (Radio Liberty) for the investigation [“Dangerous Trend: FSB Recruits Ukrainian Children to Burn Armed Forces Vehicles”](#) by Irina Sysak, Valeriya Yehoshina, and Yuliya Khimerik, who received a €500 certificate. In their investigation, the journalists examined how Russian security services deliberately recruit Ukrainian minors to set fire to military vehicles and participate in disinformation campaigns. The team traveled across Ukraine, conducted interviews with those recruited, obtained exclusive correspondence with recruiters, and uncovered how the scheme operates, including its hierarchy and sources of funding.



4. EDITORS’ CLUB

MDF Editors’ Club is a community for editors of independent regional media, designed to foster discussions with experts from various fields. The club focuses on cultural and professional lectures that encourage participants to explore current events and media trends in depth.

In 2025, MDF held two sessions of the Editors’ Club, providing a platform for professional dialogue among media leaders and journalists.

The first session featured Nataliya Humenyuk, head of the Public Interest Journalism Lab and co-founder of The Reckoning Project. The discussion focused on how to report on events in Ukraine in ways that sustain international attention and strengthen public support.

The second session addressed political and investigative journalism. Moderated by Yevhen Buderatskyi of Ukrainska Pravda, with keynote speaker Alisa Yurchenko from The Kyiv Independent, the conversation explored how editorial teams can launch and develop work in these areas, particularly in regional contexts.



5. “ANTI-CORRUPTION JOURNALISM IN ACTION” EXHIBITION

In summer 2025, the Media Development Foundation, with the support of EUACI, organized a series of exhibitions titled “Anti-Corruption in Action” in Dnipro, Cherkasy, and Ivano-Frankivsk. The project aimed to bring local communities together in an open dialogue about integrity, accountability, and the impact of investigative journalism.

Over 700 visitors participated in interactive installations, panel discussions, anti-corruption tours, and screenings of the documentary “Truth is My Weapon”, which showcased the work of investigative journalists.

The exhibitions presented 10 real-life cases of regional investigative journalism that had already led to tangible changes in communities—from halting illegal construction to exposing corruption schemes in land allocation, municipal, and defense sectors.



Exhibition in Dnipro



Exhibition in Ivano-Frankivsk

The exhibitions were also featured at the Donbas Media Forum in October 2025 and at the XIV Annual Civil Society Forum. The project highlighted how investigative journalism empowers communities and reminds audiences of the crucial changes made possible by independent media.



Exhibition at DMF

6. MEDIA COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

As part of its strategic community-building efforts, the Media Development Foundation maintains a robust digital presence across key social media platforms. MDF engages a professional community of over over 13,000 on Facebook, 5,600 followers on Instagram, and more than 1,000 on LinkedIn.

Through these channels, MDF disseminates media case studies, professional opportunities, insights from lectures and educational programs, and highlights the work of media experts. These platforms serve as forums for dialogue, peer exchange, and reflection on the challenges facing media professionals. In 2025, MDF's total social media reach exceeded **four million views**.

In addition, MDF distributes targeted newsletters to a network of over 5,000 media professionals, providing updates on programs, opportunities, and key industry developments.

A separate newsletter authored by Andrii Boborykin, Head of Growth at MDF, engages more than 1,800 subscribers and generated over 22,000 views in 2025, further strengthening MDF's professional community and thought leadership.

All programs and updates are consolidated on MDF's website, serving as a central hub for media professionals to explore opportunities and resources. Additionally, the Telegram channel "**Ukrainian Media Community**" provides a space for journalists and media professionals to network, share contacts, publicize opportunities, and engage in sector-relevant discussions.

7. TELEGRAM-CHANNEL "STAVSIA MATCH"

Stavsia Match is a specialized Telegram channel dedicated to publishing job opportunities in media, communications, and content creation, with over **7,700 subscribers**. The channel connects employers with qualified professionals and provides the audience with up-to-date job openings in:

- Media outlets
- PR and communications
- SMM, copywriting, and production
- Creative agencies
- NGOs and international organizations (communications and content-related roles)

The channel aims to create a systematic platform for sharing relevant vacancies in media, civil society, and business, focusing on content, communications, and creative industries.

Regular curated posts and individual announcements ensure a steady flow of opportunities for the professional community. The initiative also supports the development of independent media by providing a platform to showcase vacancies from newsrooms, communications teams, organizations, and companies working with content.

