

**UPGRADING OF THE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE SYSTEM
AND MECHANISMS IN CASES OF THREATS TO THE SAFETY
AND LIFE OF FEMALE AND MALE JOURNALISTS IN SERBIA**

REPORT ON STUDENT AND YOUTH MEDIA IN SERBIA

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**ANEM and the Center for the Development of Local
Media**

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Introduction

Student and youth media in Serbia occupy a distinctive place within the country's media landscape. They simultaneously seek to inform, engage young audiences, cover topics that traditional media frequently overlook, and operate within organizational frameworks that are more often project-based, informal, and constrained by limited resources than stable and institutionalized.

This report is based on interviews conducted with journalists: Irena Pejić (Mašina), Lazar Randelović (Tebrizam), Marko Živković (Revolt), Milica Marković and Lana Stanisavljević (Youth Vibes), Miljana Jovanović (Mingl), Nemanja Marinović (Zoomer), Jovan Živković (Pressing), Snežana Katunac (Oblakoder), Katarina Aleksandrović (Studentski dnevni list), Andrijana Martačić, Milica Stevanović, Tijana Doroški and Marko Antić (Univerzitetški odjek), Žarko Bogosavljević (Razglas News), as well as Milica Borjanić, Secretary General of the National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS).

The report does not cover only formally designated student and youth media outlets, but also newsrooms whose content, audience, team composition, or field reporting make them relevant to understanding the position of young journalists, youth editorial teams, and media outlets covering student and youth-related issues.

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Overall Assessment of Safety

The interviewees from student, youth, and young independent media outlets assess journalists' safety differently; however, several recurring patterns emerge from their responses: a perception of insufficient institutional protection, the dependence of safety on the topic being covered and the reporting environment, and increasing risks associated with reporting from protests, student gatherings, and electoral processes.

Safety ratings provided during the interviews range from one to three, with the exception of several newsrooms that stated they had not yet been directly attacked themselves, while nevertheless describing the overall media environment as extremely poor.

Representatives of Univerzitetski odjek gave the lowest possible assessment of the safety of student media in Novi Sad. Andrijana Martačić stated that, with regard to student media, she would assign a rating of one because they "are not formally as well protected as some larger media outlets." Milica Stevanović agreed with this assessment, adding that student media have no adequate protection "other than ourselves." Marko Antić of Univerzitetski odjek described the position of student journalists as one of double vulnerability:

As a student media outlet, we literally have double targets on our heads because we are simultaneously students, a media outlet, and journalists.

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Miljana Jovanović of the Mingl portal offered a similar assessment, although she noted that their correspondents had not experienced direct problems while reporting. However, when discussing the broader media environment, she assigned the lowest safety rating, referring to the treatment of colleagues from other newsrooms.

Milica Borjanić of KOMS likewise rated the safety of journalists at one. She pointed out that, for young people, the risk is not limited to the individual reporting the story but often extends to their families and local communities:

Young people are particularly vulnerable in smaller communities because if someone sees them reporting, their parents may lose their jobs, or their phone may be smashed...

In her view, young people experience a strong sense of insecurity and lack of freedom because the consequences of their public engagement may spill over to their families, their parents' employment, or their everyday lives within their local communities.

Other interviewees gave slightly higher ratings, although they likewise described an unsafe working environment. Snežana Katunac of Oblakoder rated safety at two—or, as she put it, "a weak two"—explaining that pressure has continued to intensify and repression has become increasingly overt, although there is still room for important stories to reach the

public.

Milica Marković and Lana Stanisavljević of the Youth Vibes portal assessed the safety situation in Niš with a middle rating (3), while noting that conditions had been considerably worse during periods of intensified protests, particularly for women journalists working in the field.

Reflecting on experiences during local elections, Zoomer editor Nemanja Marinović stated that the safety rating "can hardly be higher than one."

