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WEXFO

WORLD EXPRESSION FORUM

2026 REPORT

Some of our key impacts:

- Nearly 300 participants from 47 countries gathered at the WEXFO conference 2026.
- More than 1,600 young people engaged through WEXFO Youth activities.
- 69 Young Experts from around 40 countries brought together through the WEXFO Utøya Young Experts program.
- 1,500 students reached through WEXFO Youth Voices.
- WEXFO activities and events delivered to a total of 3,235 participants.
- WEXFO's shareholder community expanded to 82 shareholders.
- Support to the Free Imaan campaign, helping mobilize international support for imprisoned human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir.
- More than 2 million social media impressions generated across digital platforms.

Published and edited by
World Expression Forum (WEXFO)
Design by Krible

Editorial note:
Microsoft Copilot has been used to assist with translation from Norwegian to English, language editing, proofreading, and text shortening in parts of this report. All content has been reviewed and approved by WEXFO prior to publication.

Photo: MMM / WEXFO

Message from our CEO

Democracies around the world are under pressure. Public discourse is becoming increasingly polarized, which in turn leads to greater mistrust, hostility and cancellation. This formed the backdrop to the WEXFO Conference 2026 and this year's theme, The Freedom to Disagree.

Freedom of expression is about the individual's right to express themselves and their opinions. This also means accepting that others will use freedom of expression to express views we may disagree with, or even strongly oppose.

It is in the nature of democracy that not everyone should agree on everything. On the contrary, democracy needs disagreement, and it requires citizens and institutions to be able to handle disagreement without undermining trust, cooperation, peace and order.

This year's WEXFO Conference brought together defenders of freedom of expression from around the world, across disciplines, generations and backgrounds. Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa opened the conference, which addressed some of the most important challenges facing freedom of expression and democracy, with the freedom to disagree as a common thread throughout the program. Through the conference and its associated seminars, participants explored questions related to, among other things, technology, media, disinformation, dialogue, art and literature.

The conference's main theme was not only discussed from the stage. During this year's WEXFO, disagreement was also expressed, more than ever before, from the audience and in the spaces between program sessions. Many of the WEXFO participants experienced for themselves how challenging disagreement and opposing views can be in practice. Some sessions on the program also provoked reactions and protests.

One of the most powerful aspects of this year's conference was the engagement of the younger generation. They played an active role throughout the WEXFO week, shaped discussions, participated in workshops and expressed themselves on stage and through various activities. Their experiences, perspectives and questions contributed to conversations and new connections between people in the forum, and demonstrated how important it is to include young voices in all efforts to strengthen freedom of expression and democracy.

As this report shows, over the past year WEXFO has also continued to strengthen our work beyond the conference week through projects, partnerships, school initiatives and international networks.

The strength of WEXFO lies in connecting people, organizations, and ideas across borders and differences. Freedom of expression is strengthened when its defenders share knowledge, learn from each other's experiences, find inspiration and build networks. This is our most important weapon against authoritarian forces.

"The strength of WEXFO lies in connecting people, organizations, and ideas across borders and differences."

– INGUNN TROSHOLMEN, CEO

What is WEXFO?

The World Expression Forum (WEXFO) works to promote and defend freedom of expression as an absolute precondition for democracy and human progress.

Based in Lillehammer, Norway, WEXFO brings together journalists, writers, publishers, researchers, artists, civil society organizations, policymakers, and young leaders from around the world.

Drawing on Norway's strong democratic traditions and long-standing commitment to freedom of expression, WEXFO is a global platform for conversation, learning, and collaboration.

Through its annual forum, youth programs, educational initiatives, and partnerships, WEXFO brings together people from different sectors and countries to share experiences, build networks, and develop new ideas, initiatives, and collaborations that strengthen freedom of expression and democratic participation.

World Expression Forum 2026

The World Expression Forum conference remains the hub of our engagement. In 2026, WEXFO was held for the fifth time and brought together leaders, experts, activists, artists, journalists, academics, policymakers, and young changemakers to discuss the state of freedom of expression and democracy.

The conference brought together almost 300 participants from across the globe for a six-day program, with the main events taking place in Lillehammer on Monday, June 1 and Tuesday, June 2.

We welcomed representatives from 47 countries, and a significant portion of the participants, including over 110 young delegates through dedicated WEXFO programs and around 1500 youth attending a parallel freedom of expression festival, were under the age of 35.

More than 50 speakers and artists took the stage during the conference, hosted by moderators Arizza Ann Nocum and Chetan Rastogi. Among the many distinguished guests were the Prime Minister of Norway Jonas Gahr Støre, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa, and journalist and filmmaker Louis Theroux. Political representation included, in addition to the Prime Minister of Norway, Norway's Minister of Culture and Equality, Lubna Jaffery, and Mayor

*The annual World Expression Forum takes place at Scandic Lillehammer Hotel in May/June.
Photo: MMM / WEXFO*



Louis Theroux (right) was interviewed on stage by NRK presenter Chetan Rastogi. Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO

of Lillehammer, Hans Olav Sundfør. Artistic contributions included performances by Egyptian musician and activist Ramy Essam, widely recognized as a leading voice of the Arab Spring and for using music as a tool for freedom of expression and social change, as well as a concert lecture by Norwegian multi-instrumentalist Kenneth Lien exploring the cultural journeys of folk music across borders and generations.

Main theme and program

The overarching theme of WEXFO 2026 was The Freedom to Disagree, reflecting the forum's commitment to strengthening democratic resilience through open dialogue and the exchange of diverse perspectives. At a time when growing polarization is testing social cohesion and putting pressure on democratic institutions, the program explored the role of disagreement as a constructive force. Key topics included the boundaries



*Egyptian rock artist and human rights defender Ramy Essam opened WEXFO 2026 with a musical performance.
Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO*



Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre delivered the opening keynote at WEXFO 2026. Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO

of disagreement, the value of dissent, and practical approaches to addressing societal challenges through open and inclusive debate.

The first day of the WEXFO 2026 program focused on the state of freedom of expression as global power shifts, democratic backsliding, and geopolitical tensions are shrinking the space for dissent in many parts of the world. The conference opened with a keynote address by Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, who reflected on the challenges facing freedom of expression in an era of rapid technological change and growing influence from digital platforms. Participants were also presented with the latest findings from the V-Dem Institute, home to the world's largest democracy dataset, and several engaging reflections on where the boundaries of legitimate disagreement lie. On the conference's second day, the focus shifted towards solutions, featuring inspiring stories from, among others, Gen Z youth movements and the media sector, alongside the sharing of concrete methodologies and practical tools.

