

## **The 2024-2029 mandate must set ambitious guidelines for the media sector**

“The time has come to have a digital policy for the media sector”, told Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) President Maria Joao Rodrigues to stakeholders and media experts at the [Stars4Media Day conference](#) in Brussels on 15th March 2024.

The [recovery plan](#) for the news media sector, notably with the “NEWS” and [InvestEU](#) programmes, were key support elements to strengthen media resilience after the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on these, the current 2019-2024 mandate implemented by the [Digital Market Act](#) and the [Digital Services Act](#) are leading the way for a competitive Europe prepared for the digital age. Nonetheless, these new legislations are still too weak to support the media sector fully. The 2019-2024 mandate leaves many expectations the next 2024-2029 mandate will have to pursue and strengthen.

[EMFA](#) & [AI](#) Act passed in March 2024 as a substantial progress for the EU and democracy, but lack of concrete policies. The news media sector needs more support to adapt to the current challenges such as disinformation, continuous digitalisation, the development of AI, skills shortage, and gender gap in tech professions.

This is why **the EU must stand strong to ensure a thriving news sector for all media professionals**. In an [op-ed](#) by Project Syndicate calling for an industrial policy for the news sector, FEPS President Maria Joao Rodrigues, EDMO Director Paolo Cesarini and Europe MédiaLab Founder and Chair Christophe Leclercq advocate for a Media and Democracy Commissioner with the creation of “DG Democracy” or “DG DEM”, a new dedicated DG for media.

**The EU must develop a comprehensive industrial policy supporting both start-ups and established media companies.** “We need to focus on the role of platforms [...] as the heart of a new economic paradigm reorganising all sectors”, added FEPS President Maria Joao Rodrigues during the Stars4Media Day conference in Brussels. Meanwhile Paul Nemitz, Principal Advisor on the Digital Transition, DG Just, emphasised: “the industrial policy aims to guide the capitalist market towards public interest. But in Europe, we also need to have media where the market doesn't work. This is the core of the orientation towards democracy.”

The media sector also needs to **address the current skills and gender gap in the digital sector**. Indeed, in the future, 90% of jobs will require digital skills, while in 2023, only 55% of the population will have these skills. The [Digital Europe Programme](#) envisions “80% of people aged 16-74 years in the EU with basic digital skills in 2030.” Moreover, the gender gap is still prevalent; in 2023, less than 20% of ICT specialists and graduates are women (European Commission, June 2023). One of the targets is to gather “20 million ICT

specialists in the EU by 2030”, identifying major initiatives to set up recommendations increasing women’s participation in ICT studies.

The news sector has expanded in the last few years by creating new jobs in the digital media sector, sometimes combining journalism and tech expertise. FEPS President Maria Joao Rodrigues added that the EU should be “supporting education training skills for all actors at all levels” - from young education to life-long learning, the latter being one of the main pillars of the EU digital strategy whose goal needs to be amplified. Under the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), the European Commission sets one core [focus for 2030](#): “at least 60% of adults in training every year.”

In the post Covid-19 recovery context, the EU legislative and plan of action framework aimed to relaunch competitiveness in Europe. The [European Year of Skills](#) is one of these initiatives. This EU one-year project addressing the skills shortage Europe is facing was launched in 2023 during the State of the Union Speech by President Von Der Leyen. It follows the [2022 Year of the Youth](#), focused on increasing youth participation in the EU decisions, supported by the [NextGenerationEU](#) funds.

With the main objectives being upskilling and reskilling, supported by the [Just Transition Fund](#) under the [InvestEU](#) programme, the European Year of Skills has allowed much progress with precise priority on competitiveness and economic growth. Enhancing cross-border collaboration, the [European Skills Agenda](#) sets a series of objectives targeting 2025, including lifelong learning and digital skills, in the global scope of the 2030 Digital Decade Policy Programme recommendations. It addresses the main issues the EU is facing and will need to consider in order to stay competitive. However, it lacks a concrete focal point in the media sector.

The sector must adapt even faster to include **challenges such as digitalisation and AI**. By monitoring and integrating these skills, this sector will be a catalyst for change and will attract and retain talents, inverting the wheel of talent shortage. To reach this objective, the EU already anticipates combining its actual scope. **Could 2025 be the European Year of Skills for Media?** The European Commission should certainly address the topic in the coming SOTEU. Indeed, the current [European Year of Skills agenda](#) lacks perspective regarding the unique skill sets required for journalism, content creation, innovation and training through the [New European Innovation Agenda](#) and its Flagship programme 2022-2025: “[Fostering, attracting and retaining talents](#)”.

The European Year of Skills must be pursued beyond the actual scope. **Could 2025 be the European Year of Skills for Media?** The European Commission should certainly address the topic in the coming SOTEU. Indeed, the current [European Year of Skills](#)

[agenda](#) lacks perspective regarding the unique skill sets required for journalism, content creation and digital media management.

The EU must propose **skills support programmes specifically tailored to the media industry**. In this scope, [Stars4Media NEWS](#) already had three editions' success. Co-financed by the European Union, through the [Creative Europe](#) scheme, this [programme](#) aims to facilitate cooperation between media professionals, to accelerate media innovation and cross-border cooperation. Implemented by a consortium of four partners, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Europe MédiaLab (ex-Fondation EURACTIV), the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the European Journalism Center (EJC), it led to business and newsroom transformation supported by expert coaches, who helped the participants in a variety of skills such as organisation, process, methodology and expertise and was one of the concrete added-value of the programme.

The Stars4Media programmes lead the way to **more initiatives facilitating collaboration and knowledge-sharing among media professionals**. These cross-border partnerships would enhance the industry's resilience, fostering long-term collaboration between a diverse range of media. Through coaching and financial support envisioned by the programme, they allow small media companies to develop innovative EU-scale projects.

This vision paper outlines a strategic roadmap for a robust and forward-thinking European news industry as we approach the 2024-2029 mandate. It emphasises the need to build on the successes of the European Year of Skills and existing cross-border media collaboration programs to drive resilience and innovation in the media sector. To effectively address the evolving challenges of digitalization, disinformation, and AI, the EU must implement more concrete and impactful measures tailored to all media professionals. By leveraging initiatives like Stars4Media and fostering collaboration among diverse media entities, Europe can enhance its media sector's adaptability and strength, ensuring a vibrant and democratic media landscape for the future.