The interviews indicate that the safety of student and youth media cannot be measured solely by the number of incidents experienced by an individual newsroom. Several interviewees stressed that the absence of a direct attack does not necessarily mean that journalists feel protected; rather, it may simply indicate that the newsroom has not yet found itself at the most dangerous moment, in the highest-risk location, or covering the most contentious topic.

Threats, Targeting and Attacks

The interviewees' experiences demonstrate that pressure on student, youth, and young independent media does not take a single form. For some newsrooms, it primarily consists of online abuse, hostile comments, and targeted harassment, while others report physical attacks, attempts to confiscate equipment, surveillance, cyberattacks, and threats that remain without any meaningful institutional response.

The threats and attacks described by the interviewees can broadly be divided into three categories: online targeting and threats, physical endangerment in the field, and digital forms of pressure.

The most serious threats to journalists' safety are associated with reporting from protests, election days, and other high-risk events. Interviewees described situations in which journalists were physically assaulted, pushed, surrounded, prevented from filming, or subjected to attempts to seize their equipment.

Milica Stevanović of Univerzitetski odjek stated that she was physically attacked in front of the Serbian National Theatre during a protest at which other journalists were also assaulted. According to her, she was clearly identifiable as a member of the press, wearing both a press vest and accreditation, but the situation escalated when journalists began documenting an attack on a group of students. She explained that the journalists found themselves trapped in an area from which they could not withdraw while the police failed to intervene.

During the same interview, Marko Antić described the specific risks faced by student media. He explained that, although he was clearly identified as a press photographer, he was targeted on social media pages that targeted students participating in the protests. He attributes this to the unique position of student journalists, who are simultaneously students

and media professionals.

The Zoomer newsroom also reported several incidents in which its journalists were endangered while reporting in the field over the past year. Nemanja Marinović referred to attacks on journalists during protests, the chasing of a female journalist, a police officer striking a journalist's hand while she was recording police brutality, firecrackers being thrown at a female journalist, exposure to tear gas and an emergency evacuation in Novi Sad, as well as the arrest of Darko Gligorijević while he was reporting from Studentski Grad.

Journalists from Mašina likewise described frequent physical pressure while reporting in the field. Irena Pejić stated that, despite being clearly identified as members of the press—with accreditation cards, press vests, and helmets—Mašina journalists are frequently pushed, struck, or pelted with objects while reporting.

Pejić also described an incident in front of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, when police officers demanded access to her mobile phone and recorded footage:

First they told me, 'Give us your phone.' Then, when I said I wouldn't hand it over and that they had no right to demand it, they replied, 'No, no, we only want to see the recordings and delete them.'

She further explained that some threats occupy the grey area between obvious intimidation and the narrow legal definition of a threat:

They'll say, 'Your time will come.' They don't say, 'I'll eliminate you,' but rather, 'Your time will come.' I mean, that's a threat, but legally it isn't defined as one.

Žarko Bogosavljević of Razglas News described Novi Sad as an environment in which attacks and assaults against journalists have become increasingly frequent. He cited as one of the most serious incidents an attack in Stražilovska Street, when a group of masked young men armed with clubs attacked a column of people, and he was struck on the head with a metal bar. According to him, the only reason he escaped more serious injury was that he was wearing a helmet.

During the interview with members of the Youth Vibes newsroom, one example concerned comments posted beneath content related to LGBT topics, in which someone left the numerical designation of a bullet calibre:

Someone left a number in the comments—the calibre of a bullet... We reported it to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, and all we received in response was that it did not constitute a threat.

For most interviewees, the digital sphere is one of the most common channels through which pressure is exerted. Online attacks range from insults and coordinated commenting campaigns to threats, targeted harassment, and attempts to compromise social media accounts.

Marko Živković of Revolt stated that the newsroom regularly receives messages calling its members "traitors" and "Ustašas," and that colleagues received death threats after the identities of individuals who had attacked students were published. According to him, those threats were reported to the police, one suspect was arrested, and was subsequently released pending trial.