KEY NUMBERS

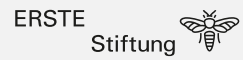
264 posts published;

571 job vacancies shared;

1+ million over the year

Engagement rate (ER): **31.7%**

PARTNERSHIP AND DONORS



From
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m'CT

PRAGUE
**CIVIL
SOCIETY**
CENTRE



ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH AND TEAM

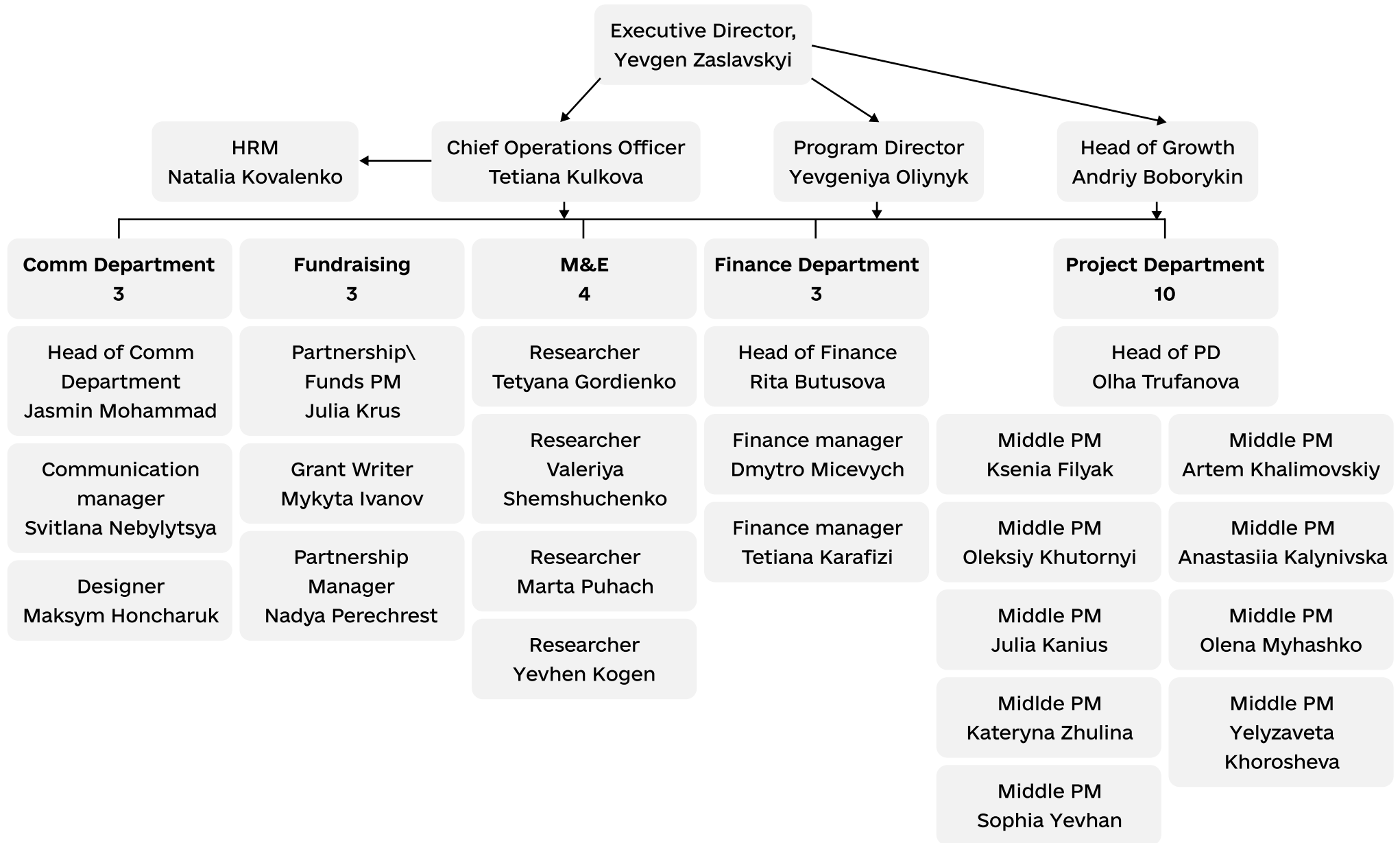
In 2025, MDF experienced a reduction in its core team due to a broader crisis in grant funding for civil society organisations. As a result, the communications and project management departments were partially scaled down, while the Mediamaker team was fully disbanded and the initiative closed due to a lack of funding, reflecting the shrinking availability of institutional and programmatic support for media development initiatives.

MDF transformed its research unit into **MDF Research Lab**, marking a new phase in the development of the organisation’s analytical and research capacity. The launch of Research Lab reflects MDF’s commitment not only to documenting challenges faced by the Ukrainian media community, but also to supporting media outlets in adapting to these challenges, making data-driven decisions, and building a strong, independent, and resilient media ecosystem.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

1 142 741, 70 EURO – ANNUAL BUDGET



CONTACT US

General inquiries

info@mdf.org.ua

Office

Kyiv, str. Maydan Nezalezhnosti, 2

Social networks

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Linkedin](#)