



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION: THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT (INFOCORE)

Policy Recommendations for Media and Academia

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This Policy Brief presents policy recommendations based on feedback from the policy synthesis and local stakeholders' seminars of INFOCORE.

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INTRODUCTION

This policy brief delves into the input provided by the participating stakeholders of the final policy synthesis seminar of the INFOCORE project and focuses on the academic and media groups. It also addresses salient concerns identified at the preceding local stakeholder seminars, and gives concrete recommendations on (1) the direction of further academic work, (2) the improvement of media-related training programmes, and (3) media practice.

What stakeholders use from INFOCORE's work strongly depends on the social, economic, political and media governance structures of a given country, which vary widely from one country to the next, as well as on the nature of the conflict.

Thus, we do not propose here that every academic researcher or media outlet unconditionally adopt the recommendations mentioned in this document. Rather, these recommendations should help to inspire media personnel and academics to take actions adaptable to the social, economic, political and cultural realities of their respective countries.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACADEMIA

The stakeholders recommended that after the completion of the project, further research in the field should identify some key variables (such as the degree of press freedom, ownership structures and business models in different media systems, cultures of news consumption, and types of political regimes) and link those to the results of the project. Another way to better grasp the multi-layered contextual dynamics of media and conflict could be to integrate a model that would enable researchers to understand what conditions are necessary for media discourse to have an independent influence on conflict dynamics.

According to the stakeholders' suggestions, it is imperative for INFOCORE, as well as for other existing networks of universities and research institutes that do research on the role of media in conflict, to further promote information sharing, as well as seek out and establish new research collaborations. Such networks could expand to other countries and continents beyond those involved in the current networks. As conflicts and situations differ, closer collaborations can lead to the greater development of theoretical, conceptual and methodological underpinnings, ultimately enriching the research field. The African continent, for example, is under-researched and often forgotten by the international community (unlike, for instance, Palestine and Israel or the Balkans which "attract" much more attention). One possibility to overcome the North-South gap could be, for instance, the establishment of partnerships with universities and research institutes from the Global South for mutual exchange on research about the mitigation of conflicts.

Moreover, in order to successfully convey academic research conclusions to the media (as well as policy makers), it is vital to find an appropriate, impactful and engaging means of presenting these results. It is paramount that scholars present their research findings in a tactful way. They must present their claims within the context of their research, stating when their conclusions stem from interviews with a finite amount of individuals or apply only to limited geographical areas. They should avoid sweeping generalizations, as these are likely to automatically be rejected by their audiences.

Another challenge that might not be resolved, but should at least be addressed, is the fact that academic results are often published with a certain delay and might even be out-of-date by the time they are disseminated. This is particularly true with regard to conflict situations that can change extremely rapidly. It

is important to think of a mechanism allowing for a quick dissemination of findings. This can be done, for instance, with the help of local communities: through networks of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) etc.

Academic collaboration with policy makers to increase international awareness can help build momentum and pressure. This is especially true in cases where media coverage is crucial to ensuring certain conflicts are not forgotten. Mapping out the internal structure of target political institutions can assist in locating appropriate venues for disseminating research. For example, within the United Nations in New York, the Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Department of Public Information (DPI) can disseminate research findings internally to the appropriate audience. Moreover, a hearing at the European Parliament, or a lunchtime conference at the External Cooperation Infopoint of DG DEVCO would be of great value to the dissemination of academic findings. Additionally, the EEAS SECPOL 2 (Conflict Prevention, Peace building and Mediation), EC DEVCO B7 (Fragility and Resilience) and EC FPI 2 (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace) should be targeted. To increase convenience and accommodate busy schedules, especially in the case of policy makers, it was recommended by stakeholders that researchers host workshops and events in close proximity to key institutions when inviting policy makers, advisors, think tank analysts, and experts working on region-specific conflicts. Approaching policy makers with specific interests in a region or conflict, and creating a sense of connection by involving them from the beginning, and through the different stages of the research process is an opportunity to gain their attention. Finally, advocating on a broader level, and focusing also on the role of media in the different consequences of a conflict such as gender-based violence, human trafficking or conflicts' effects on children could help disseminate the issues to a broader audience of policy makers.

Aside from building on strong networks and new collaborations within academia, it is important to draw on a multilevel approach, involving the different training sectors of the media industry. Overcoming traditional conventions and investing in different media production and reporting practices begins with the education of journalists. In addition to research collaborations, academic partnerships need to extend to relevant existing Bachelor's, Master's and even PhD programmes. More specifically, it is recommended to integrate state of the art findings (such as those produced by INFOCORE) in the curricula of higher education programmes in journalism, media or communication studies. This would likely lead to the engagement of young students who will ultimately shape the future media landscape. Within this framework, the Erasmus Mundus EU programme and the establishment of new Master's or PhD programmes on the role of media in conflict can help spread the far-reaching results and conclusions gained through INFOCORE and other relevant research projects to a wider academic audience.