Zoomer journalists likewise reported receiving threats via social media, particularly after elections. Nemanja Marinović stated that threatening comments included messages such as: "We know one of the admins, and we'll find all the other admins." He emphasized that Zoomer is a legitimate media outlet rather than an anonymous social media page, which gives such messages considerably greater weight.

Irena Pejić of Mašina stated that the newsroom regularly receives threats through social media platforms and private messages. According to her, institutions often fail to recognize such messages as threats because they are not phrased as explicit declarations of intent but rather as insinuations—for example, messages stating that "your time will come." She explained that Mašina reported such threats for months but eventually stopped doing so because the institutions failed to respond.

For some interviewees, digital pressure extends beyond insults and threats to include attempts to compromise accounts or publish personal information.

Zoomer cited examples of so-called "doxxing," namely the publication of the identities of students participating in plenums, as well as the targeting of Nemanja Marinović through claims that he was "a British mercenary" and "an enemy of the state." Marinović linked this to his previous public engagement and projects, as well as to a broader pattern of discrediting journalists and activists by portraying them as being connected to foreign organizations.

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Marko Živković of Revolt stated that the newsroom had experienced "a large number of attacks on our social media accounts," adding that his personal account had been compromised, causing him to lose access to it. He associated the attack with the newsroom's reporting on elections in Mionica and its exposure of vote buying, which had attracted considerable public attention.

One recurring pattern throughout the interviews is a profound lack of trust in institutions and a widespread perception that reporting threats does not result in protection.

Irena Pejić of Mašina explained that some threats had been reported to the police and to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime, but that "nothing happened." She added that, in certain situations—such as when journalists suspected they were being followed—the newsroom deliberately chose not to report the incidents because they did not feel safe doing so.

Milica Borjanić of KOMS pointed to the broader problem of young people's lack of trust in institutions. According to her, young people primarily seek assistance from civil society

organizations, journalists' associations, and support platforms rather than from state institutions. She explained that, in the cases she was familiar with, reports were generally submitted with the assistance of such organizations, rather than because the young person independently knew all of their rights and immediately decided to initiate formal proceedings.

Žarko Bogosavljević of Razglas News also identified impunity as a factor contributing to the recurrence of attacks. According to him, criminal complaints are often dismissed after lengthy periods of time, or the perpetrators are never identified, creating the impression that journalists can be attacked without consequences.

Local Elections – Election Day as a Test of Journalists' Safety

The local elections in Bor stand out as a particularly significant event during the preparation of this report, as election day simultaneously exposed security risks for journalists, shortcomings in the coordination of media crews, difficulties in obtaining reliable information, and the disparity between the position of local media outlets and that of newsrooms that had travelled to Bor from other cities.

Lazar Ranđelović, editor of the Tebra portal (Tebrizam), describes election day as having begun in an atmosphere of heightened tension. According to him, reports of incidents started coming in early in the morning, first from Donja Bela Reka and later from in front of the premises of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in central Bor. He says that this appeared to be "*an introduction to the day*," although he concludes that, in the end, "*it was not as chaotic as it had initially seemed it would be*."

Ranđelović explains that journalists had established a kind of joint media base in a café near the Cultural Centre in the centre of Bor, where reporting teams gathered. They also maintained a communication channel through which they exchanged information throughout the day.

Marko Živković of the Revolt newsroom recounts the attack on journalists Ivan Bjelić and Lazar Dinić, photojournalist Zorica Popović, and local activist Aleksandar Kulić. According to Živković, the four of them were near Polling Station No. 34 in the village of Šarbanovac on election day. He says that a group of masked individuals approached them after Zorica Popović photographed people sitting in a van parked next to the polling station with voter lists and papers. The attackers did not want to be photographed and moved toward them in an attempt to seize their equipment and destroy the evidence.

Živković states that Zorica Popović was the first to be attacked, after which Ivan Bjelić and Lazar Dinić "stepped in" to defend her. According to his account, a black Audi with registration plates from Banja Luka then arrived, from which three additional masked men emerged. The attackers proceeded to seize and smash their mobile phones and other equipment.