Throughout the conference, participants were also challenged to experience firsthand how difficult it can be to engage with opposing viewpoints and remain open to disagreement.



One of the sessions that generated the strongest reactions was The Marginalization of Moderates, which aimed to explore what public discourse loses when nuance, complexity, and middle-ground perspectives are pushed aside through boycotts and cancel culture. The discussion drew protests from some audience members, who voiced their objections and left the auditorium. At the same time, the session sparked lively and constructive conversations in the conference's many informal meeting spaces, where participants continued to debate the boundaries of freedom of expression, the consequences of exclusion, and the importance of maintaining room for disagreement in democratic societies.

Young voices played a central role throughout the program. Participants heard from more than 20 young experts and delegates who contributed to keynote sessions, panel discussions, and conversations across the conference. Bringing perspectives from different

backgrounds and fields of expertise, they challenged assumptions, shared experiences, and offered fresh insights into some of the most pressing issues facing democratic societies today.

Enhanced engagement with the media freedom community

Through collaboration with the International Press Institute (IPI), WEXFO strengthened its ties to the international press and media freedom community. IPI contributed to several program sessions, including the workshop How to Tackle Online Hate and Smear Campaigns: An Analytical and Hands-On Approach, which provided journalists with practical tools for navigating online harassment, coordinated smear campaigns, and increasingly polarized public debate. The workshop was led by Javier Luque, Head of Digital Media and Online Safety at IPI. IPI's Executive Director, Scott Griffen, also contributed to the program through the panel discussion Slaying SLAPPs: Defending Expression Against Legal Intimidation, which explored the growing use of Strategic Lawsuits Against

Public Participation (SLAPPs) to silence journalists, activists, publishers, and other voices in the public sphere. This collaboration expanded WEXFO's reach within the international media sector, a target audience for the forum.

Awards

Two awards featured prominently in the 2026 program. WEXFO presented the WEXFO Young Inspiration Award to Pema Wangmo Lama, recognizing her contribution to freedom of expression and democratic values as a leading figure of Nepal's Gen Z movement. The award comprised a diploma, a unique glass artwork by renowned Norwegian glass artist Kari Mølstad, and a grant enabling the recipient to return to WEXFO in 2027.

The shortlist for the IPA Prix Voltaire was also presented at WEXFO, highlighting courageous publishers and the importance of defending the freedom to publish. WEXFO worked in close collaboration with the International Publishers Association (IPA) on the Short List Ceremony, highlighting our shared commitment to protecting freedom of expression within the publishing sector.

Outdoor art exhibition

Four artists from the Young Experts program were represented through an outdoor exhibition in the garden of Lillehammer Hotel. The exhibition was accessible to both conference participants and the public throughout WEXFO. The artworks explored themes related to identity, democracy, human rights and social development, highlighting art as an important form of expression and participation. Represented artists were Aya Kharboutli, Sara Khayat, Moneer Alwerfally and Tara Abdulla Mohammed Sharif.

Public meeting for freedom of expression

As part of the WEXFO program, a public meeting was held in the garden of the conference hotel, bringing together locals, artists, partners and international guests to reflect on the state of freedom of expression. Organized in collaboration with amongst others The Norwegian Festival of Literature, Musikk i Innlandet, and the local newspaper GD, the event featured performances and speeches in both Norwegian and English. The meeting served as an open and inclusive arena for civic engagement, highlighting the importance of

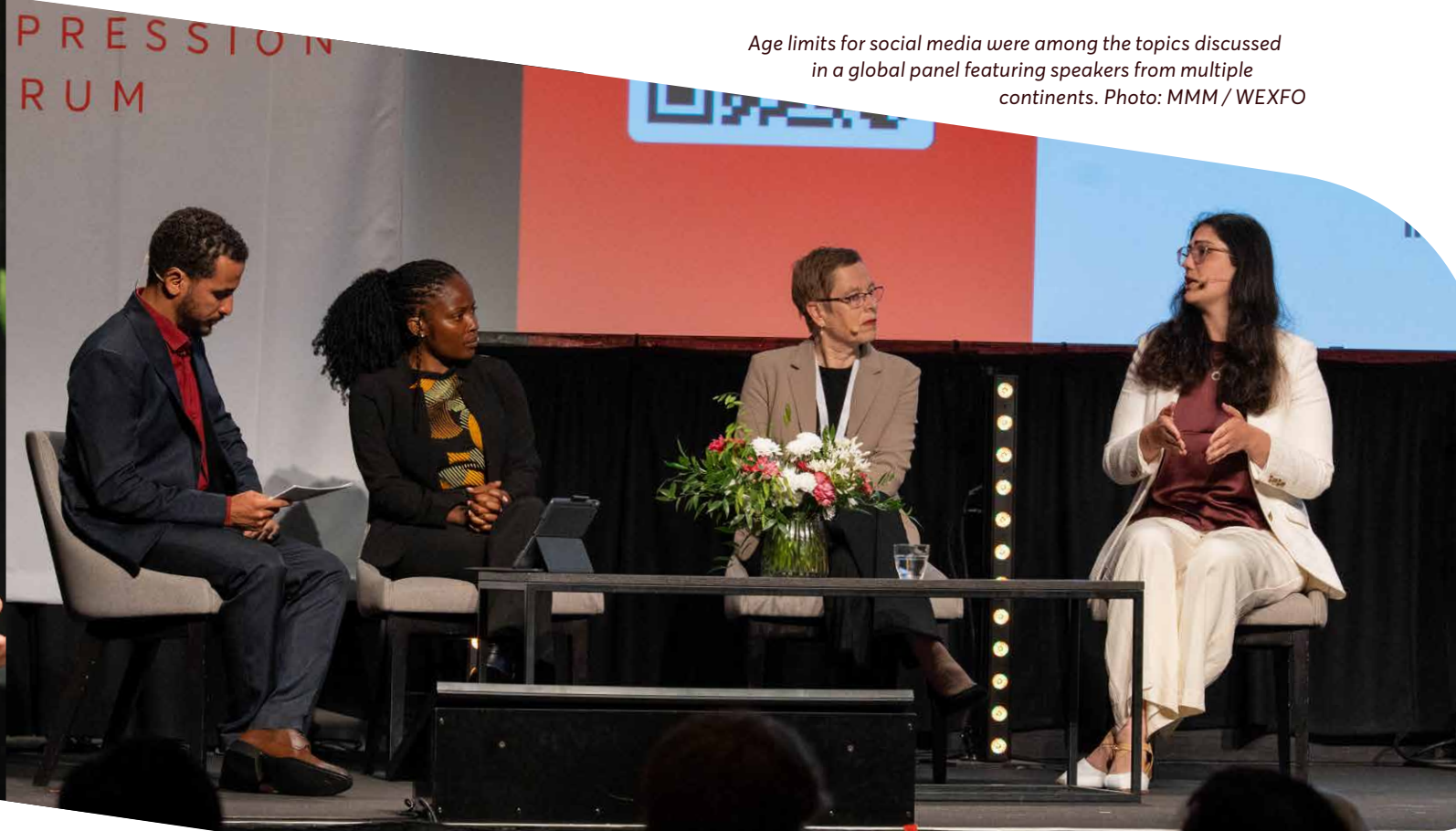
Age limits for social media were among the topics discussed in a global panel featuring speakers from multiple continents. Photo: MMM / WEXFO