Furthermore, sharing INFOCORE's results and findings as well as those of other research projects via training programmes of media outlets or journalist unions in the countries covered by INFOCORE could be the cornerstones of partnerships within academia as well as between research institutes and policy makers and the media. Through such initiatives, INFOCORE could provide added value by sharing lessons learned, and improving standards and overall output within the media production cycle. Within this framework, helping to improve the training of NGOs' information personnel who do not have a journalistic background is very important. Since NGOs often take on the role of media producers and reporters in zones that traditional media cannot easily access, they need to be taught how to produce quality news responsibly.

INFOCORE's research findings can be invaluable in the improvement of media practice. Firstly, the stakeholders' recommendations stated that these basic journalistic principles (such as balance, accuracy, fairness, inclusiveness and sensitivity) become even more important at times before, during and after a conflict.

Furthermore, according to the recommendations, the INFOCORE findings can help journalists learn why and how to use a broader network of expert sources, provide background information, put facts in context, investigate documents in the public domain (archives, libraries, local offices), interview knowledgeable people, portray people as human beings rather than representatives of religious or ethnic groups, avoid negative labels, or separate facts from opinion while still treating opinion as relevant.

The INFOCORE findings can help editors with ideas on how to organize in-house training for journalists, invite members of different religious and ethnic groups to come to the newsroom, encourage more senior journalists to support younger colleagues in these matters, support journalistic best practice, create a culture of tolerance within the newsroom, or develop their own internal editorial guidelines related to conflict reporting.

Regarding content production, it is equally important to 'Monitor Inside and Verify from Outside' by establishing internal and external quality assurance structures involving managers, journalists, editors, ombudspersons and trade union representatives in order to review the quality of conflict-related reporting, encourage best practices and improve newsroom performance. Cooperation with CSOs could also help strengthen independent monitoring of conflict coverage and contribute to increasing intercultural dialogue.

Sharing the findings of this project, and disseminating and translating them for journalists and making them available online, will help all personnel (including executives, content producers, journalists and support staff of media outlets, production companies and news agencies in particular).

Voluntary codes of ethics related to conflict reporting could be promoted to avoid all forms of bias and reporting based on stereotypes and prejudices. These codes could also include guidelines to help journalists and media outlets denounce hate speech.

Although in some countries covered by the INFOCORE project, journalists' unions and associations take political rather than professional lines, unions and associations can still play an important role. In that respect, according to the stakeholders' recommendations, journalists' unions/associations can use the INFOCORE findings when:

- * Adopting and promoting a journalistic code of ethics related to conflict reporting.
- * Organising training and workshops for journalists based on INFOCORE's findings and recommendations. Such training could pertain to conflict reporting, diversity reporting, issues related to tolerance, religion, security policy etc.
- * Developing guidelines on reporting across ethnic and religious lines.
- * Initiating campaigns and debates among journalists, unions, publishers and CSOs/NGOs.

- * Supporting public discussion on the work of journalists and media coverage of issues related to tolerance, religion, security policy and other issues related to conflict reporting.

CONCLUSIONS

The overarching observation is that there is a noticeable degree of consensus in the plethora of recommendations in the need to enhance collaboration efforts between academics, NGOs, policy makers and media practitioners to improve the role of journalists and media in conflict prevention and resolution. It is highly recommended that the findings be used to improve the dialogue by encouraging and participating in balanced, inclusive dialogues, platforms for reflection, debates, and cooperation and partnerships between academics, policy makers, CSOs and media organisations on the role of media in pre-conflict and post-conflict situations, in order to identify emerging issues and opportunities and exchange best practices.

Academia plays an important role in furthering the research agenda on journalism, media and conflict studies. However, scholars need to broaden their reach to work directly with training programmes to prepare and equip journalists for conflict reporting, while promoting best practices and lessons learned. Advancing research in close collaboration with media outlets can ensure up-to-date research on evolving media and conflict landscapes to cater to developing needs. Integrating gender-based research and awareness can provide a new and more balanced perspective to news production and output. Involving policy makers can be a challenge due to competing interests, events and conflicts. However, it is vital to cooperate in increasing awareness about the role of media in conflict.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	(In)Forming Conflict Prevention, Response, and Resolution: (INFOCORE)
COORDINATOR	Prof. Dr. Romy Fröhlich
CONSORTIUM	Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität – LMU – Munich, Germany King’s College London – KCL – London, United Kingdom Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (IDC) – Herzliya, Israel The Hebrew University of Jerusalem – Jerusalem, Israel Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy – ELIAMEP –Athens, Greece Global Governance Institute ASBL – GGI – Brussels, Belgium School of Journalism and Public Relation – SJPR – Skopje, FYROMacedonia Universidad Rey Juan Carlos – URJC – Madrid, Spain Université Libre de Bruxelles – ULB – Brussels, Belgium
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WEBSITE	www.infocore.eu
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