Živković further recounts that one of the attackers chased Lazar across a field before he was beaten. He also states that, during the assault, the attackers were communicating via video call with a person who was giving them instructions. According to Živković, they forced Lazar to shout, "Aca for President," while Ivan was called "an Ustaša" and "a mercenary."

Nemanja Marinović of the Zoomer portal says that it was the local elections that fundamentally changed his assessment of journalists' safety. According to him, had the interview been conducted before the elections, he would probably have given a higher rating. However, following the events in Bor and Bajina Bašta, he believes that the level of safety can hardly be rated higher than one.

Marinović also notes that journalists in Bor—including crews from Zoomer, Glas Zaječara, Mašina, Revolt, and other media outlets—had been gathered in a café that served as a kind of "media headquarters." According to him, they received information that a group of people was planning to storm the café, forcing them to relocate to another venue. Representatives of the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia were also with them at the time.

Irena Pejić of Mašina also describes an attack on one of their colleagues in Negotin while reporting on the elections. According to her account, the journalist and a colleague from another media outlet walked several metres away from the rest of the press corps to check what had happened, when they were surrounded by a group of men outside the premises of the Serbian Progressive Party. The female journalist's press accreditation was torn from her, while her colleague's mobile phone was smashed and he was struck in the nose. According to Pejić, the incident was reported to the police, but no action was subsequently taken.

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Protection Strategies and the Need for Training

The experiences shared by the interviewees indicate that student, youth, and young independent media outlets generally do not have formalized safety protocols. Protection is most often based on experience, risk assessment, internal agreements, working in pairs or teams, maintaining contacts with journalists' organizations, and relying on more experienced colleagues. While such practices do exist, they are, in most cases, ad hoc and depend on the capacity of the individual newsroom.

The most common practice cited by the interviewees is that journalists do not attend high-risk events alone. This approach was repeatedly mentioned in discussions about protests, student gatherings, and election day reporting.

Jovan Živković of Pressing states that the newsroom has not received formal training but instead relies on experience and advice from colleagues:

We have not received, nor are we aware of, any formal training for reporting in crisis situations. We rely on our instincts and on advice from colleagues who have previously

covered such events.

Representatives of Youth Vibes explain that they pass on knowledge internally but acknowledge the limitations of this approach in practice:

Whenever one of us attends a training, we make sure to pass that knowledge on to our correspondents... But there are things we understood in theory that we simply didn't manage to apply in practice.

The Studentski dnevni list newsroom states that, when reporting on sensitive events such as protests, it is standard practice for two journalists to work together in the field so that one can document any threat to the other's safety and provide assistance if necessary. In the same response, they note that they have not received formal crisis reporting training and instead rely on "our instincts and advice from colleagues who have previously covered such events."

Although the Oblakoder newsroom does not have a formal response plan for attacks or threats, Snežana Katunac explains that, if necessary, they know they would seek assistance from ANEM or the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia. However, no more detailed internal protocol is in place. She also notes that, when covering protests, it is standard practice for journalists not to go into the field alone.

A similar approach exists at Mingl. Miljana Jovanović explains that, while reporting on protests, the newsroom knew which organizations and associations had opened their premises that day, had press credentials, maintained relevant contacts, and had agreed to stay in constant communication. However, she emphasizes that there is no written, „step-by-step“ protocol.

Milica Marković and Lana Stanisavljević of Youth Vibes explain that safety within their newsroom is based on internal communication and ensuring that there is always someone available who can contact more experienced journalists, journalists' associations, or the police if necessary.

Newsrooms that regularly report on protests, elections, and other high-risk events have developed somewhat more comprehensive internal practices. Even so, these practices are generally based on accumulated experience rather than on an institutionalized safety system.

Nemanja Marinović of Zoomer explains that, when covering high-risk assignments, he ensures that journalists do not work alone, that they remain in constant communication while in the field, that appropriate protective equipment is used depending on the assessed level of risk, and that legal assistance contacts are readily available.

