

Journalism is a public good



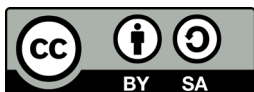
WORLD TRENDS IN

Freedom of Expression and Media Development

GLOBAL REPORT 2021/2022

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**Journalism
is a public good**

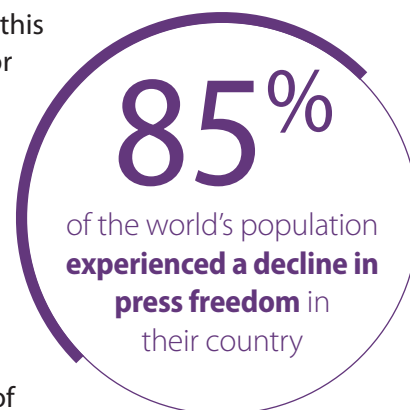
WORLD TRENDS IN
**Freedom of
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Journalism is a public good

Independent journalism—the kind that favours public interest over political, commercial, or factional agendas—is in peril. The rapid erosion of the business models underpinning media sustainability has deepened a crisis in the freedom and safety of journalists around the world. The global response to these challenges in the coming decade will be decisive for the survival of a democratic public sphere.

Over the past five years, approximately 85 percent of the world’s population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country. Even in countries with long traditions of safeguarding free and independent journalism, financial and technological transformations have forced news outlets, especially those serving local communities, to close. With readership and advertising markets moving online, advertising revenue for newspapers plummeted by nearly half in the ten-year period ending in 2019. The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic and its global economic impact have exacerbated this trend, now threatening to create an “extinction level” event for independent journalism outlets.

The 2021/2022 global edition of the flagship series of reports on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development examines these questions with a special focus on “journalism as a public good”. The findings are grounded in data-based analysis, conducted by UNESCO in partnership with Data-Pop Alliance, of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists, and supplemented by original research by Economist Impact conducted for this Report.



**“Since wars begin in the minds of men and women
it is in the minds of men and women that the
defences of peace must be constructed.”**

Foreword



The year 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, from which the United Nations, following in the footsteps of African journalists, committed to the development of free, pluralistic, and independent media—a principle that lies at the very heart of UNESCO's mandate.

During COVID-19, when access to quality information has been a life-and-death issue, we have once again seen how our societies need journalists and media professionals to inform citizens in an increasingly complex world. However, the pandemic has also underlined, and sometimes aggravated, the threats weighing on the media—from financial fragility to attacks on press freedom. These threats can even be existential, as António Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has highlighted.

To counteract these threats, we first need to measure and understand them. This is what UNESCO does, by acting as a global observer and by publishing this landmark report: *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. This work would not be possible without the unwavering support of our partners, especially Sweden, through the Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists.

The 2021/2022 edition of the World Trends Report, which builds on research carried out with researchers and universities in partnership with Economist Impact, monitors the evolution of these trends since 2016. Between the persistence of these phenomena and their drastic acceleration, we can make out three major challenges to accessing information.

The first continues to be the safety of journalists. The Report underlines the unique nature of this issue by showing that, in the countries concerned, violence against journalists cannot simply be explained by overall homicide rates or impunity for violent crimes in general. The Report also highlights the new ramifications of this pernicious problem, including the development of online violence and violence specifically targeting women journalists.

The second challenge—freedom of the press and information—encompasses many issues in the digital age. First, there is the regulation of online discourse, which, if not accurately defined and balanced, can endanger freedom of expression, as our research shows. There is also the question of the growing role of online platforms and their algorithms, which are often opaque when it comes to access to information, despite the proliferation of false information and hate speech. The last subject of concern is editorial independence, which is sometimes lacking in the media—often due to a lack of financial independence.

This leads us to the third challenge: the economic viability of the media. Over the past five years, global newspaper advertising revenues have halved. At a time when five digital platforms rake in more than half of all advertising revenue, the media must find new economic models to survive.

These observations are at the heart of the Windhoek+30 Declaration, adopted in 2021 on World Press Freedom Day to reaffirm the principles of Windhoek in the light of contemporary challenges. And, because information is a global common good, indispensable to open dialogue within and between our societies, UNESCO works every day with governments, media, online platforms, and all players in the information economy.

A handwritten signature of Audrey Azoulay in black ink, written over a horizontal line.

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO

Acknowledgements

The *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* series of flagship reports (World Trends Report) is supported by UNESCO's Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists. The programme is a Special Account which enables UNESCO to address complex issues and direct funds to emerging priorities in the fields of freedom of expression, media freedom, safety of journalists, access to information, media pluralism, community media, and media and information literacy.

The 2021/2022 global edition of the World Trends Report received additional funds from Sweden to strengthen data collection and analysis, in partnership with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Sweden has supported the World Trends Report series since its inception by sponsoring a General Conference resolution in 2011, and through each of its editions since then.

UNESCO's editorial direction for the World Trends Report is led by Guy Berger, Guilherme Canela, and Rachel Pollack, who coordinates the series and served as publication manager for this edition.

Nicholas Benequista served as lead editor and a chapter author to the 2021/2022 Global Report, reinforced by the invaluable contributions of associate editor Kate Musgrave. Annina Claesson provided important research and editorial support.

The preparation of this Report would not have been possible without the contributions, insights, and data provided by numerous experts in freedom of expression and media development.

The special focus chapter, "Journalism as a public good," was authored primarily by Matthew Fraser. It was supported by data collection and analysis undertaken by Economist Impact for this Report, led by Jonathan Birdwell, Antonia Kerle, and Ailia Haider.

The chapter "Press freedom in times of crisis and transformation," was primarily authored by Nicholas Benequista, drawing on the data collection and analysis of Data-Pop Alliance, including Ivette Yáñez Soria, Daniela Arregui Coka, Enrique Bonilla, Mateo Rojas, Guillermo Romero, Alina Sotolongo, and Zinnya del Villar.

"Threats that silence: Trends in the safety of journalists," previously published in November 2021 as a UNESCO Insights discussion paper, was led by Theresa Chorbacher, with support from Fuensanta Amorós Cascales, Sara Bonyadi, Annina Claesson, and Elisa Kirkland. Aldo Magoga provided expert statistical analysis.

"Better data for better understanding of freedom of expression and media development," together with the framework for data gaps presented in that chapter, was led by Emmanuel Letouzé, supported by Ivette Yáñez Soria.

This global edition built on the knowledge generated through several In Focus reports and issue briefs produced or underway under the World Trends Report brand. External authors included: Maciek Bednarski, Emily Bell, Mariana Francese Coutinho, Marius Dragomir, William Horsley, Toby Mendel, Tarlach McGonagle, Laura Notess, Julie Posetti, Andrew Puddephatt, Meera Selva, Frank Smyth, and Arthur Zimin.

The conceptualization of this Report benefited from an expert consultation convened by the UNESCO Communication and Information Sector and UNESCO Institute of Statistics in February 2020. We are grateful for the input of the participants in that seminar: Martin Becerra, Elda Brogi, Amy Brouillette, Carolyn Byerly, Marius Dragomir, Simon Ellis, Richard Fletcher, Kibirige M. Francis, Nafisa Hasanova, Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Giacomo Mazzone, François Nel, Mark Nelson, José Pessoa, Vincent Peyrègne, Sara Wilbourne, Sally-Ann Wilson, and Dwayne Winseck. Simon Ellis provided a background paper on monitoring the media and the internet, which informed that discussion.

Discussions alongside the presentation of the Highlights of this Report at the 41st UNESCO General Conference also informed its revisions and finalization. For that, we are grateful to the participants of the Communication and Information Commission of the General Conference, as well as to the speakers and panellists at that event: UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay, Swedish Minister for Culture and Democracy Amanda Lind, Joseph Stiglitz, Catalina Botero, Antonia Kerle, and Shahir Zahine.

Numerous other experts in their fields contributed to the framing and revisions of this Report. UNESCO would especially like to thank Sulemana Braimah, Silvia Chocarro, Mijal Iastrebnier, Larry Kilman, Hayes Mabweazara, Daoud Kuttab, Anya Schiffrin, and Alan Soon for their time and thorough review.

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Information for this Report was derived from hundreds of academic and institutional sources, as well as publicly available databases.

Numerous organizations were also integral in sharing proprietary databases and insights regarding the use of that data, complementing the many publicly available resources cited throughout the Report. We particularly thank Access Now, the Centre for Law and Democracy, Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información (CELE), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Cyrrilla, Gallup, Global Disinformation Index, International Press Institute (IPI), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Pew Research Center, the Poynter Institute, PwC, Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Westminster, WAN-IFRA, and Zenith.

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Key findings



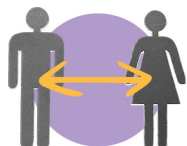
Press freedom continues its downward trend across the globe. Approximately 85 percent of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country over the past five years, according to analysis based on data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute. Measures responding to the COVID-19 pandemic were also frequently used to justify violations of press freedom.



New laws and policies restrict freedom of expression online. Dozens of laws have been adopted or amended since 2016 that contain overly vague language or disproportionate punishments that threaten online freedom of expression. Additionally, in the last five years, government requests for content removal on major internet platforms have doubled.



Audiences and revenue continue to move online, placing news media's traditional business models in grave danger. The number of social media users worldwide leapt from 2.3 billion in 2016 to 4.2 billion in 2021, and advertising revenues have shifted rapidly towards internet companies and away from news outlets. Google and Meta¹ now receive approximately half of all global digital advertising spending, while global newspaper advertising revenue dropped by half in the last five years.



Progress in closing the gender gap in newsrooms, in bylines, and in the news itself has largely stagnated. Women continue to be underrepresented at leadership levels in news organizations and on "hard news" beats like politics, while both qualitative and quantitative studies suggest persistent biases in women's representation in the news and the marginalization of women as expert sources. During the COVID-19 pandemic, only 27 percent of health specialists quoted in the media were women, despite the fact that women make up approximately half of health specialists worldwide.



A deluge of mis- and disinformation has contributed to years of declining trust in media worldwide. The growing challenge of false and misleading content was brought into sharp relief during the COVID-19 pandemic, so much so as to be dubbed a "disinfodemic." At the same time, according to several reports, trust in media and information sources has continued to decline over the past five years.



Amid controversies, recent years have seen mounting calls to end the opacity of internet companies' moderation and curation of content. Greater transparency about their operations would open these entities up to public scrutiny and greater accountability. Both independent reports and high-profile whistleblowers have flagged the need for greater transparency across the board, especially regarding the companies' governance and accountability around data holdings and privacy, fact-checking, and community standards and implementation thereof, including moderation of hate speech and mis- and disinformation.

¹ In October 2021, the Facebook company rebranded as Meta. Throughout this Report, "Meta" refers to the company and its holdings, including WhatsApp and Instagram, while "Facebook" refers strictly to that platform.



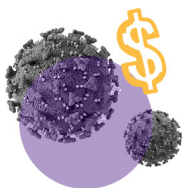
Journalism remains a deadly profession—in nine times out of ten, the murder of a journalist is unresolved. From 2016 to the end of 2021, UNESCO recorded 455 journalists killed for their work or while on the job. Though this shows slight improvement compared to the previous five years, at the same time, just 13 percent of cases recorded by UNESCO since 2006 have been judicially resolved, threatening a continued cycle of violence.



Other threats against journalists, online and off-line, continue to grow. Journalist imprisonment is at record highs, while online violence and harassment spurs self-censorship and, in some cases, physical attacks. Those threats inordinately affect women journalists and those who represent minority groups: 73 percent of women journalists responding to a survey by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists had experienced online violence in the course of their work.



The burgeoning data ecosystem offers the chance to improve our understanding of and support for the media sector and freedom of expression. However, in the countries and communities where journalism is most at risk, the health of the news system on issues like ownership, pluralism, independence, and viability often remains a black box. Using data to inform policies and solutions must first overcome significant gaps in availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability.



In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, trustworthy, independent media proved itself to be a lifesaving public good. But it is under systemic economic threat and needs support. The impact of the pandemic worsened the already fragile viability of news outlets, which collectively constitute a pluralistic and independent media sector. New policies and measures are urgently needed to ensure that journalism can continue to function as a public good—these include public financing for trusted news outlets, enhanced support for genuine public service media, and a redoubling of donor aid and philanthropic investments in news production.



Actions to support press freedom and media development have converged to produce the Windhoek+30 Declaration, a roadmap for the future outlining principles that were endorsed by UNESCO Member States in 2021. The Declaration calls attention to the ongoing value to democracy and sustainable development of free, pluralistic, and independent media where journalists can work in safety. It further signals the urgent importance of securing economic viability for news, transparency of internet companies, and increasing media and information competencies amongst the public.

Introduction

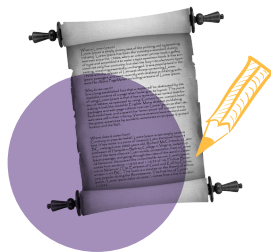
About this report

Enhancing the status of press freedom is central to UNESCO's mandate to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image as a vehicle for advancing peace and dialogue. The Organization recognizes freedom of expression is both a fundamental human right in itself and an enabler of other rights.

In this spirit, UNESCO publishes this study as the third global edition of its flagship series of reports on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* (World Trends Report). The World Trends Report responds to a key task assigned to UNESCO by its Members States at the 36th session of the General Conference, which requested that the Organization “monitor, in close cooperation with other United Nations bodies and other relevant organizations active in this field, the status of press freedom and safety of journalists...and to report on the developments in these fields to the General Conference.”²

This edition of the World Trends Report places a special focus on understanding the role of journalism as a public good, which in turn is a key component of the wider conceptualization of information as a public good. The findings are grounded in data-driven analysis, conducted by UNESCO in partnership with Data-Pop Alliance, of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists, and supplemented by original research by Economist Impact that was commissioned for this Report.

Press freedom around the world, 30 years after the original Windhoek Declaration



“The worldwide trend towards democracy and freedom of information and expression is a fundamental contribution to the fulfilment of human aspirations.”

Windhoek Declaration, adopted 3 May 1991³

This statement, taken from the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, was written in a time of change and optimism and augured the further progress to come.

In the years immediately preceding and following the Windhoek Declaration, across the world, countries put in place reforms for more open, competitive politics, including the liberalization of media markets. These reforms were a boon to the freedom, pluralism, and independence of news media.

² UNESCO. 2011. Records of the General Conference 36th session Paris, 25 October–10 November 2011. Volume 1: Resolutions. Paris, UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_general-conference-36_resolutions.pdf.

³ United Nations. 1991. *Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000090759>. (Full text available in Appendix A.)

Kwame Karikari, a scholar of African media and the founder of the Media Foundation for West Africa, described the transformation he had witnessed in press freedom during the wave of democratization in which the Windhoek Declaration was penned.

The media boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, accompanying the movement for democratic reforms in Africa, transformed the continent's media landscape virtually overnight. It ended near-absolute government control and monopoly and ushered in a vibrant pluralism. Suddenly the streets of Africa's capitals were awash with newspapers. The 'culture of silence', imposed first under colonialism and then by post-colonial military dictatorships and autocratic one-party states, was rudely broken.⁴

The Windhoek Declaration also paved the way for the creation of World Press Freedom Day by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and shaped the climate for the recurring publication of this Report. The World Trends Report offers a global and systematic evaluation, drawing from multiple sources, of the key principles of the Windhoek Declaration: media freedom, media pluralism, media independence, and the safety of journalists.