IPA President Guantsa Jobava was among the speakers at a workshop on young voices in publishing. Photo: MMM / WEXFO



Eline Ruud Kristiansen, winner of the Young People's Public Address award, spoke at the Public Meeting for Freedom of Expression during WEXFO 2026. Photo: Jørgen Skaug / WEXFO





Pema Wangmo Lama received the WEXFO Young Inspiration Award 2026 for her leadership in Nepal's Gen Z movement. Photo: Jørgen Skaug / WEXFO

public dialogue in defending democratic values. Among the speakers were internationally acclaimed author Elif Shafak, and writer and activist Megan Phelps-Roper, who shared their perspectives on freedom of expression, democratic participation, and the importance of engaging across differences.

Conference statement

WEXFO published its 2026 conference statement, capturing key insights and recommendations from this year's forum:

World Expression Forum Conference Statement, Lillehammer, June 2, 2026

The World Expression Forum (WEXFO) 2026 takes place at a time when freedom of expression is under growing attack.

Speaking out is becoming more difficult. Not only because of censorship and repression, but because fear, polarization, hostility, and distrust force more people to self-censor.

This affects all forms of expression. When people fall silent, power goes unchallenged, societies become more divided, and democracy weakens.

Disagreement is a core part of democracy. It allows ideas to be tested, perspectives to be shared, and

societies to develop. Democracy is weakened when people choose to be silent out of fear but thrives when the right to disagree is upheld or respected.

We must be willing to listen, even when we disagree, including when those who challenge us question perspectives that are deeply connected to our identities. We must not dehumanize those whose views differ from our own. This does not mean abandoning our convictions. It means defending the space where disagreement can exist without fear.

Around the world, journalists, writers, artists, academics, activists, and ordinary citizens continue to face intimidation, exclusion, violence, and rising authoritarianism for expressing their views. Their protection is essential to preserving free and open societies. Their courage reminds us that freedom of expression is not an abstract principle. It is a lived reality that must be defended every day.

Digital platforms have opened the door to more voices than ever before, but they have also made public debate faster, louder, and more polarized. Trust is weakening. It is becoming easier to dismiss



The International Publishers Association announced the shortlist for the IPA Prix Voltaire during the WEXFO conference dinner. Photo: Jørgen Skaug / WEXFO

those we disagree with and harder to engage in meaningful dialogue across differences.

At the same time, those who seek to limit freedom are becoming more strategic, coordinated, and effective. Defending freedom of expression today requires more than good intentions. It requires collective action.

We must protect the right to express dissent in all its forms, support those who face consequences for speaking out, and strengthen the conditions for open, inclusive, and informed public debate. We must ensure that young people are not only protected online, but also included in shaping the digital spaces where they learn, participate, and make their voices heard.

Democracy depends not on agreement, but on the ability to handle disagreement.

The World Expression Forum (WEXFO) calls for action:

- We must organize, cooperate, and act with purpose to defend freedom of expression.
- We must defend those who speak – and challenge ourselves to speak when it matters.
- We must rebuild trust, reclaim nuance, and make space for constructive disagreement.
- We must ensure that freedom of expression remains a right that belongs to everyone and hold the torch high for those whose voices are marginalized, excluded, or left behind.

Last year, the World Expression Forum reminded us that "ordinary people create history."

This year, we affirm a simple truth:

Freedom of expression survives when ordinary people choose participation over silence.

WEXFO Youth

In 2026, WEXFO Youth brought together more than 1,600 young people from Norway and around the world. Through activities in Lillehammer before and during the conference, at Utøya and the Nansen Academy, young people met across countries, generations and experiences to explore what freedom of expression means in practice, and to take part in the conversations shaping our democracies.

A key priority in 2026 was to create physical spaces for dialogue and disagreement. At a time when much of young people's communication and civic engagement takes place online, WEXFO Youth created opportunities to meet face to face, to look each other in the eye, listen to perspectives different from their own, ask difficult questions, and experience that disagreement does not have to end the conversation.

This ambition was put into practice across our youth programs. Around 1,500 pupils from Innlandet County took part in the WEXFO Youth Voices festival, meeting artists, organizations, decision-makers and young participants through workshops, conversations and creative activities. 69 Young Experts from around 40 countries came together at Utøya before joining the main WEXFO conference. Through WEXFO More Young Voices, 46 young Europeans met across national borders for dialogue, learning and democratic participation.

In 2026, we therefore continued to strengthen young people's role within WEXFO itself. Young representatives contributed through the WEXFO Youth Council, Board and Program Committee, while former participants took on active roles in planning and facilitating activities for WEXFO Youth participants. In this way, young people increasingly contribute not only as participants, but as co-creators of WEXFO.

WEXFO Youth Voices

WEXFO Youth Voices gathered around 1,500 students aged 14 to 17 in Lillehammer on June 1 and 2, 2026 for WEXFO's annual freedom of expression festival for young people. The festival gives young people an opportunity



WEXFO Youth Voices brought together secondary school students from Lillehammer and the surrounding region alongside the main conference. Photo: MMM / WEXFO

to experience freedom of expression in practice through workshops, conversations, performances and creative activities where they are encouraged to share their views, ask questions, listen to others and engage with differing perspectives. This year's program explored freedom of expression, human rights, hate speech, disagreement and democratic participation.