The Mašina newsroom has developed even more robust safety practices, reflecting its frequent reporting from high-risk events. Irena Pejić explains that Mašina journalists are always clearly identifiable, wearing press credentials, press vests, and helmets, and that the newsroom has a policy of ensuring that its staff are unmistakably recognized as journalists.

Nevertheless, according to her, they continue to face pushing, physical assaults, objects being thrown at them, and attempts to gain access to or control over their recorded material. Most interviewees identify journalists' associations and professional organizations as important sources of support. However, cooperation with these organizations is rarely systematic. Instead, it is generally activated only in times of crisis, when journalists need to report an incident, seek advice, or obtain legal assistance.

Institutional Responses and Trust in the Protection System

The experiences shared by the interviewees indicate that relations with public institutions represent one of the key sources of insecurity for student, youth, and young independent media outlets. Even where formal mechanisms exist for reporting threats, attacks, or online harassment, interviewees frequently state that they do not expect an effective response or that, once a report has been filed, no further action is taken.

Milica Borjanić of KOMS points to a broader pattern: young people place greater trust in civil society organizations, journalists' associations, and support platforms than in state institutions. Based on her experience, cases involving threats and attacks are most often reported with the assistance of such organizations, rather than because young people themselves are fully familiar with their rights and the relevant reporting procedures.

Mašina states that it reported certain threats to the police and to the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime but that, according to the newsroom, no action was taken. Irena Pejić explains that, for a period of several months, the newsroom consistently reported threats, but the lack of any institutional response ultimately led them to stop doing so:

For a while, we reported threats for months, but then we stopped because there was absolutely no response from the institutions.

Representatives of Youth Vibes state that the newsroom reported a comment they perceived as a threat, only to be informed by the Special Prosecutor's Office for High-Tech Crime that the comment did not constitute a threat. This case illustrates the discrepancy between how newsrooms perceive risks to their safety and how institutions legally classify such messages.

In the case of Revolt, the police response in one instance was described as formally adequate but still insufficient to create a genuine sense of security. Marko Živković states that death threats were reported to the police, one individual was arrested, and was subsequently released pending trial. At the same time, his testimony highlights the complex relationship between young media professionals and the police: although some police officers know them from protests and public events, this does not mean that the institutions are perceived as a reliable system of protection.

Pressure, Lawsuits, and Restricted Access to Information

Political pressure on student and youth media does not always take the form of direct censorship, calls from politicians, or overt attempts to influence editorial policy. For some interviewees, such pressure is reflected in the broader environment: stigmatization, a lack of responses from public institutions, restricted access to information, the dominance of pro-government narratives, and an atmosphere in which reporting on protests, elections, or socially sensitive issues is immediately perceived as politically charged.

Several newsrooms state that they have not experienced direct pressure from politicians. Studentski dnevni list notes that it has not encountered explicit threats or attempts to influence its reporting, despite regularly covering protests in Niš and student-related activities. At the same time, the newsroom states that it has not always received responses from public institutions, although it attributes this more to administrative inefficiency than to the political sensitivity of the issues covered.

Mingl draws a similar distinction. Miljana Jovanović explains that Mingl has not had the same type of experience as investigative media outlets dealing with corruption or directly scrutinizing those in power.

Although Oblakoder is not a daily news outlet, it has experienced institutional non-responsiveness. Snežana Katunac explains that the courts responded to the newsroom's requests, whereas ministries either refused to cooperate or stopped responding after the initial communication.

Žarko Bogosavljević (Razglas News) states that institutions in Novi Sad fail to respond even to inquiries concerning basic municipal issues, making routine journalistic work significantly more difficult.

Legal pressure is not experienced by all newsrooms; however, the case of Oblakoder demonstrates that youth-oriented and smaller media outlets may also face lawsuits that create financial, psychological, and organizational burdens.