BOX 1-1:

Press freedom as media freedom, pluralism, and independence

At the heart of press freedom is the fundamental right to freedom of expression, which entails the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and across all frontiers. This is a right of every individual, and press freedom particularly protects this right in relation to those who seek, receive, and impart information for the purposes of journalism.

Following the original Windhoek Declaration, UNESCO recognizes press freedom as resting on the three pillars of media freedom, media pluralism, and media independence. Press freedom is made meaningful when all three distinctive components are in place, and it is this dispensation that is essential if a society is to enjoy journalism as a public good. Alongside media freedom, pluralism, and independence, the safety of journalists (as discussed in a later chapter of this Report) has been recognized as another precondition for press freedom.

The notion of **media freedom** has historically emphasized the freedom of journalists from the control, censorship, or harassment of the state and other powerful interests. It also extends in the digital age to the freedom to publish and distribute content on the internet. It implies a legal and statutory environment that allows journalistic institutions to pursue transparency, accountability, and public interest as a matter of free expression. This requires protection for the profession from undue restrictions or legal threats. Media freedom is also strengthened by constitutional, statutory, and/or policy measures that guarantee public access to information. Media freedom is not exclusively limited to media institutions, but rather covers all individuals or institutions using media platforms.

⁴ Karikari, K. 2010. African media breaks 'culture of silence.' Africa Renewal, August. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2010/african-media-breaks-%E2%80%98culture-silence%E2%80%99-0>.

The notion of **media pluralism** relates to choice and diversity and to issues such as concentration, centralization, and monopolization of media-related institutions. Media pluralism can be viewed both as an aspect of production or supply, and from the perspective of news consumers. The content of news is relevant to the understanding of pluralism. For true pluralism, news sources must be accessible and meet the needs and interests of a diverse audience, including women, youth, rural communities, and linguistic and cultural minorities. Pluralism further encompasses consideration of user-generated content and of media consumption in a communications environment increasingly shaped by algorithms. Pluralism implies the existence of a vibrant public space where a plurality of voices can inform public dialogue and debate.

The notion of **media independence** emphasizes the ability of journalists and newsrooms to carry out their work in the absence of outside pressures, including political and commercial pressures. It suggests the practice of journalism driven by public interest and professional journalistic ethics and protocols, including verification, fairness, and transparency. Media independence relies not only upon the professional autonomy of those who produce journalism, but also upon the regulatory and self-regulatory bodies that govern the industry in line with international standards for freedom of expression and broad social support for journalistic ethics. The degree to which there is media and information literacy, with public appreciation of press freedom and trust in news media, is also a factor in assessing independence.

To put emphasis on an essential component of communications content, UNESCO dedicated World Press Freedom Day 2021 to “information as a public good”. This recognizes the distinctive value of verified information within the contemporary wider content mix of other kinds of content, such as entertainment content as well as the proliferation of mis- and disinformation. Free, pluralistic, and independent journalism is a key engine that contributes to “information as a public good” through the supply of news and informed analysis. This leads to the recognition of journalism itself as a public good.

“The theme of this year’s World Press Freedom Day, ‘Information as a Public Good’, underlines the indisputable importance of verified information.

It calls attention to the essential role of free and professional journalists in producing and disseminating this information, by tackling misinformation and other harmful content.”

Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO⁵

The primary outcome of 2021’s World Press Freedom Day was the adoption of the Windhoek+30 Declaration (Appendix B). Thirty years after the adoption of the original Windhoek Declaration, the principles of freedom, pluralism, and independence were reaffirmed and built upon in order to reflect contemporary needs around press freedom. Thus, the new Declaration also draws attention to the principles of media viability, transparency of internet companies, and media and information literacy as key elements needed to tackle the challenges facing the media and information landscape today.

⁵ UNESCO. 2021. World Press Freedom Day 3 May 2021, “Information as a Public Good”. <https://en.unesco.org/news/world-press-freedom-day-3-may-2021-information-public-good>.

This updated conception, amounting to six principles and additionally referencing the importance of safety for journalism, won the support of UNESCO's 193 Member States at their 41st General Conference in November 2021. This took the form of a resolution, adopted by acclamation, to endorse the principles of the Windhoek+30 Declaration.

Similarly reflecting these developments, this Report shows the value of re-evaluating how we understand, safeguard, and measure press freedom and media development. Liberalizing reforms for press freedom continue to be essential—but taken alone, they do not provide a blueprint for meeting the current challenges of mis- and disinformation availed through internet companies, the failing business models of journalism, and how audiences today produce and share huge volumes of communications content.

The future of news, and even the future of the technological infrastructure that underpins the news industry, is uncertain. It will be determined by innumerable decisions—large and small, local and global—about political and corporate power, the role of regulations, tax policies, criminal laws, newsroom procedures, technological standards, codes of ethics, and international development targets, among a range of other factors that can be shaped by collective will.

Unfortunately, the trends captured in this report are not as optimistic as they were 30 years ago. There is a significant risk that the future of media will be determined by interests, systems, and technologies that do not prioritize human rights, democracy, and sustainable development as their primary *raison d'être*.

That is why the principles of the Windhoek and the Windhoek+30 Declarations require a constant reassessment of how well we are delivering on their promise. The World Trends Report approaches that task beginning with a special chapter on understanding the role of journalism as a public good, which unpacks the existential challenges posed by the economic crisis of news media viability.

The Report then examines global trends in media freedom, media pluralism, and media independence over the past five years, followed by a chapter on trends in the safety of journalists.⁶ The issues around mis- and disinformation and the related challenge of internet transparency are woven into all of these sections, and particularly tackled in relation to independence. Attention to the role of the audience and the associated need for media and information literacy is especially present in the discussions around pluralism.

Each of these sections is supported by extensive data analysis conducted for this Report; drawing from that research process and in light of the ever-evolving data ecosystem, the Report then reflects on the use, impact, and need to improve data collection on these issues and provides recommendations to close data gaps. It ends with a forward-looking conclusion on how to meet the challenges facing freedom of expression and media development, delivering on the promise of the original Windhoek Declaration and Windhoek+30.

⁶ An earlier version of this chapter was released as: UNESCO. 2021. *Threats that silence: Trends in the safety of journalists*. Insights discussion paper from the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379589>.

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Introduction

The benefits of a free, pluralistic, and independent press are widely recognized and valued as a necessary condition of an open society and healthy democracy, as well as being a positive factor for sustainable development. The vital role of the press has been enshrined in national constitutions and international declarations and reaffirmed in countless legal cases. Yet, in many countries today, journalism is in crisis.

“Professional, independent journalism is critical for providing populations with life-saving information during [the COVID-19] crisis and plays an essential role in building and strengthening our democracies, justice and peace. We are committed to leading global efforts to overcome this challenge.”

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO⁷

Many news organizations globally are facing severe economic challenges due largely to shrinking advertising revenues. Many have been forced to reduce staff or shut down altogether. The safety of reporters online and off-line continues to be precarious. In some countries, governments are monitoring, censoring, and even imprisoning journalists. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a further blow to the economic viability of already-struggling news outlets. The cruel paradox is that, in these times of crisis, journalism is needed now more than ever. As Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has argued, in a post-COVID world, journalism must be a vaccine against disinformation.⁸

Contemporary challenges underscore why journalism is so urgently needed to provide citizens with access to information. But journalism’s survival cannot be taken for granted, even in countries with a long tradition of respecting press freedom. The existential threats to news media require proactive efforts to support journalism as a public good. Some groups, such as the Forum on Information and Democracy, involving 43 countries, have called for a “New Deal” for journalism.⁹ New policies and measures are urgently needed—including public financing for trusted news outlets, enhanced support for public service media, and a redoubling of donor aid and philanthropic investments in news production—to ensure that journalism can continue to function as a public good.

Understanding journalism as a public good

The viability, independence, and long-term sustainability of journalism is a subject now discussed with increasing urgency. In numerous countries, journalism previously benefited from relatively stable financing and coherent professional values and practices. Professional news media were widely trusted as reliable information sources. Over the last several years, however, digital companies have disrupted journalism’s traditional economic model, which was based largely on advertising revenues. Meanwhile public service media (also often partially financed by advertising) have been victims of cuts in public spending. Advertising revenues for media companies have dramatically shifted to digital over the past five years: internet advertising expenditure rose from a 35 percent global share in 2016 to 54 percent in 2021. According to data from Zenith, obtained and analysed by Economist Impact for this Report, that figure is estimated to rise to almost 60 percent in 2023.¹⁰ The “duopoly” internet platforms, Google and Meta, capture more than half of that digital advertising spending.¹¹

⁷ UNESCO. 2020. “UNESCO and the World Association of News Publishers join forces to ensure survival of world’s media”. <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-and-world-association-news-publishers-join-forces-ensure-survival-worlds-media-0>

⁸ Reporters Without Borders (RSF). 2021. *2021 World Press Freedom Index: Journalism, the vaccine against disinformation, blocked in more than 130 countries*. <https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries>.

⁹ RSF. 2021. The Forum on Information and Democracy calls for a New Deal on Journalism. RSF, 15 June. <https://rsf.org/en/news/forum-information-and-democracy-calls-new-deal-journalism>.

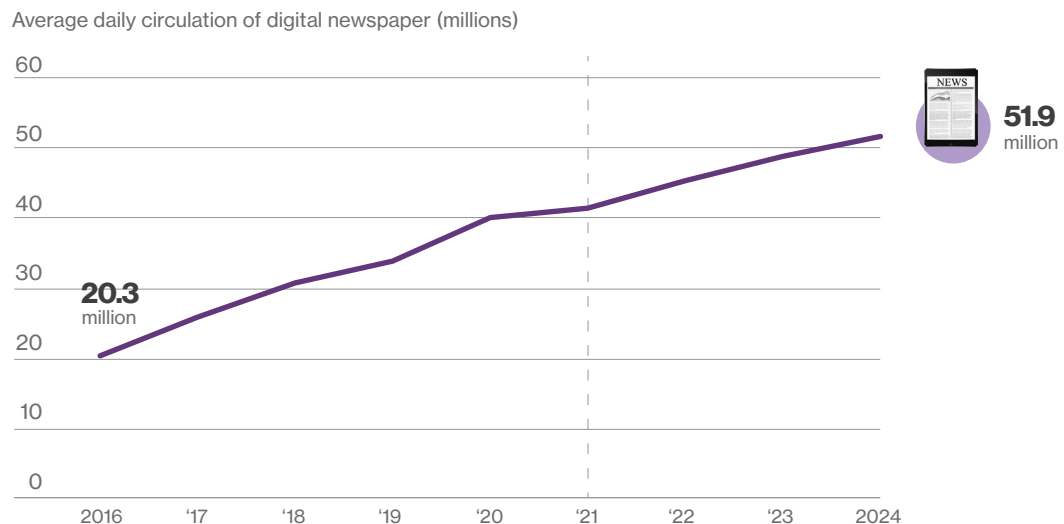
¹⁰ Zenith. 2020. *Advertising Expenditure Forecasts*, December 2020.

¹¹ Cramer-Flood, E. 2021. Duopoly still rules the global digital ad market, but Alibaba and Amazon are on the prowl. eMarketer. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/duopoly-still-rules-global-digital-ad-market-alibaba-amazon-on-prowl>.

While digital developments continue to disrupt the news media landscape, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the longer-term trend towards accelerated growth of internet advertising and digital news circulation¹² (Figure 2-1). The pandemic triggered an initial downturn in global advertising spending (ad spend) that further eroded the viability of many media companies. While global ad spend showed signs of recovery—an estimated 14 to 19 percent increase in 2021 following a 2.5 percent decline in 2020—the rebound was largely in digital ad spend, where news media organizations lack competitive strength.¹³ As a result, this trend has strengthened the position of the major internet services in the advertising market.

FIGURE 2-1:
Digital news circulation is projected to continue exponential growth, forcing innovations in news media's traditional business model

Source: PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2021-2025, analysis by Economist Impact for this Report.



In a context of reduced ad revenue, many news organizations, both traditional and pure-play digital, have found themselves struggling to survive with reduced budgets and shrinking staff capacity. For instance, in February 2021, digital news brands BuzzFeed and HuffPost merged to strengthen their position in a shrinking advertising market for news media. Shortly thereafter, however, the newsrooms of these brands faced restructuring, mass layoffs, and shutdowns.¹⁴ In both developed and developing countries, the situation is much worse for small media outlets, local news producers, and other less financially stable media organizations, exacerbating trends that were ongoing prior to the pandemic.

On the other hand, the crisis has forced many news outlets to innovate and experiment with new business models. This has produced some encouraging trends. Digital technologies have dramatically reduced the cost of access to newsgathering tools, lowering start-up costs for players such as *Rappler*, *Malaysiakini*, *Le Desk*, *La Silla Vacía*, the *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project* (OCCRP), and other investigative and community-based journalism projects. News start-ups can enter the market relatively easily and produce high-quality, independent journalism. This has increased media pluralism worldwide by diversifying the sources of information beyond traditional mainstream media, although the way this plays out is particularly complex, as is unpacked in the next chapter.

¹² Data on news circulation trends was obtained from PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2021–2025 and analysed by Economist Impact for this Report. PwC data on circulation trends are divided into podcast monthly listeners, newspaper average daily unit circulation digital, newspaper average daily unit circulation print, and newspaper average daily unit circulation total.

¹³ MAGNA. 2021. MAGNA Global Advertising Forecast, June 2021. MAGNA, 13 June. <https://magnaglobal.com/magna-global-advertising-forecasts-june-2021/>.

Wall Street Journal. 2021. Global ad spending expecting to rebound faster than previously forecast. *Wall Street Journal*, 14 June. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-ad-spending-expected-to-rebound-faster-than-previously-forecast-11623666600>.

¹⁴ Flynn, K. 2021. BuzzFeed lays off 70 HuffPost staffers in massive 'restructure' less than a month after acquisition. CNN Business, 9 March. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/09/media/huffpost-layoffs/index.html>.

At the same time, the digital sphere is now overwhelmed with a multitude of content producers—institutional information sources, new media practitioners, activists, advertisers, influencers, spin doctors, and politicians—competing for the public’s attention. Traditional values underpinning journalistic practices of impartiality and verification are coming under greater pressure from social and political polarization. And, increasingly, news consumption is mediated by gatekeeper platforms that tend to prioritise other kinds of content, and which only under pressure in some regions have begun to share some revenues with those producing the news.

Against this backdrop, the value of journalism as a “public good” is a matter of increasing interest. Like other public goods, journalism plays a critical role in promoting a healthy civic sphere. It does so by providing citizens with trusted information and facts they need to participate in a free and open society. Journalism simultaneously acts as an independent watchdog and agenda-setter. But for journalism to function as a public good, it needs to operate in a viable environment so that it can produce high quality, trustworthy news and information. The question of public financing is more relevant today than it ever has been.

“Information is a public good...and as a public good, it needs public support.”