A stronger international dimension was introduced in 2026 through the participation of Young Experts from Gaza, Afghanistan, Serbia, Norway and the United States, as well as a youth group from Trenčín, Slovakia, which led a workshop. By meeting young people with different experiences of freedom of expression, democracy and participation, students gained first-hand insight into global issues and perspectives that can otherwise feel distant. Meeting young people from different countries made international issues more personal and easier to relate to, while also encouraging curiosity, dialogue and mutual understanding.

WEXFO Youth Voices has also become an important arena for organizations working with democracy and freedom of expression. Contributors included Stop Hate Speech, Transparency International Norway, the United Nations Association of Norway, the Nansen



Spoken word poet and actor Fredrik Høyer was among the workshop facilitators at WEXFO Youth Voices. Photo: MMM / WEXFO

Center for Peace and Dialogue, and UKM together with spoken word artist Fredrik Høyer. Artistic expression remained a key part of the program, including a stage performance by Young Expert and performance artist Obel from Kenya on freedom of expression, identity and resilience, alongside musical performances by young UKM artists from Innlandet County.

Equal Opportunities to Express Yourself

In Lillehammer, WEXFO Youth Voices is part of the three-year educational program "Like muligheter til å ytre seg" (Equal Opportunities to Express Yourself), developed by WEXFO, Lillehammer Municipality's schools and education administration, The Norwegian Festival of Literature, and the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue. The program integrates freedom of expression, dialogue and democratic participation throughout lower secondary school and is connected to objectives on democracy, participation and critical thinking.

The aim is to move beyond one-off activities and build students' democratic skills

progressively over time. Throughout lower secondary school, students take part in classroom teaching, reading and author conversations, dialogue activities and WEXFO Youth Voices.

WEXFO More Young Voices

The seminar took place from 29 May to 2 June at the Nansen Academy and WEXFO in Lillehammer. WEXFO More Young Voices is an Erasmus+ youth exchange project that brought together 46 young people aged 18-25 from Norway, Sweden, Poland, and Germany. The project was carried out in partnership with the National Youth Council of Poland, European Youth Press (Germany), and Ung Zon (Sweden), which joined the project as a new partner organization this year.

Author Aleksander Kielland Kragh met with lower secondary school students in Lillehammer as part of the educational program Equal Opportunities to Express Yourself, developed with WEXFO. Photo: WEXFO

As part of the program, participants attended the WEXFO conference, where they joined discussions on democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression and contributed their own perspectives and experiences.

Through dialogue and exchange with other young delegates, the project participants gained insight into how young people around the world are working to promote democratic participation and positive social change. The project also provided valuable opportunities for intergenerational learning through meetings with experienced professionals and changemakers.

WEXFO Utøya Young Experts

WEXFO Utøya Young Experts 2026 brought together 69 young leaders, activists, researchers, civil society representatives, and community changemakers aged 18 to 35 from approximately 40 countries. The seminar took place from 29 May to 3 June at Utøya and during the World Expression Forum (WEXFO) in Lillehammer.

The overarching theme of this year's seminar and conference was "The Freedom to Disagree" focusing on how democratic societies can engage with disagreement constructively while safeguarding freedom of expression. The seminar aimed to provide participants with a platform to explore challenges and opportunities related to freedom of expression, human rights, democracy, technology, and civic participation.



The program began at Utøya, where participants took part in workshops led by Young Experts themselves, dialogue sessions, and reflective activities. These sessions aimed to provide opportunities to share experiences, build international networks, and learn from one another's work in promoting democracy and freedom of expression. As an international learning center for democracy, peace, and human rights, Utøya offered a meaningful setting for these discussions, highlighting the importance of defending democratic values and addressing the growing challenges of hate, polarization, and extremism.

WEXFO Take Action and Pre-Conference Session

The WEXFO Take Action seminar is the action-oriented component of the World Expression Forum. The seminar was held on 3 June at Lillehammer Hotel, the day after the conclusion of the main conference.

Designed to help participants transform ideas, learning and connections into concrete initiatives, the seminar focused on how participants can develop projects, strengthen partnerships and create impact in their own communities. The program combined workshops, discussions and networking activities led by members of the WEXFO community.

A new element in 2026 was a Pre-Conference Session at the Nansen Academy, bringing together 115 participants from the WEXFO Utøya Young Experts and WEXFO More Young Voices programs. Introduced in response to participant feedback, the session provided time and space for participants to get to know one another before the conference began. The goal was to strengthen relationships, build trust and create a foundation for dialogue, collaboration and networking throughout the WEXFO week.



Young participants made a strong contribution to WEXFO 2026, represented here by Kai Mata, one of 70 WEXFO Young Experts. Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO



Khaled Emam of the WEXFO Program Committee and Felicia Anthonio of the WEXFO Board presented the 2026 Conference Statement from the stage. Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO

WEXFO in numbers

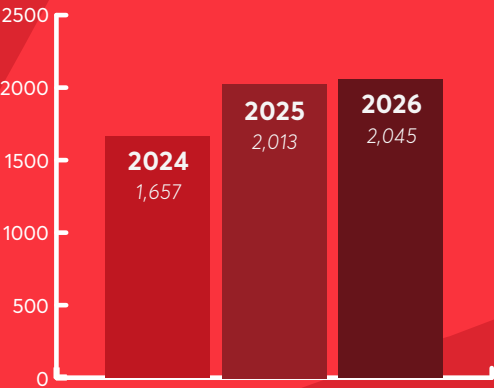
In 2026, WEXFO operated with a dedicated team equivalent to 4.8 full-time positions, distributed across five roles. The WEXFO conference featured 53 speakers who contributed in various capacities throughout the conference.

Delivering an event of this scale requires the support of many committed individuals. In addition to our board and program committee – many of whom are actively involved during the event – we were fortunate to have over 20 volunteers working from early morning to late evening.