Snežana Katunac explains that Oblakoder was sued by Tomislav Momirović for republishing information that had previously been reported by N1 as unofficial information. According to her, Oblakoder, in its weekly news roundup, reported that Momirović had been arrested at the airport, clearly citing N1 as the source. She explains that the lawsuit was filed on the grounds of alleged damage to the plaintiff's reputation and honour, with the claimant arguing that he had not been arrested at the airport but at his home.

Katunac further emphasizes that, according to information available to the newsroom, the lawsuit was not filed against the media outlet that originally published the information but rather against several smaller media outlets that subsequently republished the story. This

claim should be treated with appropriate caution, as the interviewee herself presents it as information that has not been independently verified.

Funding, Operations, and Sustainability

Financial sustainability is one of the key challenges facing all independent media, and student and youth media are no exception. These newsrooms frequently operate through project-based funding, grants, partnerships, volunteer work, and occasional forms of external support.

Milica Marković and Lana Stanisavljević of Youth Vibes explain that the portal does not rely on traditional commercial advertising. Instead, it cooperates with local organizations that use the platform to promote their activities and has also benefited from an individual corporate donation. While this model enables the newsroom to continue operating, it does not provide long-term stability. The newsroom remains dependent on project funding, individual partnerships, and occasional opportunities, making it difficult to plan its work and develop its team. The interviewees also point to donors' expectations that small youth media outlets should become "self-sustainable."

In their experience, supplementary activities can provide additional support but cannot replace stable funding for editorial work. Models such as selling merchandise, running occasional fundraising campaigns, or engaging in complementary activities may generate additional income, but they do not address the underlying problem: producing high-quality media content requires skilled staff, time, equipment, editorial oversight, and administrative support.

Studentski dnevni list and Univerzitetski odjek represent a different model of sustainability, relying on the support of universities and the broader academic environment. This model facilitates access to young people, expertise, and mentorship, but it does not fully address issues relating to formal status, protection, continuity, or professional development. Student newsrooms naturally undergo continuous generational turnover, while their members often do not hold the status of formally employed journalists, making them more vulnerable both organizationally and in terms of their safety.

Oblakoder, Zoomer, Revolt, and Mašina represent another model of young and independent media organizations, relying on a combination of project funding, public engagement, support networks, and recognition among their audiences. However, their experience clearly demonstrates that greater public visibility also brings greater exposure to pressure, further increasing the need for stable funding, legal protection, digital security, and adequate staffing capacity.

Jovan Živković of Pressing points out that the financial challenge is not merely an obstacle to newsroom development but a matter of basic professional dignity:

A huge number of journalists, including many who hold university degrees, earn monthly salaries that are below the minimum wage. Journalists who live independently and have to pay rent and their bills are forced to take on additional jobs, which means their working week often exceeds 50 hours.

Financial instability has a direct impact on both journalists' safety and the quality of their work. Newsrooms without stable sources of income struggle to provide protective equipment, legal assistance, professional training, adequate remuneration for experienced contributors, and sufficient time for editorial planning. For student and youth media, this challenge is even more pronounced, as the enthusiasm of young people is often taken for granted while the real costs of professional journalism are consistently underestimated.

For this reason, the sustainability of these media outlets cannot be viewed solely in terms of financial revenue. It also encompasses their ability to retain staff, transfer knowledge to new generations, develop internal protocols, provide legal and psychological support, and ensure that their operations do not depend exclusively on short-term project funding cycles.

Staffing, Volunteerism, and Professionalization

Student and youth media often serve a dual role: they inform the public while also providing a space where young people enter the journalism profession, learn professional standards, and gain their first experience in the field.

In student newsrooms such as Studentski dnevni list and Univerzitetски odjek, editorial staff acquire knowledge through their academic studies, mentorship, and practical experience. Katarina Aleksandrović explains that students receive training in reporting and field safety as part of their education, supported by lecturers who themselves have professional journalism experience. While this framework is valuable, it does not mean that the newsroom has formalized safety procedures or a professional status comparable to that of larger media organizations.