Joseph E. Stiglitz
Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences¹⁵

As UNESCO noted alongside World Press Freedom Day in 2021, while there has been a rise in pluralistic media environments, there are many economic challenges for the durability of doing journalism in these organizations. “The production of local information, such as local news, is under great stress. At the same time, humanity faces a confusing abundance of content that drowns out even those facts that are produced and circulated at both global and local levels.”¹⁶

Most public goods require public investment in order to provide the services valued by citizens. Journalism with a public service mission is no different. Key questions that need to be considered are: How can journalism be supported as a public good without compromising its independence from the state and powerful economic interests? If subsidies are one partial solution, can quality journalism be subsidized without political interference? Can there be a significant increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to media, and in philanthropic donations to public service journalism? What is the role of journalism produced and paid for by non-media organizations?

This chapter explores these questions while making a case for journalism as a public good.

What are public goods?

Public goods are generally defined as services or commodities available to everyone in society without exclusion. These include health care and education (and supporting institutions), roads, street lighting, and parks. All citizens have access to and/or benefit from public goods. In most cases, public goods are expensive to produce and provide little financial return. While the provision of accessible public goods is normally not financially profitable, society as whole recognizes and values their intrinsic benefits.

Access to information—for example, through public libraries—is considered a public good. Public access to official information is availed by states under access to information laws through proactive and reactive services, funded primarily from the public purse. Professional journalism also serves a

¹⁵ UNESCO. 2021. 2021 World Press Freedom Day Conference, Opening Talk Show. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vq9iHhvt2Bs>.

¹⁶ UNESCO. 2021. World Press Freedom Day 2021, Information as a Public Good, Concept Note. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/wpfd_2021_concept_note_en.pdf.

public function, providing citizens with information that meets standards of verification and public interest. Journalism is an essential piece of the checks and balances machinery that is crucial to the consolidation of democracies and, therefore, for the protection and promotion of human rights and sustainable development.¹⁷

The importance of such trustworthy information as a public good was powerfully demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Windhoek+30 Declaration noted, reliable information in the midst of the global health crisis was often a matter of existential survival, especially given the widespread circulation of mis- and disinformation.¹⁸

In countries with public service broadcasting, journalism is explicitly funded as a public good. Public broadcasting is at least in part financed by taxpayers through direct subsidies or license fees. Those who do not pay taxes are not excluded from accessing public broadcasting because public goods are available to all. Therefore, the very existence of public broadcasting is an institutional recognition of journalism as a public good, even as other forms of journalism serve the same role in society. At the same time, as with other public goods, such services are sometimes instrumentalised for political purposes, which in the case of public broadcasting means information services that do not qualify as meeting the standards of independent journalism. The same applies to international broadcasting, which generally follows a country's broad foreign policy objectives. The public character of public goods has to be protected if they are to have integrity of service.

Public goods as non-excludable and non-rivalrous

Public goods are usually described according to two main characteristics: access to public goods is non-excludable, and consuming them is non-rivalrous. Applying these two basic criteria allows us to assess the role of journalism as a public good.



Non-excludable

Information, if made publicly available, is inherently non-excludable because all members of society have access to it. For instance, no one in society is excluded from using a public library. Similarly, public broadcasting is non-excludable because programmes are made freely available to the public over the airwaves or online channels. In principle, this is not invalidated by the need to have a radio or television receiver or a computing device and internet connection, nor by limits on the languages provided, although these are all important access issues that affect the value of a public service to the whole society.

Information can be made more excludable in different ways by erecting obstacles to access. Newspapers, magazines, and video streaming services available only to their subscribers are excludable: the barrier is subscription payments. High costs for devices like smart phones and high fees for connectivity can also serve as indirect barriers to information's value as a public good. As detailed in a subsequent chapter of this Report, for instance, internet access is often least affordable in developing regions,

¹⁷ Musgrave, K. 2021. *Tipping point: Democratic erosion and the assault on press freedom*. Washington, DC, Center for International Media Assistance. <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/tipping-point-democratic-erosion-and-the-assault-on-press-freedom/>.

¹⁸ UNESCO. 2021. *Windhoek+30 Declaration*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378158>. The principles of the Windhoek+30 Declaration were subsequently endorsed by the UNESCO General-Conference in November 2021. (Full text available in Appendix B.)

especially in Africa. All of this incurs social costs. It creates haves and have nots, raising questions about unequal access to information. Excludability can also be a feature of “echo chambers”, when—largely due to the algorithms of social media platforms and news aggregators—media outlets serve audiences in closed networks where similar values and opinions are shared, rather than promoting a diverse range of perspectives.



Current trends are making news media more excludable. In North America and Europe, many newspapers and magazines are becoming subscription services, though even in these regions the largest paywall remains the cost of access to the internet.¹⁹ In developing countries, low incomes and limited internet penetration and access to online payments means there is less potential to offer news in return for subscription payments, either online or off-line, thereby curbing the overall supply of journalism even to part of the public. Where online news is available freely (with costs covered by advertising or other mechanisms), access depends on connectivity.

Applied to the realm of journalism as a public good, a scenario may emerge of media becoming available only to comparatively elite audiences—a private good. While some news stories may still inform broader discussions and travel outside such “walled gardens”, this possibility depends on there being other media and forums available to a wider public which can pick up, expand upon, and amplify the content to the broader society. In short, viability for a part of the media does not help citizens more broadly if there are no mechanisms to ensure sufficient media pluralism and diversity to afford the general public an opportunity to access a variety of journalism, including local news in local languages.

Non-rivalrous

Information is non-rivalrous when its consumption by one person does not prevent others from consuming the same information. Non-rivalrous consumption is frequently contrasted with the consumption of goods such as food, housing, and consumer products. If someone purchases and drinks a bottle of wine, it is impossible for others to consume that bottle of wine—its consumption is rivalrous.

Public goods are non-rivalrous because they benefit all members of society. Everyone in society has access to street lighting and public parks. In media, broadcasting is similarly non-rivalrous: when radio or television signals are sent over the public airwaves, everyone can access them. If one person listens to a radio programme, it does not prevent others from listening to the same programme. On the internet, billions of people can consume the same services online (although there can be extra bandwidth costs for the producer) with few obstacles to other consumers accessing the same content. This digital dimension has enormous potential for considering journalism as a public good.

Journalism as an essential service

Essential services are generally defined as basic needs in a society, such as water, electricity, and health care. Can we similarly qualify journalism as not just a public good, but also as an essential service?

¹⁹ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C.T., and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2021. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf.

“The pandemic has also shown us even more the value of the work of journalists, and the perils they face every day to bring us reliable information in the face of very challenging situations”

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO²¹

One way of answering this question is by considering an essential service as something society cannot do without. What if society were deprived of journalism? Imagine if the only available information came from advertising, marketing, government statements, partisan arguments, international broadcasters, and mis- and disinformation, with no journalists working according to professional values, ethics, and practices. It can generally be agreed that the quality of trusted news and information would suffer.²⁰

The essential service mission of journalism is particularly vital in times of crisis: reporting on wars and conflict zones, on environmental and climate issues, on natural disasters, and on public health emergencies. This is why many countries under the curfews introduced under the COVID-19 pandemic recognized journalism as an essential service. The health crisis was exacerbated by a lack of critical information, compounded by a “disinfodemic” of false and misleading information about the virus and vaccines. This underscored the need for more quality journalism to identify and debunk such content. As UNESCO observed in two policy briefs regarding the COVID-19 disinfodemic, “access to reliable and accurate information is critical at the best of times, but during a crisis such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it can be a matter of life and death.”²²



In the midst of travel restrictions and nationwide lockdowns, journalists were widely recognized as professionals providing an essential service, along with hospitals, public transport, and food outlets. A year into the pandemic, in April 2021, a Reuters Institute survey in eight countries confirmed that news reporters have provided accurate, up-to-date, accessible information and investigated the handling of the pandemic, commentators have helped interpret our experiences, and different kinds of media have provided access to credible information, a sense of community and commonality, and an understanding of the differential and unequal impact of coronavirus.²³

News media also played an essential role during the pandemic in enabling policy debate and accountability for public spending on COVID-19 measures.

The consequences of a society lacking a strong supply of independent news are serious for many other issues, such as resilience and preparedness for disaster and emergency. But the role of news media also impacts many more aspects of sustainable development and democracy.²⁴ For example, consumers of news tend to be more politically engaged, better connected within their communities, and more knowledgeable about electoral issues.²⁵ Indeed, the impact of media development on corruption is now well established. A 2006 study of 51 countries found that even slight improvements in the enabling environment for independent journalism led to lower corruption which has been supported by some studies at national level.^{26 27}

²⁰ UNESCO. 2021. What would a world without independent media look like?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDqWLK0XhhU&list=PLWuYED1WVJIP6AR2z48IKHDZb3Pnt9Rtl&index=1>.

²¹ UNESCO (2021) UNESCO calls for global support for independent journalism amid funding crisis for media. <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-calls-global-support-independent-journalism-amid-funding-crisis-media>

²² Posetti, J., and Bontcheva, K. 2020. *Disinfodemic: Deciphering COVID-19 disinformation*, Policy Brief 1, and *Disinfodemic: Dissecting responses to COVID-19 disinformation*, Policy Brief 2. Paris, UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/disinfodemic>.

²³ Kleis Nielsen, R., Schulz, A., and Fletcher, R. 2021. *An ongoing infodemic: How people in eight countries access news about coronavirus a year into the pandemic*. Oxford, Reuters Institute. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/ongoing-infodemic-how-people-eight-countries-access-news-and-information-about-coronavirus-year>.

²⁴ World Bank. 2002. *The right to tell: The role of mass media in economic development*. Washington, DC, World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15212>.

²⁵ Cagé, J., and Rueda, V. 2016. The long-term effects of the printing press in Sub-Saharan Africa. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 69–99.

²⁶ Reinikka, R., and Svensson, J. 2005. Fighting corruption to improve schooling: Evidence from a newspaper campaign in Uganda. *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 3, No. 2–3, pp. 259–67. <https://doi.org/10.1162/jeea.2005.3.2-3.259>

²⁷ Freille, S., Haque, M.E., and Kneller, R. 2007. A contribution to the empirics of press freedom and corruption. *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 23, No. 23, pp. 838–62.

Sometimes communities are deprived of trusted information sources as a result of market failure, when local newspapers go out of business due to a lack of advertising revenue. Citizens are left with “news deserts”, where there are no local sources of trustworthy news. These news deserts have been identified in multiple regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and North America, with almost one in five people living in such areas in some countries.^{28 29 30}

When communities lose their local news sources, levels of civic engagement suffer. The value of a public good is never more recognized and cherished than when it is withdrawn from citizens who had enjoyed its benefits. It is significant to recognize that, in addition to the large swathes of humanity that have always been subjected to news deserts, even the few oases that have existed now face various threats, especially that of economic viability.

All of this demonstrates that fact-based information is vitally important as an essential service, especially in times of crisis.

Failing viability and what it means for journalism as a public good

For journalism to fulfil its mission as a public good and essential service, media must be not only independent, but also economically viable. If the viability of media is under constant threat, journalism as distinctive communication in the public interest cannot be sustainable. Media viability gives journalism the institutional strength and autonomy to perform its role as a public good. It provides journalism with the environment, resources, and means to produce independent, high-quality news. It helps resist pressures to replace journalism with editorial content produced for reasons such as favouritising particular products, political parties or politicians, or specific religious groups. Economically strong media are better able to resist media capture, a phenomenon described further in this Report and in a 2020 World Trends Report In Focus report, *Reporting facts: Free from fear or favour*.³¹

BOX 2-1: UNESCO's work to promote media viability

In November 2020, UNESCO strengthened its work to support media viability by launching an initiative with the aim of addressing the global emergency facing independent news organizations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter, a special focus of the flagship World Trends Report, is one piece of that work.

The media viability initiative, launched in partnership with the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), includes original research and data collection on the extent of the viability crisis. This includes data collected by Economist Impact, which informed the analysis of this Report; regional consultations and knowledge exchanges between media outlets led by Free Press Unlimited, whose findings will be localized through workshops by the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD); a handbook of innovative practices; and a forthcoming policy brief with recommendations for supporting the viability of the media.

²⁸ Atlas da Notícia. 2021. The news deserts in Brazil. <https://www.atlas.jor.br/english/>

²⁹ Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP). 2018. Cartographies of information: War in Colombia is silencing local journalism. <https://flip.org.co/index.php/en/publications/item/2268-about-cartographies-of-information>.

³⁰ Shaker, L. 2014. Dead newspapers and citizens' civic engagement. *Political Communication*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 131–148.

³¹ Dragomir, M. 2020. *Reporting facts free from fear or favour*. InFocus report in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375061>.

This initiative benefits from the support of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), an intergovernmental body that has worked for over 40 years to promote media development in developing countries.

Among its other research efforts on media viability, UNESCO has supported a project to pilot its Media Viability Indicators in Jamaica and produced a study on the *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on media sustainability in Latin America*.

Resources:

- UNESCO. 2015. *Draft Indicators for Media Viability*. Paris, UNESCO and IPDC. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/IPDC/ipdc59_Media_viability_indicators.pdf.
- Espada, A. 2021. *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on media sustainability in Latin America: changes and transformations in the production models, sources of income, and products of Latin American media*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377631>.
- Free Press Unlimited. 2021. *National consultations on solutions to promote media viability while preserving media independence*. Paris, UNESCO and IPDC. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/fpu_report_national_consultations_unesco.pdf.

As defined by UNESCO's Media Viability Indicators, media viability requires that the "overall economic and business environment provide conditions conducive for independent media" and the ability of the public to consume news.³² It is also essential that news organizations benefit from a political and social environment that enables journalism to perform its role as a public good. Obstacles to this are corruption in government, state interference and influence in the media, and restrictions on freedom of expression. News producers must furthermore be able to operate in an enabling technological environment that allows them to be sustainable in the digital sphere. This requires efficient infrastructure through which an independent media ecosystem can operate and thrive. When these conditions converge, news media can achieve longer-term sustainability.

In short, the necessary conditions for media viability are not only financial, but also socio-political and technological. This makes media viability a matter for policy-makers.

The section below describes how viability is threatened within three types of media—commercial news media, public service media, and community or alternative media—and the impact on journalism's role as a public good. Through assessment of this issue, it is possible to identify pathways to strengthening viability for policy-makers and stakeholders considering measures to promote independent news media.

³² UNESCO. 2015. *Draft Indicators for Media Viability*. Paris, IPDC-UNESCO. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/IPDC/ipdc59_Media_viability_indicators.pdf.

Key trends in the viability of commercial news media



In the early days of journalism, newspapers were largely partisan, maintaining allegiances to political parties, and financed by subscriptions. This model ushered in the “party press” in many countries where wealthy patrons, or “press barons”, owned and managed newspapers to wield political influence. Power was just as important to media proprietors as profit—and sometimes the two were linked. As commercial advertising gradually became the dominant model, journalism emerged as increasingly independent from partisan politics and political patronage. Sources of advertising revenue were sufficiently diverse for journalism to develop into a profession with its own newsgathering standards. Privately-owned media flourished for more than a century with a business model based largely on advertising revenues. In colonial contexts, newspapers were

state-financed and served as tightly controlled instruments of governance, a tradition that continued in many countries even after independence. In state-socialist countries, media were likewise paid for and controlled by the authorities.