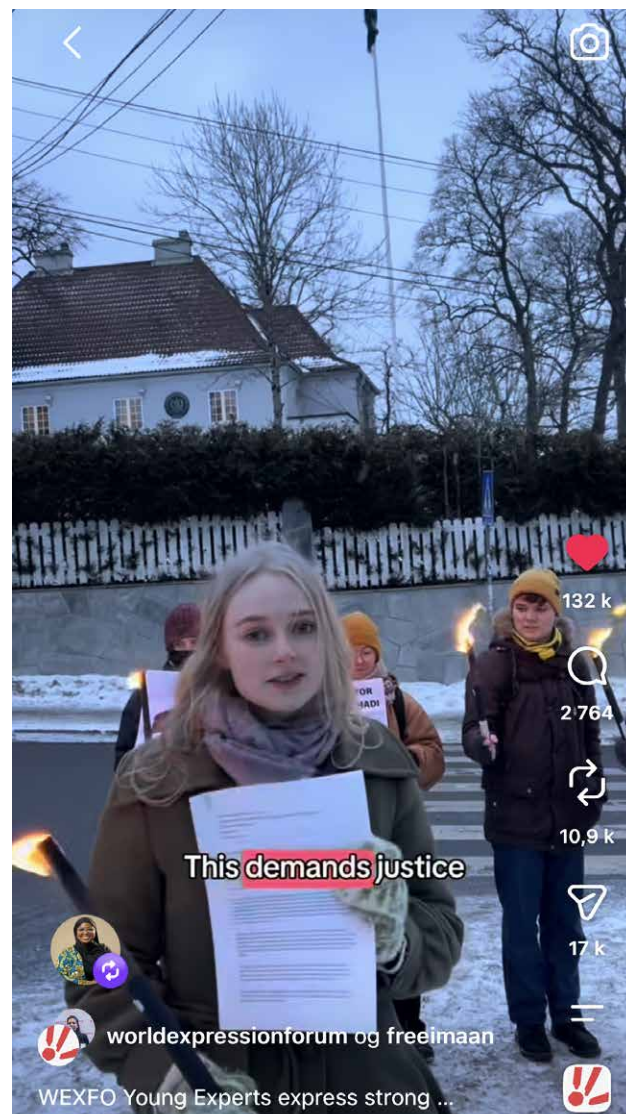
Number of participants

- WEXFO conference 2026: 295 Including:
 - WEXFO More Young Voices: 46
 - WEXFO Utøya Young Experts: 69
- WEXFO Youth Voices: 1,500
- Public Meeting for Freedom of Expression: 150
- WEXFO Take Action: 100
- **Total number of participants 2,045**

Development in attendance figures in recent years:



Other activities, partnerships and contributions



Johanne Fearnley, a WEXFO Young Expert in 2025, is leading a viral campaign to support the release of imprisoned human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir, whom she met through WEXFO. Screenshot: WEXFO

Standing with Imaan Mazari-Hazir

Pakistani human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari-Hazir participated in the WEXFO Young Experts program in 2025 and received the WEXFO Young Inspiration Award for her commitment to freedom of expression and human rights.

During the reporting period, Mazari-Hazir and her husband were arrested and sentenced to 17 years in prison following social media posts critical of the authorities in Pakistan. The case

attracted international attention and raised concerns about freedom of expression, due process and the situation for human rights defenders in the country.

As a result of her imprisonment, Mazari-Hazir was unable to return to Lillehammer as planned to participate in WEXFO 2026. During the forum, she was honored through a dedicated film, a public appeal, and an empty chair symbolizing the voice that was missing from the conversation.

WEXFO has publicly called for the protection of freedom of expression and for a fair legal process in the case. The organization has also supported the Free Imaan campaign, initiated by members of the WEXFO Alumni network. Several campaign films were shared through WEXFO's channels, with the most widely viewed video reaching more than 1.4 million views.

The case was also presented during the WEXFO Take Action Seminar, where participants explored how members of the WEXFO community can coordinate support for individuals facing threats because of their work and expression. The response to Mazari-Hazir's imprisonment demonstrated how relationships built through WEXFO can develop into international solidarity and support when freedom of expression comes under pressure.

WEXFO at Arendalsuka

Arendalsuka is Norway's largest annual arena for public debate and civic engagement, bringing together political, business and civil society leaders from across the country.

In August 2026, WEXFO participated in Arendalsuka through three events addressing freedom of expression and democratic resilience:

- *Freedom of Expression and Self-Censorship: Has It Become More Difficult to Speak Your Mind? (with the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue)*



The Human Rights Tent at Arendalsuka 2026 was practically full during a joint event hosted by the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue and WEXFO. Photo: WEXFO

- *You Can Say What You Want, But Do You Dare? (with the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association, NRK, the Norwegian Publishers Association, the Norwegian Editors' Association and PEN Norway)*
- *Public Debate Under Attack: Disinformation as a Weapon (with Bellona and UTSYN – Centre for Security and Resilience)*

The events formed part of WEXFO's year-round activities and partnership work on freedom of expression, democracy and public discourse.

Reading and literacy

Together with the Norwegian Festival of Literature and Lillehammer Library, WEXFO co-hosted a seminar for teachers and librarians during WEXFO and the Norwegian Festival of Literature in June 2026: Together to Boost Reading.. The seminar focused on reading promotion, literacy development and the role of reading in democratic participation, while

providing a platform for sharing experiences from the Leseløft Lillehammer initiative.

Workshop on political disagreement and dialogue

In collaboration with UTSYN – Centre for Security and Resilience, WEXFO co-hosted a workshop for representatives of Norwegian political youth organizations during WEXFO 2026. The workshop focused on how to navigate difficult political conversations, handle disagreement constructively, and contribute to a broader space for free expression and democratic participation. The initiative connected the conference theme, The Freedom to Disagree, with practical training and dialogue across political differences.

Partnership with Trenčín 2026

In May 2026, WEXFO participated in a conference in Levoča, Slovakia, bringing together organisations involved in cultural and

democratic development projects supported by EEA and Norway Grants.

WEXFO is a partner of Trenčín 2026, the European Capital of Culture, in a collaboration involving the City of Trenčín, the Trenčín 2026 implementation team, Bodø2024 Legacy, the Hamsun Center and more. The partnership focuses on young people’s freedom of expression and democratic participation through cultural activities, dialogue and workshops. As part of the collaboration, a youth delegation from Trenčín participated in WEXFO 2026 in Lillehammer.

Dialogue and democratic resilience

WEXFO partnered with the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) and UTSYN – Centre for Security and Resilience in a seminar for political leaders from the Lillehammer region.