Univerzitetски odjek particularly highlights the problem of dual exposure. Members of the editorial team are both students and media professionals, enabling them to maintain closer ties with the student community while simultaneously making them more vulnerable. They are not merely journalists covering student-related issues but also members of the very community that, in the current social and political context, is itself frequently subjected to targeting.

Within youth media platforms, professionalization often takes place through networks of correspondents, project-based activities, and occasional training programmes. Mingl explains that it relies on correspondents who already have prior experience, particularly when reporting from higher-risk environments or protests. While this represents a sensible safety practice, it also illustrates that newsrooms do not always have the capacity to provide

systematic training for new staff themselves.

Youth Vibes points out that organizational capacity can be strengthened when project funding is available. The interviewees explain that, whenever possible, part of the funding is allocated to training sessions, workshops, and the engagement of experienced professionals who can contribute to the development of the editorial team. This demonstrates an awareness of the importance of professionalization while also showing that such efforts depend largely on available financial resources and project cycles.

For young independent newsrooms such as Zoomer, Revolt, and Mašina, staffing issues are further complicated by the intensity of field reporting. Newsrooms covering protests, elections, and other crisis events must rapidly develop expertise in personal safety, digital security, legal responsibilities, and working under pressure. However, such knowledge is often acquired through direct experience and exposure to incidents rather than through a structured training system established in advance.

Volunteerism and the enthusiasm of young people are valuable resources, but they cannot serve as the foundation for long-term sustainability. If young journalists are expected to work in high-risk environments, covering protests, elections, and sensitive issues, their work must be accompanied by appropriate training, professional support, protection, and fair remuneration. Otherwise, student and youth media remain dependent on individual enthusiasm alone, which inevitably leads to burnout and the loss of talented young journalists over time.

Professionalization of these media outlets therefore means more than simply formalizing newsroom structures. It also requires creating conditions in which young people can learn, make mistakes, develop professionally, and remain in journalism in a safe and supportive environment. This includes mentorship, access to professional training, legal protection, psychological support following incidents, and sustainable funding models that do not assume that work of significant public interest can be carried out almost entirely on the basis of enthusiasm alone.

Media Landscape, Solidarity, and Support Networks

In the interviews conducted for this report, solidarity emerges as one of the most important resources available to student, youth, and young independent media outlets. It is reflected in the sharing of information, joint field reporting, cooperation with more experienced newsrooms, reliance on journalists' associations, and support from civil society organizations.

During the local elections in Bor, solidarity took on a very practical form. According to the interviewees, several media crews shared a common workspace, exchanged information, and attempted to coordinate their movements in the field. Among those using this shared space were Zoomer, Tebrizam, Glas Zaječara, Mašina, Revolt, and other media outlets,

together with representatives of the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia.

Mingl describes its cooperation with various newsrooms and platforms, including Blokade Info and Mašina, particularly in the context of reporting on student protests and developments at universities. Such partnerships demonstrate that youth media rarely operate in isolation but instead function as part of a broader network that provides access to the field, professional experience, and mutual support.

Oblakoder identifies ANEM and the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia as key sources of support, while Univerzitetški odjek emphasizes the strong sense of community and solidarity among journalists in Novi Sad. At the same time, however, the interviewees stress that solidarity alone cannot compensate for the absence of formal protection. It is invaluable in times of crisis, but it cannot replace systematic procedures, legal certainty, or effective institutional responses.

Milica Borjanić of KOMS points to an important distinction regarding trust: young people often place greater confidence in civil society organizations, journalists' associations, and support platforms than in state institutions. As a result, support networks have, in practice, assumed part of the role that should be fulfilled by formal protection mechanisms.

Nevertheless, solidarity has its limits. The example of election day in Bor demonstrates that effective communication and the presence of fellow journalists can help, but they cannot always prevent violence, confusion, or the lack of reliable information. When circumstances change rapidly, newsrooms lack clear procedures, and institutions fail to provide timely and accurate information, informal support networks become indispensable—but remain insufficient on their own.