The liberalization of media markets throughout the last century, and particularly after the end of the Cold War, produced robust economic viability that allowed high-quality commercial media to flourish. In Central and Eastern Europe, this involved a transition from state-controlled media to more pluralistic commercial media. In Africa and Latin America, strong state influence over media remained, but liberalization opened up media markets and made news sources more diverse. In these contexts, the model of professional journalism, independent of political and economic interests, came to the fore as a norm for media contribution to the public arena.

The commercial model entailed some risks for the journalism profession. Private media proprietors have often considered their newspapers, magazines, television, and radio assets as personal property and, in many cases, used them as mouthpieces for their own views and agendas. Media dependency on commercial revenues moreover gave advertisers some degree of power over news media. The commercial model also often encouraged sensationalism and marketization of journalism, catering to what interested the public (as a commodity to produce and sell audiences to advertisers) even at the expense of the public interest.

While the weaknesses of commercially-financed media have always been present—and have been exploited to varying degrees from country to country—current threats to media viability have made private media more vulnerable than ever to capture by powerful interests. Though the norm of journalism as a public service persists, the reality has become even more complex. The below sections detail three primary sources of funding for news outlets: advertising, subscriptions, and newsstand sales. Beyond these three models, however, some outlets have also striven to bolster their budgets through fact-checking or research services, event hosting, crowdfunding, and more.

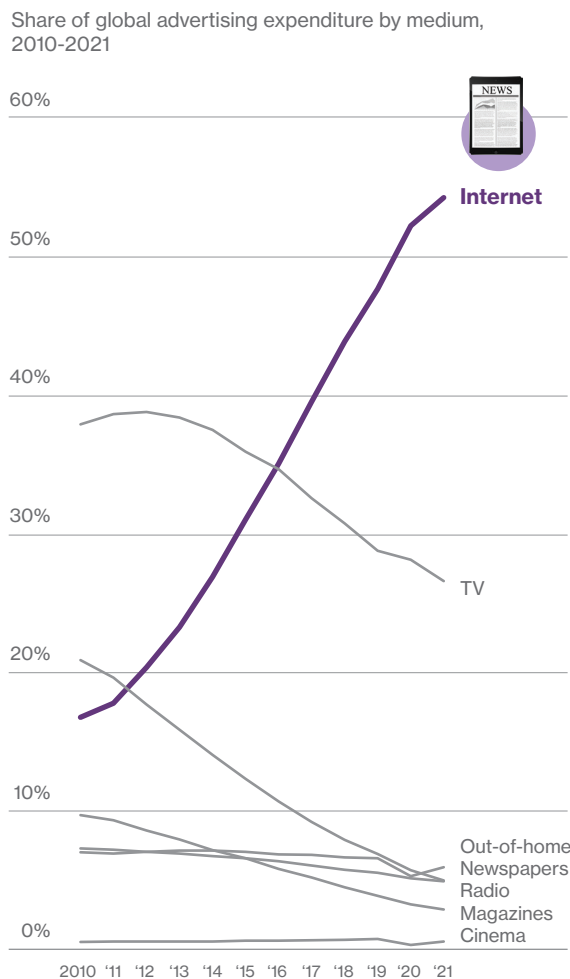
Advertising

A main source of revenues for many news organizations over the past century was advertising, which, as noted above, posed the risk of commercial capture. Further threatening outlet independence, in many countries, governments control significant advertising budgets and can wield influence over outlets by allocating these funds to friendly news organizations. Overall economic conditions present another variable, as overall ad spend tends to decrease in recessions. Journalism has thrived where ad spend was robust, stable, and diversified.

For most news organizations, the advertising market peaked in the 1980s, followed by a downward trend after the internet companies attracted advertising away from traditional media. The first impact was in classified advertising—recruitment, real estate, and retail ads—which, in developed media markets like the United Kingdom and the United States, defected from print publications to sites such as eBay, Monster, and Craigslist. The second blow, which fell across both developed and developing markets, came from web giants such as Google and Meta, which captured the lion's share of the digital advertising market.³³

FIGURE 2-2:
Global advertising trends continue in favour of online platforms, as the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated disparities between mediums

Source: Zenith, Advertising Expenditure Forecasts, December 2020.



An advertisement placed directly on an online news site will usually reach all of that site's readers, who may have different tastes and budgets. Because Google and social media platforms such as Facebook possess so much personal data, they can target ads much more precisely: a jewellery ad for high-income visitors recently searching for necklaces, a book ad for a voracious reader, a bank ad for someone recently seeking a loan. Using "ad tech", Meta and Google now control more than half of the digital advertising market.³⁴ This is an unprecedented level of market dominance in the global advertising industry.

Newspapers and magazines have been particularly hard-hit by the shift to digital ad spend. According to Zenith data, analysed by Economist Impact for this Report, print media's share of global advertising spending declined from a 16.5 percent share in 2016 to an 8 percent share in 2021, and is forecast to decline even further.³⁵ Newspaper advertising declined by 9 percent in 2019 over the previous year, followed by a 23 percent drop in 2020—the most significant decrease since 2010. Television's share declined from 34.6

³³ Cramer-Flood, E. 2021. Duopoly still rules the global digital ad market, but Alibaba and Amazon are on the prowl. eMarketer. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/duopoly-still-rules-global-digital-ad-market-alibaba-amazon-on-prowl>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Zenith. 2020. Advertising Expenditure Forecasts, December 2020.

percent to 28.1 percent over the same period. Meanwhile, the share of global ad spend going digital soared from 35.5 percent in 2016 to 52.2 percent in 2020. While news media have captured some of that digital ad spend, most revenues go to Google, Meta, and other tech giants. A longer trendline, shown in Figure 2-2, indicates the soaring strength of internet advertising compared with traditional media.³⁶ This remained true even as the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting contraction of economies and ad spend spurred declines in all mediums except internet advertising.

Against this backdrop, many news organizations are scrambling to retain some portion of advertising revenues. This shifts bargaining power in favour of advertisers. Trends towards advertising-driven “sponsored content” and “native advertising” have been embraced by many news organizations as they attempt to recapture advertising revenues. These innovations, while sometimes commercially successful, can undermine journalistic quality by exposing newsrooms to advertising capture or misrepresenting the independence of the content if it is not clearly labelled as sponsored or advertising.

Subscriptions



As advertising revenues vanish, some newspapers and magazines have shifted to focus more on subscription-based strategies to strengthen their financial position. In the pre-internet era, advertising revenues in developed countries generally counted for between 60 and 80 percent of all revenues at newspapers and magazines, with the rest coming largely from circulation (single copy sales and subscriptions), while traditional television in many places depended almost entirely on advertising revenues.³⁷

Today this model has flipped, as media increasingly become subscription-driven, especially at big-brand newspapers and magazines with solid customer bases. In the United States, for example, newspaper circulation revenues surpassed advertising revenues for the first time in 2020: print and digital subscriptions reached \$11.1 billion, while newspaper advertising revenues were \$8.8 billion.³⁸

The increasing importance of the subscription model is largely a result of the shift from legacy to digital media. This has been a particularly hard hit in developing countries, where reader revenue in the form of street sales has been a major component of newspaper economics. However, as news consumption has increasingly migrated to digital delivery, demand for print newspapers and magazines has declined in most regions. Especially in wealthy countries with high internet penetration and mature media markets, the current challenge for outlets is to migrate their subscribers to digital platforms. That said, it is important to consider the unique contexts of each country and region; though data are often more readily available from media ecosystems in the Global North (as discussed later in this Report), it is critical not to conflate trends in some regions as applying uniformly across the world.

³⁶ As displayed in Figure 2-2, Zenith measurements of global advertising expenditure include mediums beyond news media, namely, cinema and “out-of-home”, such as billboards and posters.

³⁷ Vogel, H.L. 1998. *Entertainment Industry Economics*, 4th edn. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

³⁸ Pew Research Center. 2021. Newspaper Fact Sheet. 29 June. <https://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/>.

Many news organizations also turned to a digital subscription model in hopes of compensating for losses in advertising revenues. In countries where credit cards are not common, this is an impossible task. More broadly, the challenge is twofold: convert existing print subscribers to digital subscribers, and drive digital subscriptions with new customers to compensate for advertising revenue losses. This echoed the larger shift in media consumption over the past few decades towards subscription media, with the rise of cable and satellite television and video and music streaming services such as Netflix and Spotify.

Many news organizations today are attempting to drive subscriptions as a primary source of revenue. PwC noted in its five-year 2019-24 forecast, “As print continues its decline, more publishers are re-evaluating their content offerings and reporting that their subscription revenue, boosted by digital growth, has displaced advertising as their most significant revenue stream.”³⁹ According to the most recent PwC data, collected for this Report by Economist Impact, newspaper digital subscriptions soared globally from 20.3 million to 41.6 million subscriptions from 2016 to 2021—a 105 percent increase.⁴⁰ This growth is evident in a variety of burgeoning markets (although building from a very low base) over that same time period, including Pakistan (170 percent), Nigeria (139 percent), and Indonesia (129 percent).⁴¹ With a few notable exceptions such as these, however, the success of the subscription model has thus far proven harder to replicate in middle- and lower-income countries due to lower internet penetration rates, e-commerce enablers, and less disposable income to support the cost of subscriptions.

For newspaper and magazine brands in wealthier countries, subscriptions are a valued revenue source because subscribers are premium customers with strong brand loyalty. Subscription revenues are also more stable because, unlike advertising, they are less subject to fluctuations due to overall economic conditions. Subscriptions can be a highly successful business model that finances quality content for paid subscribers, and some high-profile traditional news brands, such as the *New York Times* and *The Economist*, have made a great success of this strategy. Digital news sites with strong niche appeal have also successfully adopted the subscription model or variations such as a membership model, including, for example, *Mediapart* in France, the *Daily Maverick* in South Africa, *Denník N* in Slovakia, *El Diario* in Spain, *La Silla Vacía* in Colombia, *Malaysiakini* in Malaysia, and *Zetland* in Denmark. In Kenya, the Nation Media Group launched a “premium” section of its digital platform in February 2021, enabling readers to choose from a one-time purchase or long-term subscriptions.⁴² Other digital news brands with broader appeal have found the subscription model challenging in a market where substitutes are available for free.

However, as news brands focus on serving their own paid subscribers, they may risk becoming more partisan and serving an audience only what it wants to hear. The subscription model is also excludable and consequently does not meet the strict criteria of public goods. Journalism produced with the support of the subscription model can nonetheless produce public goods as externalities. Their news is disseminated into the public and can have an impact that benefits society as a whole, including by indirect amplification in free-to-audience channels—in so far as these exist. Some news brands with paywalls also make a portion of their content available to the public for free, and therefore can still fall under the definition of public goods.

³⁹ Mayhew, F. 2020. Report predicts five years of steep global decline for newspaper industry revenue (print and online). *Press Gazette*, 14 September. <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/report-predicts-five-years-of-steep-global-decline-for-newspaper-industry-revenue-print-and-online/>.

⁴⁰ PwC. PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2021–2025. <https://www.pwc.com/outlook>.

⁴¹ Original data collected by Economist Impact for this Report.

⁴² Otieno, S., and Misiko, H. 2021. NMG premium content digital platform goes live. *The East African*, 9 February. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/business/nmg-premium-content-digital-platform-goes-live-3284880>.

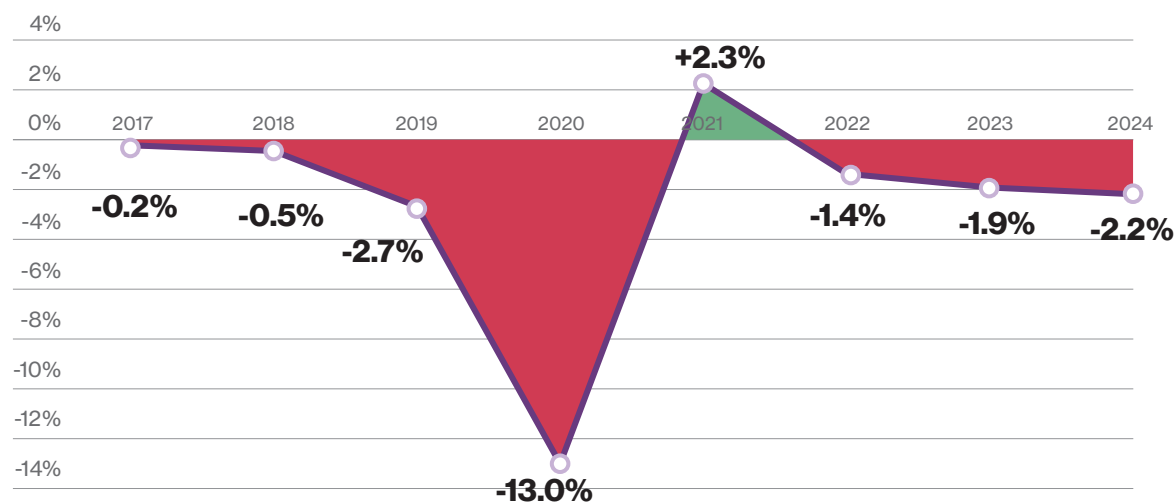
Newsstand sales

In print news, the newsstand and street vendors were part of the culture for generations as millions of consumers bought newspapers and magazines from these agents. Single-copy sales were generally part of circulation revenues, along with home delivery subscriptions. In many cities, newsstands and street sellers are vanishing from street corners as fewer customers are buying printed newspapers and magazines. By 2018, *Forbes* observed that “the newsstand’s decline is epic.”⁴³ This trend is particularly evident in countries where consumers are shifting to digital news consumption. There are some exceptions to this trend, especially in countries where the shift to digital has been slower. In other cases, such as India, demand for printed newspapers and magazines remains relatively high, largely due to rising literacy rates and low cost of production.⁴⁴

Globally, however, print newspaper circulation has been declining. According to PwC, there has been a steady overall decline in newspaper daily circulation worldwide, dropping from 5.3 billion in 2016 to 4.5 billion in 2020—a decline of 15 percent.⁴⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend; PwC registered a drastic decline of 13 percent between 2019 and 2020, compared with only 3 percent the previous year. This trend is expected to continue in the coming years, as shown in Figure 2-3.

FIGURE 2-3:
Daily newspaper
circulation
continues to
decline globally

Source: PwC Global
Entertainment and Media
Outlook 2021-2025.



In many cases, newspapers have not been able to replace their revenues from print sales and advertising with digital equivalents. Savings from switching from print to digital publishing have also been insufficient to pay the bills. These challenges account for the downturn in this sector, with enormous ripple effects on the rest of the media, which has seldom matched the journalistic investment of newspapers. A decline in news supply from legacy newspapers has a serious knock-on effect on broadcasting, which has often relied on legacy newspapers as the key feed for its own coverage. The result is a loss in the volume of journalism in digital distribution channels, which has not been made up for by new digital native operations.

⁴³ Silber, T. 2018. Big ideas for a magazine news industry in distress. *Forbes*, 19 May. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonysilber/2018/05/29/big-ideas-for-a-magazine-newsstand-industry-in-distress/>.