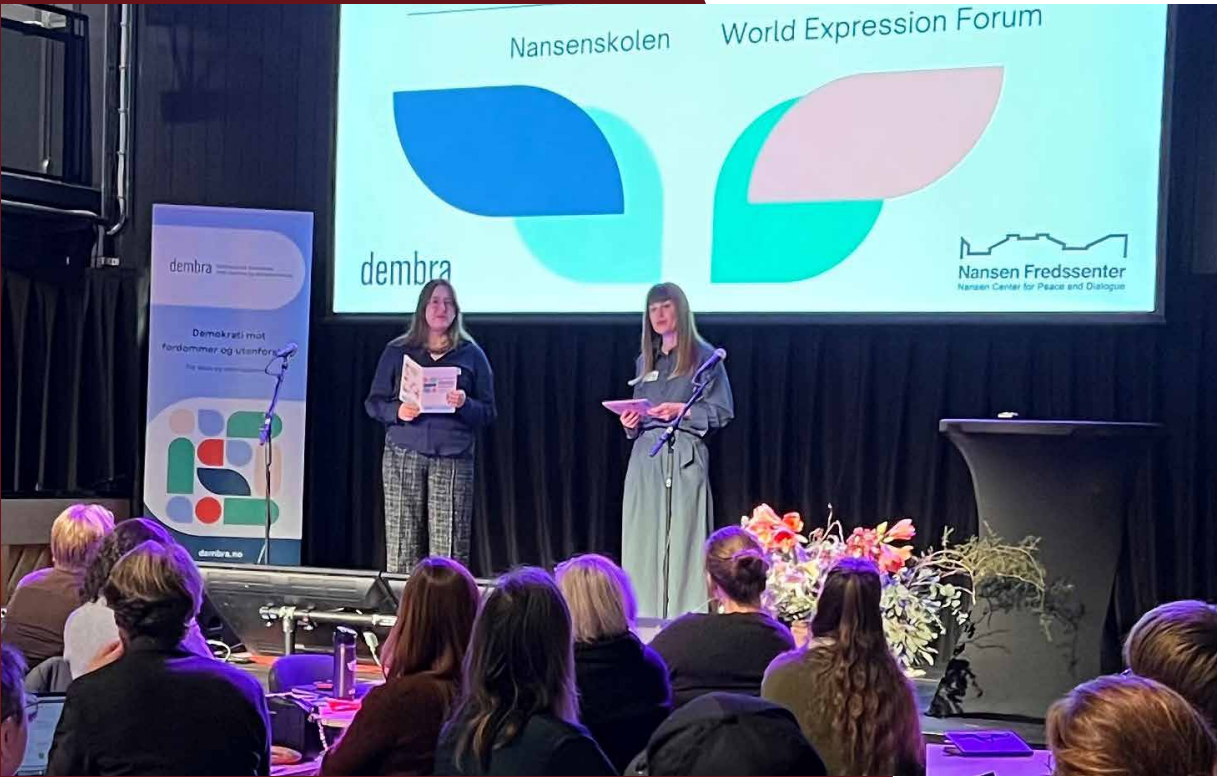
The session explored challenges related to polarization, disinformation, trust and democratic resilience, with a particular focus on how local communities can strengthen inclusion and prevent radicalization.

Dembra Conference

WEXFO contributed to the 2025 Dembra Conference, organized by the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in Lillehammer. WEXFO staff took part as co-hosts and workshop facilitators, including a session on joint efforts by schools, local authorities and partner organizations about the Equal Opportunities to Express Yourself curriculum and development.

WEXFO board member and poet Fatemeh Ekhtesari also contributed through a cultural performance and a panel discussion on the role of art in education. The conference brought together educators, researchers and practitioners working to prevent prejudice, exclusion and group hostility in schools and society.

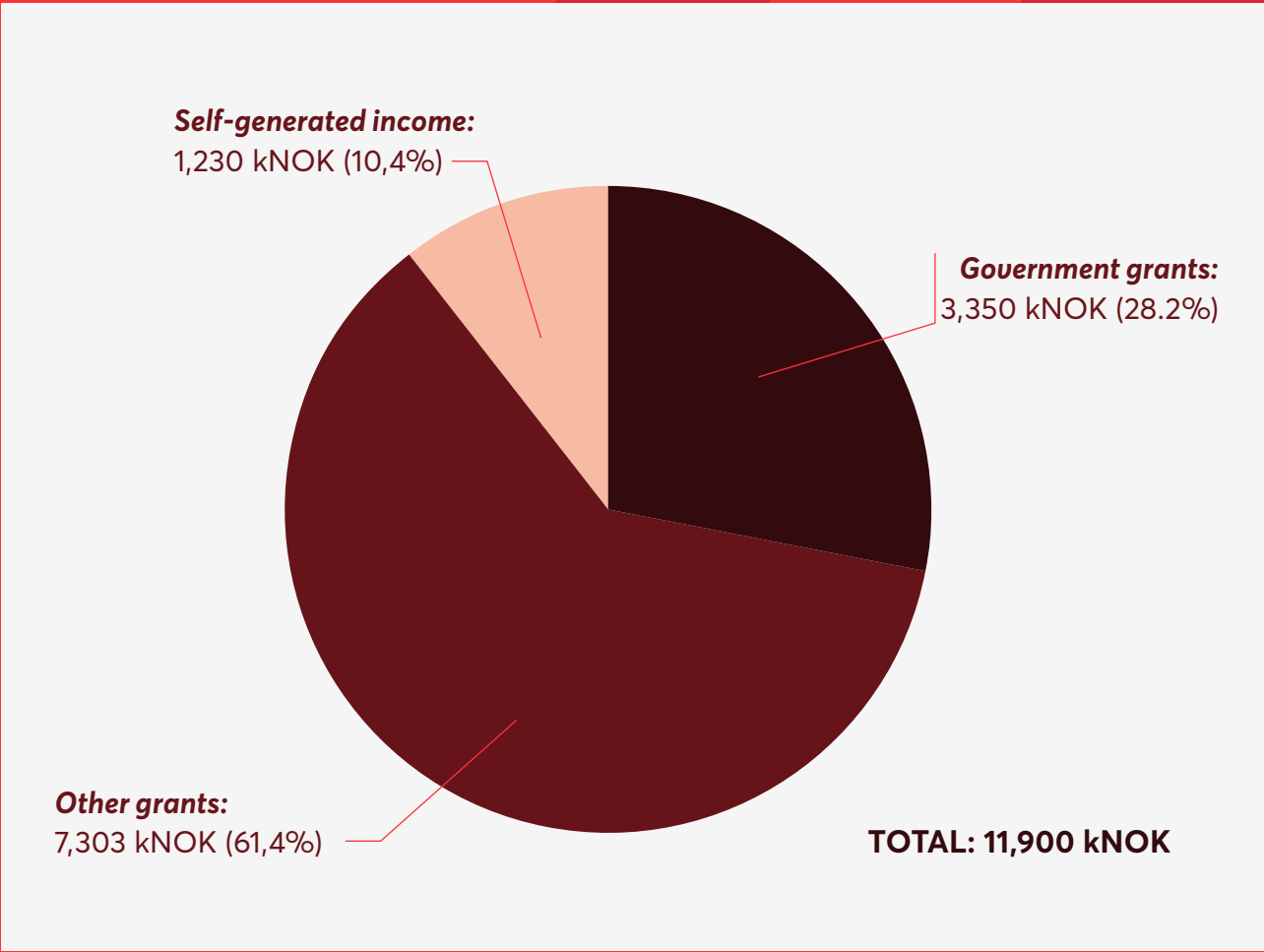
WEXFO Head of Administration Anne-Thea Haavind (right) was one of the hosts of the DEMBRA Conference organized by the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue in November 2025. Photo: WEXFO