For this reason, one of the report's key findings is that existing networks of solidarity should be strengthened and, wherever possible, formalized. This does not imply bureaucratizing youth media, but rather establishing clearer channels for crisis response: identifying whom a newsroom should contact in an emergency, who can provide legal assistance, who monitors cases involving threats and attacks, who can offer digital security support, and how experience and knowledge can be systematically transferred to new members of editorial teams.

Student and youth media demonstrate a high degree of mutual support and a strong willingness to cooperate. However, their safety cannot depend on solidarity alone. It must be reinforced by systematic training, accessible legal protection, more stable funding, and institutional mechanisms that treat threats and attacks with the seriousness they deserve, regardless of whether the target is a large professional newsroom, a youth media platform, or a student publication.

CONCLUSION

Student and youth media in Serbia currently operate in an environment that is both underregulated and high-risk. They are not merely a "training ground for journalism" or a peripheral segment of the media landscape. At a time when much of public life has shifted to the streets, social media, universities, local elections, and informal communication channels, young journalists, student newsrooms, and youth media platforms have often been among the first to document events, report developments, and explain to their generation what is happening around them.

However, this report demonstrates that, for young people, entering the journalism profession is increasingly unlikely to begin in a safe and professional environment. For many of them, their first assignment is not a press conference but a protest. Their first professional challenge is not simply how to write a news story, but how to protect their phone, remain in contact with their editor, recognize potential risks, know whom to contact if they are attacked, and determine whether public institutions will even recognize them as journalists.

Although the interviewees describe different experiences, a common pattern clearly emerges. Formal protection is often lacking, procedures remain underdeveloped, and journalists' safety depends largely on individual judgment, the solidarity of colleagues, and the speed with which a newsroom can respond to a crisis. In this sense, student and youth media operate within a paradox. They are expected to be professional, responsive, accountable, and to serve the public interest, while at the same time they are rarely provided with the conditions necessary for professional journalism: stable funding, legal support, safety training, digital security, psychological assistance, and institutional recognition.

It is particularly significant that the risks faced by young journalists do not end once they leave the field. They continue in the form of hostile comments, threatening messages, targeted harassment, attempts to compromise personal accounts, and, perhaps most importantly, institutional silence. When reports receive no follow-up, when threats are not recognized as threats, when attacks are downplayed, or when responsibility is shifted onto the journalist who documented the incident, a clear message is conveyed: young journalists may be visible, but they are not necessarily protected.

For this reason, the issue of student and youth media cannot be reduced to the question of their sustainability as project-based initiatives. It is, fundamentally, a question about the future of journalism itself. If young people enter the profession through unpaid work, improvised safety protocols, and repeated experiences of attacks that go unpunished, then the problem extends far beyond the survival of individual newsrooms. It means that an entire generation of journalists is being socialized into believing that insecurity is simply an inherent part of the profession.

These media outlets demonstrate that young people possess knowledge, courage, solidarity, and a strong sense of public responsibility. They also show that there is an audience for their work—particularly at times when traditional media fail to communicate in ways that resonate with younger generations or overlook issues that matter to them. However, enthusiasm cannot substitute for a functioning system. Solidarity cannot serve as the sole mechanism of protection. Nor can volunteerism provide a sustainable foundation for work carried out in the public interest.

The key finding of this report, therefore, is that student and youth media should be recognized as an integral and relevant part of the media ecosystem rather than as its periphery. Ensuring their protection, providing them with training, and supporting their financial sustainability is not simply about helping young people "try their hand at journalism." It is an investment in a public sphere that, in the years ahead, will continue to depend on journalists who are willing to go into the field, ask difficult questions, verify information, and publish facts that others seek to conceal.

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In a country where young journalists are increasingly learning to work under pressure before they ever have the opportunity to work in a stable newsroom, the question is no longer simply whether they are prepared for journalism. The real question is whether the system is prepared to protect them.

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