⁴⁴ Tharoor, S. 2017. There's one country in the world where the newspaper industry is still thriving. World Economic Forum, 24 May. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/05/despite-the-decline-of-printed-papers-theres-one-place-that-is-bucking-the-trend/>. See also Musgrave, K. 2019. India's other media boom. Center for International Media Assistance, 16 April. <https://www.cima.ned.org/blog/indias-other-media-boom/>.

⁴⁵ PwC. PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2021-2025. <https://www.pwc.com/outlook>.

Key trends in the viability of public service media

Public service media was the original broadcasting model with the emergence of radio a century ago, followed by television in the 1940s. The BBC in the United Kingdom established the model of an independent, publicly funded, non-commercial broadcasting system. However, in many places, states maintained direct control over the broadcasting systems as official instruments of government influence.

A distinction therefore must be made between public service and state media. With state-controlled media, journalism is subject—directly or indirectly—to political interference and influence.⁴⁶ While public service broadcasting, with various degrees of independence, has prevailed in some democratic countries, state-controlled media is still dominant in many countries. Still, the public service model has been under pressure from several converging factors. The liberalization of media markets and multiplication of channels available to the public have inevitably eroded the audience share of public service media and consequently led to questions about the necessity of state subsidies funded by taxpayers.

The explosion of social media and transformation of news consumption habits, especially among young people, have further eroded audience share of legacy broadcast media owned and operated by governments. Public service media are additionally subject to threats from political parties and governments promoting privatization over subsidies for media. At the same time, genuine public service media are associated with professional journalistic values and trustworthy practices. This was demonstrated during the COVID-19 crisis, when the public needed reliable information amidst the growing “disinfodemic”.

In its *Digital News Report 2020*, the Reuters Institute observed high levels of trust for public service media, especially in Northern Europe. There was a caveat, however: “criticisms from the extremes do seem to be chipping away at this confidence in many countries, especially when combined with anti-elitist rhetoric from populist politicians... Though trust remains high, *distrust* of public service media is growing and is often higher than for many other news brands.”⁴⁷ A year later, after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, trust in public service media appeared to have grown. As the *Digital News Report 2021* confirmed, “In a number of countries, especially those with strong and independent public service media, we have seen greater consumption of trusted news brands. The pattern is less clear outside Western Europe, in countries where the Coronavirus crisis has dominated the media agenda less, or where other political and social issues have played a bigger role.” The report added that public service media websites performed particularly well, possibly due to their reach via television and radio to promote more detailed information online. It further noted, however, that these gains are primarily reflected in countries where public broadcasters were already relatively well trusted.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Dragomir, M. 2020. *Reporting facts free from fear or favour*. InFocus report in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375061>.

⁴⁷ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2020. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2020*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf.

⁴⁸ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C.T., and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2021. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf.

Political and social environment for public service media viability

Public service media is always vulnerable to both public criticism and government policies. This fragility comes with dependency on public subsidies. For public service media to be viable, it requires a strong political commitment to wholly independent financing and governing structures and, secondly, the confidence and trust of audiences who turn to public service media as a reliable news source.

On the first point, even when public broadcasters are independent, the possibility of political pressure is never entirely absent. Governments can still often exert pressures on them with financial instruments by, for example, reducing their operational budgets. Governments also often have the power to appoint oversight bodies for public media, and in some cases appoint senior management. These kinds of political pressures can shift depending on the wider ideological system of values about the necessity of publicly financed media, and this varies from country to country. In many countries, public service broadcasters feel increasingly threatened by political polarization, partisan interference, and budget cuts. The politicization of media can then do further damage by turning public opinion away from public broadcasting.

Still, trust in genuine public service media remains high, especially in the midst of viral mis- and disinformation. At the same time, a major challenge for public service media is attracting younger demographics. Drawing from a sample of eight countries representing a wide range of public service media traditions, a 2019 Reuters Institute report observed, “Public service news audiences both off-line and online are heavily skewed towards older people and people with higher levels of education, whereas younger people and people with more limited formal education in many countries rely more on news found via platforms like Facebook and YouTube.”⁴⁹ Those in the 18–34 age group value traditional news brands when in digital formats but are still turning more to Facebook and YouTube for news than to online services of public service media. In fact, the report finds, public service media may today engage younger audiences even less than in the past, “even as the move to a more digital, mobile, and platform-dominated media environment continues apace.”⁵⁰

Nonetheless, public service media enjoy powerful cross-platform reach, which gives them the means to access younger audiences, perhaps by capitalizing on social media engagement.

Key trends in the viability of community media

While discussion of media viability often tends to focus on national news organizations, community media, especially radio, remains an important source of news in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. Over-the-air radio exemplifies journalism as a public good because it is freely available to all and therefore non-excludable. Online, the market for podcasts is experiencing huge growth, with an estimated 1.4 billion monthly listeners globally by 2024.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Schulz, A., Levy, D.A.L., and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2019. *Old, educated, and politically diverse: The audience of public service news*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-09/The_audience_of_public_service_news_FINAL.pdf.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ PwC. PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2021–2025. <https://www.pwc.com/outlook>.

In sub-Saharan Africa, with its relatively low internet penetration rates, millions of people continue to rely on radio as the most accessible and independent source of news. While local radio stations in Africa and elsewhere strive to be self-sustaining, they face viability challenges due to limited advertising revenue and continued dependence on donors, even as many have sought mixed funding solutions in order to be sustainable over the long term.⁵² The political environment is also challenging, with attacks on independent journalism, the capture of community media by political, religious, and economic interests, and regulatory obstacles in radio licensing.

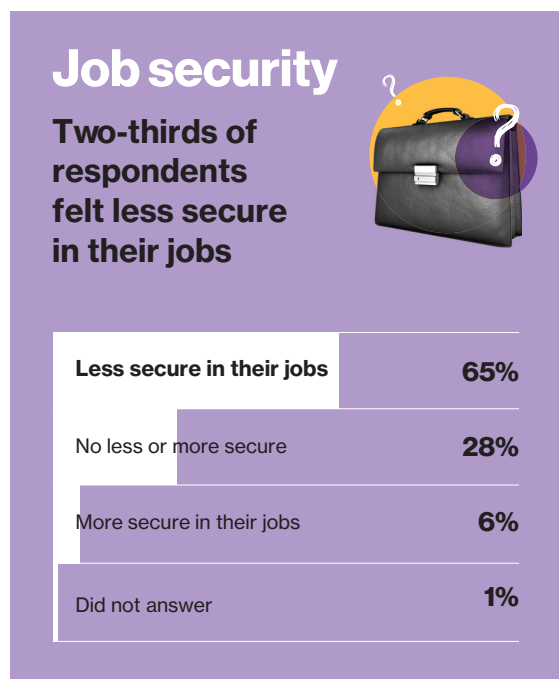
Community radio—typically supported by volunteers, advertising, and grants—has also had its finances undercut by the pandemic and the shift to digital channels. At the same time, community media has become less of a factor in generating news through professional journalism and more of a forum for voices and culture. While this sector of the media therefore plays an important part and merits support as a public good, its ability to generate and sustain actual news production is likely to remain limited.

The costs of journalism’s declining viability

Market failure in traditional financing models for media has produced catastrophic shocks to the profession. In some cases, news media failed to adapt to the rapid digital shift. But in every case, across the industry, the digital transformation under its current predominant business model of attracting attention and advertising has produced negative knock-on effects for the quality of journalism and the vital role that trustworthy information plays in a democratic public sphere.

FIGURE 2-4:
Economic fallout of
COVID-19 threatens
journalist job
security worldwide

Source: ICFJ and the
Tow Center for Digital
Journalism at Columbia
University.



Falling employment figures for journalists

Cost-cutting and newsroom layoffs constitute the biggest negative impact of the current crisis, ongoing challenges accelerated by financial losses amidst the pandemic—to such an extent, in fact, that the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and others have described the impact of the crisis as a potential “extinction event” for the profession. Traditional media—newspapers, magazines, and broadcast—have been forced to lay off staff as advertising revenues shrink. A survey of news organizations from 125 countries conducted in May and June 2020 by ICFJ and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism found that nearly half (43 percent) had seen revenues plummeted by more than 50 percent, and 17 percent said revenues had declined by more than 75 percent in the first three months of the pandemic.

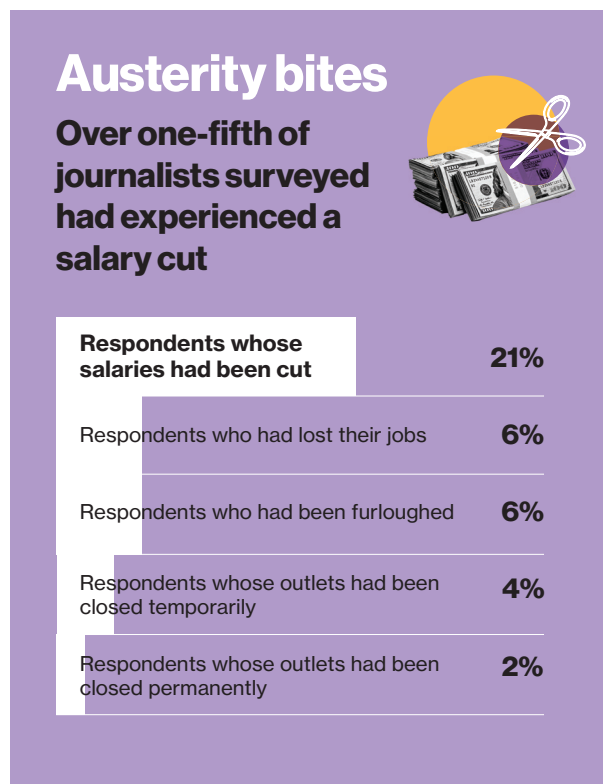
⁵² Myers, M., and Harford, N. 2020. *Local radio stations in Africa: Sustainability or pragmatic viability?* Washington, DC, Center for International Media Assistance. <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/local-radio-stations-in-africa-sustainability-or-pragmatic-viability/>.

The report also surveyed 1,400 journalists from 125 countries and identified job security as a widespread concern: approximately 65 percent of journalists surveyed said they felt less secure in their job (Figure 2-4) three months into the pandemic than before.⁵³

“While some research at the beginning of the pandemic suggested that increasing demand for accurate, reliable information might translate into paying audiences as advertisers disappeared,” the report observed, “the economic impacts of COVID-19 have clearly been devastating.”⁵⁴ Young and aspiring journalists were hit particularly hard as news organizations necessarily froze budgets and reduced staff, deprioritizing recruitment and training.

FIGURE 2-5:
Austerity cuts to the media industry in 2020 spurred furloughs and reduced journalist salaries across the globe

Source: ICFJ and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism.



Even in well-developed media markets like the United States, newsroom employment has declined substantially over the past decade and were inevitably worsened in 2020 by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁵ As the ICFJ and Tow Center survey confirmed, a substantial portion of journalists who have maintained their positions have nonetheless experienced or anticipated salary cuts, and 21 percent of survey respondents reported that their salaries had been reduced in the first three months of the pandemic.

Though reliable and consistent data are extremely limited, anecdotal evidence suggests that these trends and challenges are even greater in smaller, less developed media markets, where local outlets already faced serious obstacles to long-term sustainability. The “Lights On” survey by Singapore-based Splice Media, for instance, gathered responses from newsrooms and media workers across 30 countries in April

2020. At that time—just as outlets and others were beginning to see the wider impact of the COVID-19 pandemic—over 40 percent of the media organizations that responded to the survey expected to begin cutting jobs in the next 12 months.⁵⁶ Similar stories were echoed across the globe. Media companies and newsrooms in every region reported necessary downsizing as advertising revenues and circulation continued to fall, spurring substantial layoffs, salary cuts, and placing newsroom staff on furlough.^{57 58 59}

⁵³ Posetti, J., Bell, E., and Brown, P. 2020. *Journalism & the pandemic: A global snapshot of impacts*. ICFJ and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University. <https://www.icfj.org/our-work/journalism-and-pandemic-survey>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Walker, M., and Matsa, K.A. 2021. A third of large U.S. newspapers experienced layoffs in 2020, more than in 2019. Pew Research Center, 21 May. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/21/a-third-of-large-u-s-newspapers-experienced-layoffs-in-2020-more-than-in-2019/>.

⁵⁶ Soon, A. 2020. The Splice Lights On survey shows that over 40% of media orgs expect to start cutting jobs in the next 12 months. Splice Media. <https://splicemedia.com/stories/splice-lights-survey-cutting-jobs-in-the-next-12-months>.

⁵⁷ Chirwa, J. 2020. About 8% of Zambia's media cuts jobs, salaries due to Covid-19, reveals FPI survey. World Association of News Publishers, 25 August. <http://www.wan-ifra.org/articles/2020/08/25/about-8-of-zambias-media-cuts-jobs-salaries-due-to-covid-19-reveals-fpi-survey>.

⁵⁸ Kilman, L. Forthcoming. *Strengthening media viability: Ideas and inspirations*. Paris, International Programme for the Development of Communication-UNESCO.

⁵⁹ Isaac, A., and Roper, C. 2021. Reuters Digital News Report 2021: Nigeria. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/nigeria>.

“This devastation is unprecedented in its scope...It will be impossible to recover completely, but we do not want to belong to the generation that let the media die.”

Sbu Ngalwa

President, South African National Editors' Forum⁶⁰

Low entry barriers to the digital sphere have made it easier for news start-ups to appear in the marketplace and hire journalists, and some high-profile digital news organizations such as Politico and Axios have prospered thanks to subscriptions, premium content, and sponsored newsletters. These success stories, however, are largely limited to developed countries with high levels of disposable income and robust advertising markets. In a range of contexts, non-media initiatives like The Conversation have also been producing journalism, drawing from universities, as well as a range of non-governmental organizations and institutes. In these cases, the journalism does not usually pay for itself, but rather is subsidised through one means or another.

In this environment of shrinking budgets and layoffs, many full-time and freelance journalists are seeking employment in other spheres like public relations, government, and interest group lobbying. The net effect of these challenges is a smaller and weaker journalism profession as it struggles to fulfil its role as an essential service.

Reach and quality of news coverage

With shrinking budgets, staff layoffs, and news organizations closing or being bought out by larger players, the reach and quality of news coverage is showing the effects of this stress. In commercial journalism, reduced newsrooms mean stretched resources to adequately cover the news. Takeovers often entail mergers and streamlining exercises that focus operations only on profitable markets, creating or worsening news deserts in towns and communities that do not make the cut. In some cases, small, independent news start-ups enter the market and serve local communities that have been abandoned by large-scale media companies, but they face tough economic conditions and depend on donations and other forms of funding to survive.

The decline of news quality, though often discussed and debated, is difficult to assess because impressions are subjective. What is more, the history of journalism has many examples of both professional excellence and poor-quality news. As the profession monopolized the media space over the past several decades, the quality of journalism greatly improved due to higher standards of practice and ethics. The explosion of the internet and social media, while fostering pluralism and innovation, brought intense competition and pressure for newsrooms that were often already short-staffed or overworked, and consequently risked sacrificing quality.