Financial overview

Total projected revenue for 2026 was approximately NOK 11,900,000.

The revenue is distributed as follows (in thousands of NOK):



WEXFO is funded through a combination of public grants, private grants, sponsorships and self-generated income. Conference pass sales remain an important source of revenue for the conference, while scholarships and subsidies help ensure participation from a broad range of countries and professional backgrounds.

Local ripple effects

The conference, along with its associated projects, plays an important role for Lillehammer and the local business community. We are committed to using local suppliers, both in our year-round operations and during

the event itself. The scale of the event and the large number of attendees have a significant positive impact on hotels and restaurants in the area. The number of hotel nights we generated this year, along with the rooms booked directly by our partners and participants, represents valuable business for our hotel partner, Scandic. Our regular suppliers of staging and technical services also had busy days, delivering large-scale productions across multiple venues.

Networks

Lillehammer UNESCO Creative City of Literature

WEXFO is part of the steering committee for Lillehammer UNESCO City of Literature, alongside Lillehammer Municipality, the Norwegian Festival of Literature, Innlandet County, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, the Nansen Academy, Rada Reiseliv, and Lillehammer Museum. Through this collaboration, WEXFO has access to the global UNESCO Cities of Literature network and engages with relevant partners within the network when appropriate.

Reading Boost Lillehammer and Reading Futures

Reading Boost Lillehammer is a collaborative initiative involving the Lillehammer schools, the Municipal School Office, Lillehammer Public Library, the Norwegian Festival of Literature, Innlandet County Library, The Cultural Schoolbag, WEXFO and several other partners. The project is anchored in Lillehammer Municipality’s adopted Cultural Strategy 2024–2035, which places strong emphasis on the goal of fostering an enlightened and informed community.

Internationally, Leseløft Lillehammer is now joining Reading Futures, a collaborative project involving partners from EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations), Plateforme Culture (France) and Fundacja Good Culture (Poland). The project has applied for Erasmus+ funding for coordinated activities starting in 2027.

WEXFO Outreach

WEXFO’s outreach activities include digital communication, media engagement and dissemination of conference content, projects and initiatives throughout the year.

Website

The WEXFO website remains the main hub for information about our activities, projects, and events.

During the year, we published 29 news and insight articles and updated key sections of the website, including project pages, partner

information, ticketing, governance information, and volunteer registration.

Website highlights:

- 6,100 active users (+22%)
- 29 new articles published
- Updated project, partner and information pages
- New conference content, films, photos and annual report published

Newsletter

WEXFO’s newsletter continues to be an important channel for reaching partners, participants, supporters, and stakeholders.

Over the past year, subscriber numbers have grown, and engagement has increased.

Newsletter highlights:

- 1,077 subscribers (+18.7%)
- 20,670 emails delivered (+29%)
- 7,170 opens (+42.5%)
- Average open rate: 34.9% (+10.1%)

The average open rate remained well above the nonprofit sector benchmark of 28.6% (Nonprofit Tech for Good).

Social media

WEXFO expanded its digital reach significantly across social media platforms during the year. Growth was particularly strong on Instagram, reflecting increased interest in the forum and engagement with conference content.

Content published:

- Facebook: 119 posts
- Instagram: 280 posts and stories
- LinkedIn: 112 posts

Total impressions:

- Facebook: 270,493
- Instagram: 1,733,006
- LinkedIn: 87,784

Audience growth:

- Facebook: +1,224 followers (+70%) to 2,895 total followers
- Instagram: +4,995 followers (+541%) to 5,919 total followers
- LinkedIn: +407 followers (+56%) to 1,134 total followers

Combined, WEXFO content generated more than 2 million impressions across social media platforms during the reporting period.

Media coverage

WEXFO received broad media coverage in Norway through newspapers, television, radio, podcasts, and digital media.

Coverage focused on keynote speakers and participants including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa, journalist and filmmaker Louis Theroux, and Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, as well as the active involvement of young participants throughout the program.

International media coverage remained more limited but included interviews and reporting by Child Press, coverage in Publishing Perspectives, Borders Literature Online, and references in other international media outlets.

Our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals

WEXFO actively aligns its work with several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Our core mandate is to promote and protect freedom of expression – a fundamental pillar of democracy, the rule of law, and inclusive societies.

In addition, our work supports:

- **Goal 4: Quality Education**, through initiatives like Reading Boost Lillehammer and Equal Opportunities to Express Yourself, which fosters critical thinking and democratic awareness among youth.
- **Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals**, by building strong collaborations with schools, organizations, institutions, and international partners.
- **Goals 12 and 13: Responsible Consumption and Climate Action**, through concrete measures to reduce the environmental impact of our events – including reuse, local accommodation, vegetarian food options, and sustainable transport.

WEXFO is committed to being a socially, democratically, and environmentally responsible actor – contributing to a more sustainable society.