The COVID-19 pandemic gave an audience boost to many news organizations. One Reuters Institute study, surveying independent news media across the globe, found that most news organizations experienced expanded reach in 2020: 25 percent said audience reach had increased somewhat during the global health crisis, while 39 percent said that reach had increased significantly.⁶¹ Even as revenues were collapsing for local newspapers, the public increasingly sought them out for critical and trustworthy information.

⁶⁰ RSF. 2020. The 2020 pandemic has challenged press freedom in Africa. RSF, 27 November. <https://rsf.org/en/reports/2020-pandemic-has-challenged-press-freedom-africa>.

⁶¹ Kleis Nielsen, R., Cherubini, F., and Andi, S. 2020. *Few winners, many losers: The COVID-19 pandemic's dramatic and unequal impact on independent news media*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/few-winners-many-losers-covid-19-pandemics-dramatic-and-unequal-impact-independent-news-media>.

Accountability and press freedom

It is often said that journalism's duty is to hold power to account. But when media's viability is weakened, its accountability function is inevitably compromised.

In a free and open society, an independent press helps reduce political corruption by reporting on and investigating the political process and calling citizens to action. Studies such as "A free press is bad news for corruption" have demonstrated a clear relationship between an independent press and low levels of corruption.⁶² But the capture of media by powerful state and private interests—a threat all the more serious when outlets struggle to maintain consistent and independent funding—corrodes the editorial independence of the press. Challenges facing media independence and the ongoing threat of media capture are covered in more detail in the following chapter of this Report.

In countries with strong institutional corruption controls, pro-competition mechanisms and high degrees of press freedom can limit the effects of capture. In countries with low press freedom and weak mechanisms of corruption control, the risk of capture is much higher. This makes a strong case for the viability of news media: the vital accountability function of journalism is increasingly difficult when news organizations do not possess the resources to finance their operations. Or inversely, when news organizations possess the resources to fulfil their public service mission, they act as controls on corruption and promote democratic values. Recognizing this check on corruption to be a necessary action, and recognizing the role of professional journalism in ensuring that check, reiterates journalism as a public good—and, as such, the need to find ways to fund it.

Efforts to save journalism as a public good

The numerous challenges threatening media viability have forced innovative strategies in search of new business models and sources of funding. Innovation has produced new ideas, techniques, and operational models. For example, online trust-verification tools, ranging from the Journalism Trust Initiative and NewsGuard to Ads for News, have been designed to signal to internet platforms and advertisers which news outlets and stories are trustworthy or merit favourable treatment by algorithms. Since advertisers wish to associate their brands with high-quality sources, this can give more visibility and enhance revenue opportunities for verified news brands. When trustworthy news media is more visible, viable, and sustainable, it is good for both journalism and society as a whole.

At the same time, while these new and innovative commercial strategies begin to address the need for advertisers or subscribers, outlets must also continue to strive to diversify their sources of income. Large scale newspapers and magazines are moving into new business initiatives, ranging from live events and e-commerce to apps and niche content. These new ventures are designed primarily to attract new income streams to compensate for declining advertising revenue. Well-branded news organizations can pursue these strategies successfully, but they are typically less feasible for smaller and community-based media that have been stripped to the bone by their revenue crisis.

⁶² Brunetti, A., and Weder, B. 2003. A free press is bad news for corruption. *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 7–8, pp. 1801–24.

News organizations, large and small, need to find solutions to funding sustainable journalism in the public interest. New and innovative funding models are already emerging in the public and private sectors—from tax credits and direct subsidies to increased donor support, philanthropic funding, and non-profit models. Among these funding streams, and one of the most debated issues in journalism funding today, is also the financial contribution of tech giants.

Innovative business models

As advertising revenues become scarcer, news organizations are increasingly appealing more directly to their customers for financing. While many news organizations are shifting towards subscriptions, some, like *The Guardian* in the United Kingdom and *Daily Maverick* in South Africa, are encouraging their audiences to make donations or become paying members. Most news organizations that solicit readers to become members leave the amount and frequency of the payments up to the customer. This model, which can also be described as direct reader donations, can be successfully used to generate revenue from a loyal customer base.

Crowdfunding journalism was a trend for several years and attracted a significant amount of media attention, and many journalism crowdfunding projects were launched thanks to platforms such as Kickstarter. Tortoise, for instance, is a “slow journalism” platform founded by news veterans from the BBC and Dow Jones. Tortoise launched in 2019 thanks to \$585,000 raised from some 2,500 backers and continues to produce in-depth journalism. However, the crowdfunding model has a relatively low success rate. At best, crowdfunding is a niche financing method that needs to be supplemented with other sources of funding.

The rise of newsletters and social media engagement in journalism has presented opportunities for individual journalists to develop their own following, free or through paid subscriptions. The same model is offered via platforms such as Substack, Patreon, and Cenital in Argentina, enabling journalists to aggregate their own followers for their work, usually independent of media companies. In the short term, platforms like Substack have threatened established news brands when their star columnists have left the outlet to instead develop their own paid followers. *The New York Times* is countering this trend by signing up writers to produce newsletters under its brand.

Direct subsidies

Levels of public funding for media vary according to political and cultural traditions, particularly according to whether such funding is independent of political influence or not.

At the international level, the European Union has supported media production with significant funding programmes such as MEDIA for film and television production. At the national level, most governments subsidize media and journalism through state-owned or public service broadcasting, with various degrees of risks of political capture depending on the national political culture. In countries with large advertising markets, institutionalized forms of public service media, well-established traditions of press freedom, and political influence over the governance of internet platforms, among other factors, such efforts are more likely to succeed. In poorer countries and at the local level, the news crisis will

be more difficult to address without a concerted push with international support. Governments at all levels recognize the crisis media are facing and many are innovating with new funding models, ranging from creative uses of tax credits to direct funding of journalism initiatives to compensate for revenue losses, especially after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the extent of government financial support to media varies significantly between countries. Within the Europe and North America region alone, as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), public media spending varies from less than \$1.50 per capita to more than \$100 per capita.⁶³ In Africa, direct subsidies fund state-owned broadcasters in countries such as Nigeria and Namibia. In Senegal, an Aid and Development Fund for the Press was created in 1996. Tunisia has a subsidy programme to support local radio initiatives.

When governments establish or amend measures for direct media funds to benefit journalism, it is vitally important that those funds are granted by independent bodies. That independence and transparency is necessary to avoid the appearance, or reality, of partisan decisions and political capture.

Indirect subsidies: Tax incentives

Governments can also use fiscal measures to give tax relief to media companies to ensure their long-term sustainability. In many countries, newspapers benefit from sales tax relief, which today is shifting to digital news subscriptions. The Government of the United Kingdom's budget in 2020 removed sales tax on both e-books and digital print subscriptions. In the United States, a proposed law called the Local Journalism Sustainability Act, introduced in Congress in 2021, would allow individuals to claim an income tax credit capped at \$250 for a local newspaper subscription. The bill also offers payroll tax credits to local newspapers for journalist wages. A similar measure is tax vouchers that allow individuals to support a news organization of their choice by listing it on their tax returns.

In Canada, the Federal Government announced an ambitious policy in 2018 providing for tax credits and other incentives to generate \$600 million for journalism over five years. Under the programme, news organizations in Canada are eligible for refundable tax credits on salaries, a non-refundable tax credit for Canadian digital news subscriptions, and access to charitable tax incentives for not-for-profit journalism. In Tunisia, new companies—including news media—can claim a tax exemption in the first four years of activity (full exemption in the first year, 75 percent the second year, 50 percent the third year, and 25 percent the fourth year). Start-up costs are also fully deductible in Tunisia.

Development assistance

Beyond financial support for media organizations within their own borders, governments remain a significant source of funding for news outlets and media development worldwide.

This support is provided through multiple channels, including official development assistance (ODA) and bilateral support, as well as through multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and recent global initiatives.

⁶³ Media, Inequality & Change Center. 2021. Raising the bar for journalism. Philadelphia, Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. <https://www.asc.upenn.edu/research/centers/media-inequality-and-change-center/publications/images-text>.

It remains both difficult and complex to establish a comprehensive picture of international aid flows.⁶⁴ Recent research also suggests that this complexity may limit governments' ability and interest in directing ODA and other support to independent media.⁶⁵ Initiatives like the Global Media Defence Fund (GMDF) and the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM), however, hope to encourage greater government support to media through clear mechanisms for contributions and comprehensive approaches to the most urgent needs.

The GMDF, administered by UNESCO, supports not-for-profit organizations working on the ground at the local, regional, and international level in the undertaking or upscaling of projects that bolster journalists' legal protection or enhance media freedom through investigative journalism and strategic litigation.⁶⁶

IFPIM similarly aims to provide an efficient modality for greater international support for independent media with three main components: an investigative journalism fund; regional centres providing financial support to independent media at the national level; and media development funding to intermedia organizations that financially support independent media. Towards this end, IFPIM seeks partnerships with governments, development agencies, philanthropists, big tech companies, and other private sector corporations.⁶⁷

Foundations, philanthropy, and non-profit news

Philanthropy and other forms of non-profit media assistance are increasingly regarded as important funding streams for journalism, especially in the circumstances of market failure and public health crisis. According to Candid,⁶⁸ a non-profit organization working to track philanthropic funding and grants, philanthropic support for news media organizations had remained relatively stagnant since 2016, until a dramatic spike in donations in 2020. Over this period, aid to news media organizations grew to \$458 million, a huge increase from \$226 million in 2019.⁶⁹

Philanthropic funders were primarily located in the United States, as were the vast majority of recipients—in 2020, only 9 percent of all philanthropic donations were given to news media organizations outside of the United States. International assistance has picked up some of the slack, allocating \$477 million to outlets in the Global South.

The Global Investigative Journalism Network, which trains journalists around the world, is a U.S.-based non-profit funded by foundations like the Ford Foundation, Humanity United, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and Open Society Foundations. In Africa, the Uganda-based African Centre for Media Excellence, which offers grants to investigative journalists, also depends on foundation funding. In Latin America, the Velocidad initiative is an accelerator programme that promotes professionalization and sustainability of local digital news outlets committed to high-quality journalism and editorial independence. The Velocidad programme, run by ICFJ and non-profit SembraMedia, is financed by Luminate.

⁶⁴ Myers, M., and Angaya Juma, L. 2018. *Defending independent media: A comprehensive analysis of aid flows*. Washington, DC, Center for International Media Assistance. <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/comprehensive-analysis-media-aid-flows/>.

⁶⁵ Benequista, N. 2019. *Confronting the crisis in independent media: A role for international assistance*. Washington, DC, Center for International Media Assistance. <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/confronting-the-crisis-in-independent-media/>.

⁶⁶ UNESCO. 2021. Global Media Defence Fund. <https://en.unesco.org/global-media-defence-fund>.

⁶⁷ International Fund for Public Interest Media. 2022. The fund. <https://ifpim.org/the-fund/>.

⁶⁸ Candid is a non-profit organization working to track global philanthropy and funding from corporations, foundations, public charities, and high-net-worth individuals.

⁶⁹ Economist Impact analysis for this Report, based on data provided by Candid.

Media companies are increasingly establishing themselves as non-profits for tax purposes in order to receive charitable donations and other non-commercial forms of funding. Non-profit tax status allows news organizations to solicit funding from a variety of sources, including customer donations, foundation support, and government subsidies. Donors to non-profit news organizations can also write off their donations on tax returns, making it a more appealing option. Non-profit status is gaining renewed momentum in the current context of economic crisis and uncertainty.

The non-profit model is particularly growing in investigative journalism and at the local level, recognizing news as an essential service. Examples of digital non-profit news organizations are amaBhungane in South Africa and ProPublica, MinnPost, and Texas Tribune in the United States.

While philanthropic and institutional support for news media organizations increased in the midst of the pandemic, it was not sufficient to offset revenue declines in advertising for print and broadcast news media. For philanthropy to help news media's viability, levels of donations would need to expand dramatically in size and geographic reach.

Financial contributions from internet companies

Many argue that tech giants such as Google and Meta should be obliged to redirect a portion of profits towards news organizations as compensation for using news content to attract advertising. Others argue that these internet giants do not owe anything to journalism because their success is simply a reordering of the marketplace—or “creative destruction”—and news organizations must learn to adjust.

In the past few years, pressures have been building to tax internet platforms to redirect funds towards journalism. At the same time, Google, Meta, and other companies have been negotiating partnerships and making donations to journalism initiatives.

Direct funding

Major internet companies such as Meta and Google have responded to pressures from governments and media advocates by proposing to work with news organizations in partnerships, whereby they directly fund journalism initiatives.

In 2019, Facebook announced plans to invest a total of \$300 million into journalism projects over three years, including several non-profit local reporting projects such as Report for America, the American Journalism Project, and the Local Media Consortium.⁷⁰ In 2020, the company committed an additional \$100 million to support news organizations around the world that are facing revenue losses due to the pandemic, encompassing \$25 million in emergency grant funding for local news through the Facebook Journalism Project and \$75 million in additional marketing spend.⁷¹ Portions of this funding are dedicated to programs in Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa, but the vast majority of the support remains focused on North American and European programs and outlets.

⁷⁰ Ingram, M. 2019. Facebooks says it plans to put \$300 million into journalism projects. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 15 January. https://www.cjr.org/the_new_gatekeepers/facebook-journalism-funding.php.

⁷¹ Brown, C. 2020. Facebook invests additional \$100 million to support news industry during the Coronavirus crisis. Meta, 30 March. <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/coronavirus-update-news-industry-support>.

Google has also been directly funding journalism. In 2020, Google announced a Journalism Emergency Relief Fund offering financial support to local newsrooms worldwide hit by the economic fallout of the pandemic. The fund, part of the \$300 million Google News Initiative, promised to help approximately 5,300 small and medium local newsrooms around the world with funding ranging from \$5,000 to \$30,000.

Many, however, argue that these donations are often more public relations exercises than sustainable funding schemes.⁷² Additionally, Google and Meta disburse most of these funds through their marketing and public relations budgets rather than through charitable foundations, which makes it difficult to track the precise amounts granted.

Licensing and revenue sharing

Beyond direct funding, internet platforms under public pressure are entering into licensing arrangements with news organizations with a view to revenue sharing.

In 2019, Facebook announced a licensing scheme called Facebook News, which promised to pay partners from mainstream news outlets to publish their content. Facebook said it would pay millions of dollars over multiple years to select major media partners, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and large city news outlets in certain countries. While this Facebook initiative appears to be beneficial for large-scale news brands like the *New York Times*, is available in only a handful of countries in Western Europe and North America and it does little for smaller news outlets and local journalism. Some critics claim that this and similar financial support from the tech giants create a “somewhat dysfunctional alliance” as the platforms tout such initiatives for public relations while news outlets struggle to stay afloat in the sea of information (or, for those receiving support, ensure their editorial independence).⁷³

Australia recently made licensing mandatory, passing legislation in 2021 that forces Google and Facebook to negotiate payments for using the content of news organizations. The News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code, as its title indicates, makes bargaining mandatory subject to arbitration. Facebook, which had initially blocked Australians from accessing news on its platform as a move against making payments to news organizations, reversed this strategy in 2021. Facebook announced a content licensing agreement with Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp in Australia.

Google likewise negotiated a payment scheme with Murdoch’s news organizations worldwide as part of its Google News Showcase feature. Google said the initiative was a “\$1 billion investment” in news. In late 2020, Google reported that it had signed licensing partnerships with some 200 publications in Germany, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In the United Kingdom, approximately 120 news publications were part of the News Showcase agreement, alongside about 450 news partners worldwide. Google News Showcase is a feature on the Google News and Google Discover on its mobile app. When users click on a news snippet on the app, they are taken to the full article on the news outlet’s website. In France, Google signed a deal to pay French publishers roughly €30 million annually for an initial three-year period to license their content specifically to Google’s News Showcase. The amount still represents less than 3 percent of the annual revenues of French news

⁷² Coster, H. 2021. Google, Facebook pledged millions for local news. Was it enough? Reuters, 10 June. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/google-facebook-pledged-millions-local-news-was-it-enough-2021-06-10/>.

⁷³ Ingram, M. 2018. The platform patrons: How Facebook and Google became two of the biggest funders of journalism in the world. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 16 May. https://www.cjr.org/special_report/google-facebook-journalism.php.

publishers benefiting from the licensing deal with Google. However, in July 2021, France's anti-trust body fined Google \$500 million for failing to comply with the regulator's stipulations on negotiating licensing arrangements.

One problem with mandatory licensing is that solidarity amongst publishers is often subject to strain, as they each have an interest in signing their own deals with Google and Facebook. In the United States, a new law would allow news organizations, like news groups in Australia, to form a cartel to negotiate with both Google and Facebook. In late 2021, a news industry coalition in South Africa sought to enlist similar support from their country's competition regulator, arguing that tech companies should pay the local media industry for using their content. A cause for concern, however, is how big internet platforms such as Google and Facebook have tended to sign deals with the biggest and most powerful companies like News Corp, while smaller and local news outlets are left out—a failing point especially notable in smaller media markets.

Taxation

Initiatives to tax internet giants started in Europe, where companies such as Meta, Google, Amazon, and Apple were pursuing fiscal optimization strategies to avoid paying taxes to national governments. Several governments, including France and the United Kingdom, have introduced digital service taxes on large tech companies operating within their borders. Thus far, however, these revenues would go into the general treasury of these governments, not earmarked to fund media or journalism directly.

In Ireland, the National Union of Journalists called for a 6 percent tax on search engines and social media companies specifically to fund the media industry. The Irish public broadcaster, RTE, echoed this by calling for a digital tax imposed on internet platforms such as Facebook and Google to help fund journalism in Ireland. In the United States, the media interest group Free Press has likewise called for a tax targeting online ads on platforms, including Facebook and Google, that would raise \$2 billion to fund local, non-profit journalism. In Brazil, the National Federation of Journalists also proposed a new tax on digital platforms and the creation of a Fund to Support and Promote Journalism and Journalists. This proposal followed an International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) call for taxes on the tech giants—including Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft—to finance a Fund to Support and Promote Journalism and Journalists.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). 2020. COVID-19: "We don't want the crumbs from the Facebook and Google table. We want them to pay their fair share". IFJ, 22 May. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/article/covid-19-we-dont-want-the-crumbs-from-the-google-and-facebook-table-we-want-them-to-pay-their-fa.html>.

The future of journalism?

It is especially difficult to make predictions about the future of journalism at a time when media are going through a period of profound turmoil and crisis. Few can see the future with clarity and confidence, but there is much at stake in knowing where journalism is heading.

The current crisis, as noted throughout this report, has had negative and positive consequences for journalism. The economic catastrophe triggered by the pandemic severely hit news organizations already struggling to find new business models to survive. In the wider political context, many states have exploited the global crisis to leverage power over media and even crack down on journalists. At the same time, however, the global pandemic gave professional journalism a renewed vote of confidence and support from audiences anxiously seeking trusted sources of information. The crisis also forced news organizations to adjust their professional practices and adapt to new social and technological realities to seek new audiences and find different forms of funding.

Adopting policies and practices that promote a free and independent press will not be an easy task. Public authorities will need to acknowledge the crisis threatening the viability of media worldwide and agree that concrete measures are necessary to ensure journalism's sustainability as a public good. As the Reuters Institute underscored, the turbulence created by the current crisis has produced "few winners, many losers". The winners are mainly big brand news organization in major markets, while the losers are largely smaller news outlets in markets that were already struggling. Policy instruments must primarily address the challenges facing the "many losers" in the news media space. Policies must also promote the viability of media while avoiding the risk of political capture. Without effective change, the biggest losers will be the public.

An arsenal of policies and innovative practices are urgently needed to support news media. These include changes by news producers, direct and indirect public financing for trusted news outlets, enhanced support for public service media, tax incentives for non-profit news outlets, and a redoubling of ODA and philanthropic investments in news production. All such efforts must be accompanied by institutional mechanisms that guarantee the editorial independence of news media outlets and avoid capture by powerful interests. The successful implementation of these and other policies will work towards ensuring that journalism continues to function as a public good.

Press Freedom

in Times of Crisis and Transformation



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This chapter examines global trends in media freedom, media pluralism, and media independence in the context of the most salient developments of the past five years. Those developments include the global COVID-19 pandemic, the continued digitalization of the media sphere, and the growing crisis of mis- and disinformation and declining trust. Each of these sections is bolstered by extensive data analysis (see Methodology in Appendix C). Trends in the safety of journalists are covered in the subsequent chapter.

Media freedom

Media freedom implies the liberty to publish and distribute content on any platform, free from the control, censorship, or harassment of the state. While these repressive measures continue to pose a significant threat, media freedom requires much more than just the absence of censorship—it needs a proactive promotion and protection.

International frameworks recognize that the enabling environment for media freedom includes freedom of expression laws, access to information guarantees, civil defamation laws based on international standards, and protections for the confidentiality of journalist sources and whistleblowers, among other legal and statutory preconditions. Amid the digitalization of the media sector, media freedom is also predicated on the internet remaining free from forms of online censorship described in further detail below.

For full press freedom, these components that shape the character of media freedom need themselves to be accompanied by pluralism and independence. And in the frame of the Windhoek +30 Declaration, endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2021, media freedom, pluralism, and independence today are also dramatically affected by the rise of internet gatekeepers, the eroding business model for journalism, and the levels of competence of news media audiences to engage with communications.

According to the major tracking indices, media freedom and freedom of expression have been on the decline in many parts of the world since 2012. That turning point marked the end of what had been an historic two-decade expansion in media freedom. To be sure, freedom of expression and press freedom never change uniformly across the world; in any given year, some countries progress while others lose ground. Between 2015 and 2020, 27 countries saw freedom of expression decline substantially, compared with 25 countries from 2010 to 2015, and just 10 from 2005 to 2010.⁷⁵

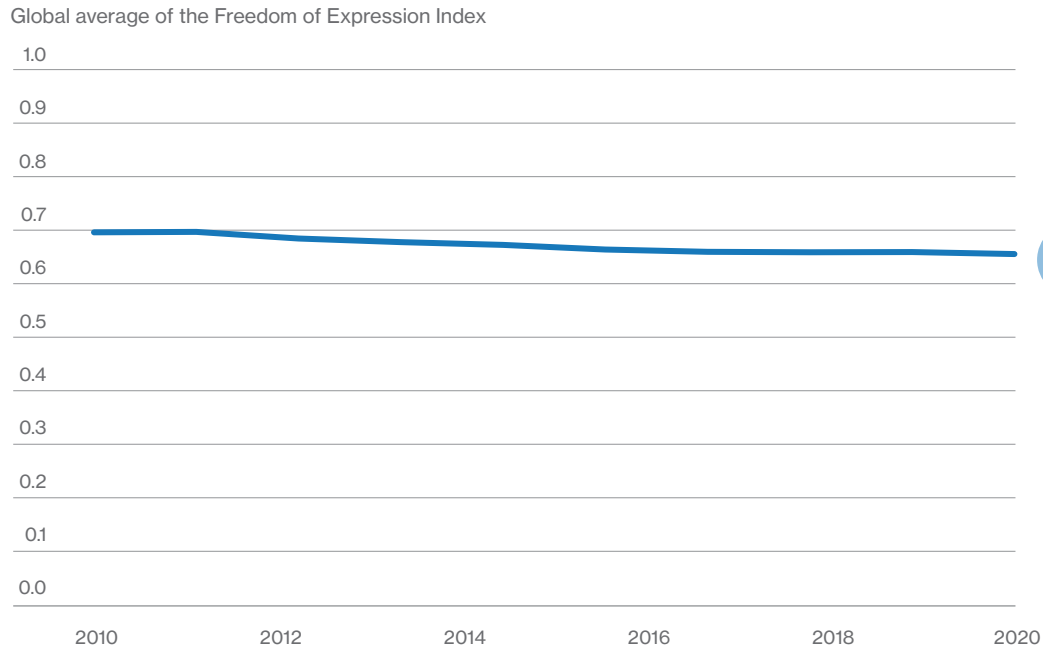
In most countries, however, the environment for freedom of expression remains unchanged, though *stagnant* may be a more accurate depiction, as the need for progress remains imperative on so many issues. While the decline in media freedom and freedom of expression appears to have slowed somewhat in the past five years relative to the previous five-year period, the trends included throughout this Report do not suggest an imminent rebound. On the contrary, media freedom may be entering a period of slow descent, characterized by a sometimes-subtle erosion of the legal enabling environment. Under the cover of transformations in the media landscape—including the growth of online mis- and disinformation—countries are responding with laws, regulations, and policies that endanger media freedom in the long term. Thus, in many cases, the apparent stagnation of freedom of expression scores in global indices may portend future declines.

⁷⁵ Analysis by Data-Pop Alliance for this Report, utilizing data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute's Freedom of Expression and Alternative Sources of Information Index. A "substantial" decline is one that moves a country into a new quartile on the index.

The following section unpacks the driving forces behind this apparent decline by looking at major trends, including how the COVID-19 pandemic has served to impact media freedom, legal and statutory environments, access to information, and freedom on the internet.

FIGURE 3-1:
Press freedom continues to decline, though the decline has slowed

Source: V-Dem Institute, Freedom of Expression Index.



The pandemic and media freedom

Amid the global pandemic and its uncertainties, citizens around the world scanned their TVs and radios, flipped through newspapers, and scrolled down news sites and apps, searching for critical and trustworthy information. How was the government responding to the pandemic? Was it safe to go to work or shop for food? When would a vaccine be available?

Not everyone found the information they needed. Often, news media struggled to keep up with the demand—a task made all the more difficult by accelerated declines in revenue and limited capacity, especially for local newspapers and outlets in the Global South. And some audiences instead found mis- and disinformation: myths, rumours, and outright lies, and in such quantities as to be dubbed a “disinfodemic”, a pandemic of non-verified or misleading information. Such falsehoods—spread intentionally or not—sowed confusion, division, and discord, impacting lives and livelihoods around the world.

“The ability to cause large-scale disinformation and undermine scientifically established facts is an existential risk to humanity”, noted United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in his report *Our Common Agenda*. “While vigorously defending the right to freedom of expression everywhere, we must equally encourage societies to develop a common, empirically backed consensus on the public good of facts, science, and knowledge.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ United Nations. 2021. *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General*. New York, United Nations, p. 27. https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf.

Journalists have been denied access to information essential for providing a clear and accurate portrayal of the spread of the disease, including basic data on the number of confirmed cases. They have been barred from attending briefings or speaking to health care workers and health officials. They have been subjected to laws that purported to limit the spread of mis- and disinformation but instead curtailed independent journalism.⁷⁷ They have also faced worse—direct censorship, arrest, and threats—for carrying out a profession that is recognized as an essential public service during a health crisis.⁷⁸

“Journalists and media workers of all kinds are crucial to helping us make informed decisions. In a pandemic, those decisions can save lives. Now more than ever, we need the media to document what is happening; to differentiate between fact and fiction; and hold leaders accountable.”

But since the pandemic began, around the world, many journalists have been subjected to increased restrictions and disproportionate punishments simply for doing their jobs. While temporary constraints on freedom of movement are essential to beating COVID-19, they must never be used as a pretext for cracking down on journalists’ ability to do their work.”

David Kaye

former UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression⁷⁹

FIGURE 3-2:
The pandemic provided cover for press freedom violations

Source: “COVID-19 Press Freedom Tracker,” International Press Institute.



Some governments have used the pandemic as cover to crack down on many forms of democratic rights, but restrictions on the media are the “most common by far” of violations of democratic standards, according to research conducted by the V-Dem Institute. The research found that COVID-19 measures had been used to justify significant media freedom violations in every region of the world, including in 96 out of the 144 countries in its 2021 study.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ International Press Institute (IPI). 2020. Rush to pass ‘fake news’ laws during Covid-19 intensifying global media freedom challenges. IPI, 22 October. <https://ipi.media/rush-to-pass-fake-news-laws-during-covid-19-intensifying-global-media-freedom-challenges/>.

⁷⁸ Pollack, R. 2020. *Journalism, press freedom and COVID-19*. Issue brief in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373573>.

⁷⁹ April 2020 report to the UN Human Rights Council.

⁸⁰ Kolvani, P., Lundstedt, M., Edgell, A., and Lachapell, J. 2021. *Pandemic backsliding: A year of violations and advances in response to COVID-19*. Policy Brief No. 32. Gothenburg, Sweden, Varieties of Democracy Institute. https://www.v-dem.net/media/publications/pb_32.pdf.

Legal and statutory trends

Much of the backsliding in media freedom derives from more subtle or indirect forms of restrictions and legal threats.

According to international standards, criminal sanctions for speech in any form—verbal, written, or recorded—should be applied only very exceptionally and as a last resort in the most severe cases, such as those involving incitement to imminent violence. In contrast, criminal defamation laws in any form are widely seen as disproportionate ways to deal with alleged violations of dignity and reputation, whereas civil penalties do not constitute a threat to freedom of expression and media freedom.⁸¹

The gradual progress towards the decriminalization of defamation has slowed in the last five years in all regions but Africa, where momentum remains strong. According to UNESCO data, at least 160 countries still have criminal defamation laws on the books, down from 166 in 2015 (Figure 3-3). These laws are finding new life through Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP) and in “libel tourism”, through which powerful actors initiate lawsuits in countries where defamation or libel laws are easier to abuse for the purpose of silencing critical voices.

FIGURE 3-3:
Many criminal
defamation laws
remain in place

Source: UNESCO.

REGION	2015	2021
Africa	45	39
Arab Region	19	19
Asia and the Pacific	37	38
Central and Eastern Europe	15	15
Latin America and the Caribbean	29	29
Western Europe and North America	21	20
GLOBAL	166	160



At least

160 countries
still have criminal defamation
laws on the books

At the same time, a raft of new laws has been passed in the last five years that purport to take aim at mis- and disinformation, cybercrime, or hate speech, but with potentially grave implications for media freedom. At least 57 laws and regulations across 44 countries have been adopted or amended since 2016 that contain overly vague language or disproportionate punishments that threaten online freedom of expression and media freedom.⁸²

⁸¹ The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OAS Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, have repeatedly called for criminal defamation laws to be abolished—see, for example, several of the Joint Declarations published here: https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/expression/basic_documents/declarations.asp.