ChildPress reporters covered WEXFO 2026 throughout the conference. Photo: MMM / WEXFO

Supporters

Sponsors

WEXFO is supported by a wide range of sponsors and partners who are essential to our operations and the successful delivery of our programs.

Our sponsors include ARK, Aschehoug, Bokhandlerforeningen, Cappelen Damm, Den norske forleggerforening, Erasmus+ ungdom, Fritt Ord, Groep Algemene Uitgevers (GAU),

Gyldendal, Innlandet fylkeskommune, International Publishers Association, Kopinor, Kultur- og likestillingsdepartementet, Lillehammer kommune, Mediebedriftenes landsforening, Norsk faglitterær forfatter- og oversetterforening, NRK, Sparebank1 Gudbrandsdal, Sparebankstiftelsen DNB, Syndicat national de l'édition, Verlag C.H. Beck, WAN-IFRA.

Collaborators

We collaborate closely with The Norwegian Festival of Literature, Utøya, The Nansen Academy, and Scandic Lillehammer Hotel.



Shareholders

WEXFO is backed by 82 shareholders, all of whom contribute to our mission in various ways. WEXFO welcomed three new shareholders during the year: Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, The Norwegian Authors' Union and Kristenn Einarsson.

The WEXFO shareholders in 2026 are Advokatfirmaet Thallaug, Aller, Alrow Media ApS, Amedia, ARK, Aschehoug, Association of American Publishers (AAP), Associazione Italiana Editori (AIE), Bokhandlerforeningen, Bonnier Books, Bonnier forlag, Börsenverein, Brazilian Book Chamber, Cappelen Damm, Childpress, Civita, Creo, C.H Beck Verlag, De norske bokklubbene, Den norske forleggerforening, Egmont, Eum Publishing House, European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF), Fagpressen, FEP – Federation of European Publishers, Filmforbundet, Finnish Publishers Association, Folkeakademiens landsforbund, Forbundet frie fotografer, Forfatterforbundet, Forfatterforeningen, Forlagshuset Vest, Forlagsfinans, Groep Algemene Uitgevers (GAU), Grafill, Gudbrandsdølen Dagningen, Gyldendal, Hamar Arbeiderblad, Holtzbrinck Buchverlage, Human Rights Foundation, International Publishers Association, Kagge, Kristenn Einarsson, Lillehammer kommune, Lillehammer kultur, Mediebedriftenes landsforening, Mimeta, Must, Nansen fredssenter, Nansenskolen, NOPA, Norli, Norsk bibliotekforening, Norske dramatikerer forbund, Norsk faglitterær forfatter- og oversetterforening, Norsk litteraturfestival, Norsk musikkråd, Norsk PEN, Norsk presseforbund, Norsk skuespillerforbund, Norsk teater- og orkesterforening, Norstedts, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, NTB, Odd Øie, Piratförlaget, Polaris Media, Publishers Association UK, Riksmålsforbundet, Sahoipyong, Samlaget, Schibsted News Media, Stiftelsen Lillehammer museum, Stiftelsen Tinius, Svenska Förläggareföreningen, Syndicat national de l'édition, Tidningsutgivarna, Torleif Dahls kulturbibliotek, TV 2, TV 2 Skole, Vigmostad og Bjørke, WAN-IFRA.

Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Ressa and Lillehammer Mayor Hans Olav Sundfør on the opening day of WEXFO 2026. Photo: MMM / WEXFO



Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre was welcomed to WEXFO by CEO Ingunn Trosholmen, Chair Mads Nygaard and Lillehammer Mayor Hans Olav Sundfør. Photo: MMM / WEXFO

Organization

Board

Mads Nygaard (Chair), Anne Bergman, Trine Skei Grande, José Borghino, Marit Borkenhagen, Aage Borchgrevink, Kristenn Einarsson, Celina Jerman Bright-Taylor, Elisabeth O. Sjaastad, Helje Solberg, Heela Yoon, Khin Thandar Htay, Fatemeh Ekhtesari, Felicia Anthonio.

Program Committee

Arizza Ann Nocum (Chair), Aage Borchgrevink, Felicia Anthonio, Carlos Egaña, Bokani King, Joakim Lie, Anushani Alagarajah, Sam Rechek, Martijn David, Oksana Brovko, Reihane Taravati, Khaled Emam, Sarah McLaughlin.

Nomination Committee

Ingvild Kogstad Brodal (Chair), Margit Ketterle, Karina Thyra Cordova, Veslemøy Østrem, Morten Gjeltén.

Alumni Working Group

Frances An, Kiyra Baloch, Atta Khaled, Hiqmat Sungdeme Saani.

Administration

Ingunn Trosholmen (Chief Executive Officer), Anne-Thea Haavind (Head of Administration), Julia Dietze (Producer), Hilde Fauskerud (Project Manager WEXFO Youth), Andreas Gjone (Communications and Marketing Manager).



Photo: MMM / WEXFO



Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO

More than 50 speakers from around the world contributed on stage and in workshops during this year's WEXFO, including Maria Ressa (top), Sam Rehek, Megan Phelps-Roper, Arizza Nocum (conference host), Hanna Ustynova, Fatemeh Ekhtesari, and Zyma Islam.



Norwegian Minister of Culture Lubna Jaffery opened the final conference session, which featured speakers including filmmaker Louis Theroux. Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO



Photo: MMM / WEXFO



Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO

Moving forward

In 2026/2027, WEXFO will continue to develop its established events and the forum as a year-round platform for freedom of expression, democratic participation and collaboration.

A key priority will be to strengthen engagement with our core target groups, including youth and young leaders. We will continue to expand opportunities for learning, collaboration, and inspiration, both during the annual forum and throughout the year.

Building on the growth of the WEXFO Alumni network, we will place greater emphasis on creating long-term value for participants. The response to the Free Imaan campaign demonstrated how connections formed through WEXFO can lead to collaboration and solidarity across borders.

WEXFO will work to strengthen its presence in Norway and on the global stage. We will continue to develop partnerships and activities that connect freedom of expression with reading, education, democracy and civic participation. Through events, projects and public engagement, WEXFO will contribute to local and global conversations on the challenges facing freedom of expression and democratic societies.

Interested in collaborating? Please get in touch.



Photo: MMM / WEXFO



Photo: Øystein Nordås / WEXFO



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EXPRESSION
FORUM

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