⁸² For this Report, UNESCO compiled this list of laws with input from several initiatives tracking new laws governing online speech, including the CELE (Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información), the Centre for Law and Democracy, Poynter Institute, University of Westminster, International Press Institute, and Cyriila.

In accordance with international standards, any limits on freedom of expression should be legal, necessary, proportional, and pursuant of legitimate objectives. Studies examining these new laws have found that many do not adhere to these international standards.⁸³ It is a question as to whether such restrictions have any meaningful impact on the drivers or effects of mis- and disinformation, given that many are justified as having this ambition, or whether there is more likely to be a chilling effect on media freedom and freedom of expression.

BOX 3-1:

A raft of new laws pose a threat to online freedom of expression



At least 57 laws and regulations across 44 countries have been adopted or amended since 2016 that contain overly vague language or disproportionate punishments that threaten online freedom of expression and press freedom.

What kinds of legal statutes threaten freedom of expression and media freedom?

As mis- and disinformation and hate speech continue to spread rapidly, particularly online, many legal and policy measures have sought to address the challenges. However, vague or disproportionate provisions in these laws and regulations can have a negative effect on freedom of expression. These can come in the form of laws that claim to be “anti-fake news”, address “cybercrime”, or impose heavy penalties for spreading “rumours”.⁸⁴ These types of laws and regulations are often not in line with international human rights standards and can be abused by actors seeking to restrict freedom of expression and media freedom.

Source: Compiled by UNESCO with input from CELE, the Centre for Law and Democracy, Poynter Institute, University of Westminster, International Press Institute, and Cyrilla.

Access to information

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the fundamental importance of access to information to the public sphere, governance, and development by including target 16.10 to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”.⁸⁵ UNESCO is the custodian agency responsible for global reporting on indicator 16.10.2 regarding the “number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory, and/or policy guarantees for public access to information”.⁸⁶

⁸³ CELE (Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información). 2018. *La Regulación de Internet y Su Impacto En La Libertad de Expresión En América Latina*. Buenos Aires, University of Palermo.

Cunliffe-Jones, P., Diagne, P., Finlay, A., Gaye, S., Gichunge, W., Onumah, C., Pretorius, C., and Schiffrin, A. 2018. *Misinformation policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Westminster, University of Westminster Press.

⁸⁴ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL). 2021. *Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression*. Washington, DC, ICNL. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Expression/disinformation/2-Civil-society-organisations/International-Center-for-Non-Profit-Law1.pdf>.

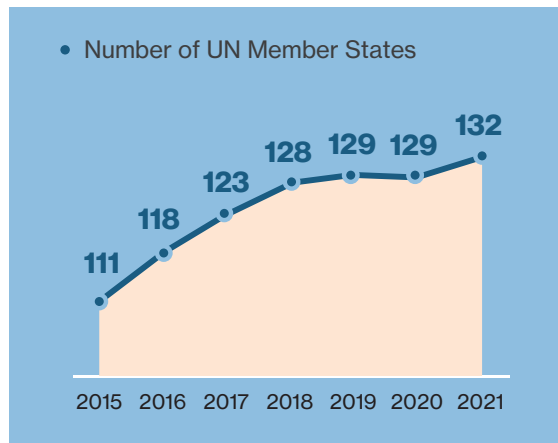
⁸⁵ UN General Assembly. 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/70/1.

<https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

⁸⁶ UNESCO. 2016. *Finlandia Declaration: Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms - This is Your Right!* https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/finlandia_declaration_3_may_2016.pdf.

FIGURE 3-4:
Continued progress on the passage of access to information laws

Source: UNESCO.



According to UNESCO data, over the past five years, at least 22 UN Member States adopted constitutional, statutory, and/or policy guarantees for public access to information, bringing the global total to 132 UN Member States as of August 2021. Indeed, owing to the efforts of civil society organizations around the world, as well as the commitment of governments and international and regional bodies to the principle of openness, the number of countries with such access to information (ATI) laws has tripled in less than 20 years.

Still, challenges in this area remain. Data from UNESCO show that ATI laws frequently lack strategies for implementation or suffer from poor resourcing to the agencies responsible for oversight.⁸⁷ The quality of ATI laws also remains highly variable. Some laws do not include adequate reporting requirements, while others provide overly broad language for exemptions—such as the types of information that should not circulate in the public domain—which can give governments an excuse to deny requests from citizens and journalists for information that could be used to hold officials to account. Information commissioners are often not independent from the government, and there are not always alternative routes to requesting access. Looking ahead, key challenges will be access to underlying data held by governments, as well as to that held by private sector entities, that impact public interests and public goods.

Freedom of expression and digital technologies

The relationship between freedom of expression and the internet, acknowledged in the UN Secretary-General's *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, is now recognized widely in international frameworks. Internet shutdowns have been repeatedly highlighted by bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council as a key human rights challenge on the rise.⁸⁸ While many international frameworks and national laws now protect freedom of expression and media freedom on the internet, these principles remain severely threatened in practice.

The modular and decentralized nature of the internet was thought initially to make it more difficult for a state to control or restrict than the analog technologies that preceded it. On the whole, that remains true, but connectivity choke-points make for vulnerabilities that are being exploited to limit freedom of expression and press freedom in the digital realm.

⁸⁷ UNESCO. 2020. *From promise to practice: Access to information for sustainable development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375022.locale=en>.

⁸⁸ See, for example, A/HRC/RES/47/16: *The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet* and A/HRC/RES/47/23: *New and emerging digital technologies and human rights*.

An “internet shutdown” is often defined broadly as the government restricting internet access for large swaths of territory, the most blatant and well-known method for restricting freedom of expression online. However, there are several more subtle approaches than this blanket shutdown, provided the technology capacity and expertise. Access Now, a non-profit organization that works to counter such online restrictions, records six types of shutdowns, all of which are included in this Report (Box 3-2).⁸⁹

BOX 3-2:

Digital methods of restricting freedom of expression and press freedom

- Broadband throttling, “the intentional slowing of an internet service or type of internet traffic by an internet service provider”
- Broadband internet shutdowns, “cuts to internet access via broadband, such as in a home, office, or business”
- Mobile internet shutdowns
- “Internet blackouts” or blanket internet shutdowns
- Mobile phone call and text message network shutdowns
- Service-specific (platform) shutdowns⁹⁰

The most recent UN Human Rights Council resolution on the promotion, protection, and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet “condemns unequivocally measures in violation of international human rights law that prevent or disrupt an individual’s ability to seek, receive or impart information online, including Internet shutdowns and online censorship.”⁹¹

Source: Access Now.

Internet shutdowns reached a peak of 213 unique incidents in 2019, though it is too early to say whether 2020 indicates a declining trend.⁹² Internet shutdowns can be conducted nationwide, but most are targeted at specific cities or regions and can last for hours, days, and even, in rare cases, months. Analysis by Access Now demonstrates that perpetrators of internet shutdowns often try to justify them as a “precautionary measure” or as a matter related to “national security,” “public safety,” or “hate speech,” when the underlying motivations appear strongly correlated with moments of political instability, protests, communal violence, or elections.

⁸⁹ Access Now, 2019. *The state of internet shutdowns around the world: The 2018 #KeepItOn report*. New York, Access Now. <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/07/KeepItOn-2018-Report.pdf>.

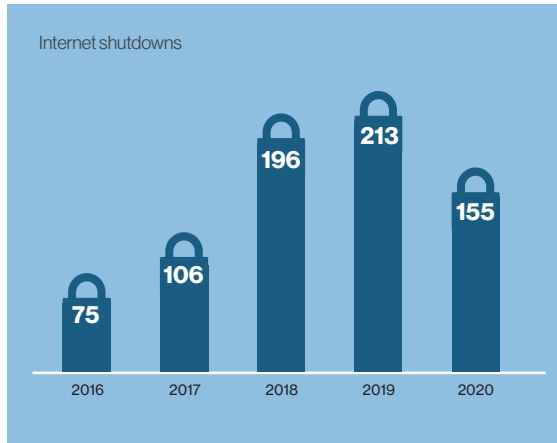
⁹⁰ Access Now. 2021. *Shattered dreams and lost opportunities: A year in the fight to #KeepItOn*. New York, Access Now. https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/03/KeepItOn-report-on-the-2020-data_Mar-2021_3.pdf.

⁹¹ UN Human Rights Council. 2016. *The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet*. (A/HRC/RES/47/16) Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 13 July 2016.

⁹² Access Now. 2021. *Shattered dreams and lost opportunities: A year in the fight to #KeepItOn*. New York, Access Now. https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/03/KeepItOn-report-on-the-2020-data_Mar-2021_3.pdf.

FIGURE 3-5:
Internet
shutdowns
reached record
numbers in 2019

Source: Access Now.



Some governments are also increasingly investing in their capacity to “filter” and “throttle” the internet, blocking certain kinds of content or slowing down access to discourage users from seeking information online. Filtering can be used to block specific websites within a country, such as foreign news websites or specific social media platforms. It can also be done through more sophisticated manipulation of the algorithms that determine what content people see on the internet when using search engines or browsing social media feeds.

As illustrated recently by the 2021 revelations regarding the use of Pegasus spyware, some governments have also invested in online surveillance capabilities to monitor opposition figures, activists, and journalists. The use of spyware puts new financial burdens on news outlets, encourages self-censorship, and has significant implications for the safety of journalists explored in greater detail elsewhere in this report.⁹³ These tactical assaults on press freedom are also far more difficult to detect and deter, posing a vexing challenge to the global efforts to safeguard freedom of expression and a free press.

According to reports provided by Meta, Google, and Twitter, the number of content removal requests received by those platforms from court orders, law enforcement, and executive branches of government worldwide have doubled in the last five years to a total of approximately 117,000 requests in 2020.⁹⁴ The growth of content removal requests has stirred concern that some actors might be abusing the platforms’ community standards and terms of service by filing unjustified content removal requests as a strategy to suppress dissent or criticism.

Unfortunately, of these companies, only Google publishes data on the underlying rationale of the content removal requests made by governments; that data shows “defamation” and “privacy and security” as the leading justifications.



In the last five years, government requests for content removal on major internet platforms have doubled

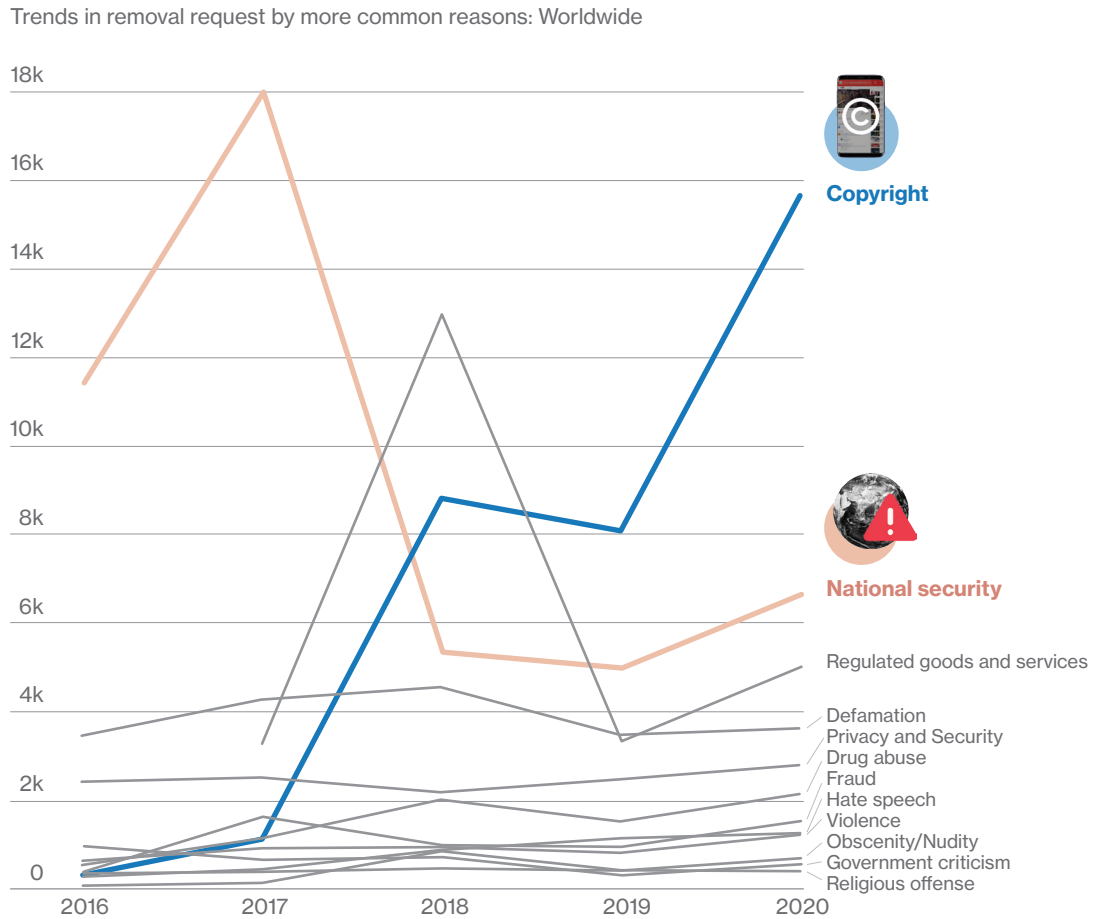
⁹³ Woodhams, S. 2021. *Spyware: An unregulated and escalating threat to independent media*. Washington, DC, Center for International Media Assistance. <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/spyware-an-unregulated-and-escalating-threat-to-independent-media/>.

⁹⁴ Analysis by Data-Pop Alliance for this Report, based on transparency reports from Facebook, Twitter, and Google.

FIGURE 3-6:

Copyright and National security most common reasons for government requests for online content removal

Source: Google Transparency Report.



Although states are the primary duty bearers in regard to ensuring freedoms of expression, association, and privacy, there is growing recognition—as highlighted, for example, in the Secretary-General’s *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*— that the private sector has an obligation to respect these human rights. While companies may set their own limits on the types of expression that they allow on their services, they are nevertheless expected to implement their policies consistently and provide redress where appropriate. They also have a duty to ensure that each user respects their terms of service, including, for example, prohibitions on violating other users’ rights to express themselves without being subjected to intimidation, bullying, hacking, or hate speech.

In this context, private internet companies—most notably, Meta holdings (including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp), Google, and Twitter—have faced increased scrutiny about their “community standards” and implementation thereof. For example, information has emerged that the standards are not applied equally to all people. An example is from what Meta calls its “Oversight Board”, which deals with content moderation appeals, and which has requested from the company greater transparency related to the enforcement of rules, including the more lenient standards revealed as being applied to some elite users.⁹⁵ Other examples cover the geographical and linguistic discrepancies in enforcement of standards.

⁹⁵ Caplan, R., and Gillespie, T. 2021. Facebook has an invisible system that shelters powerful rule-breakers. So do other online platforms. *Washington Post*, 18 September. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/09/18/facebook-has-an-invisible-system-that-shelters-powerful-rule-breakers-so-do-other-online-platforms/>.

The scrutiny has also grown into how the companies' policies and practices actually deal with speech that is not protected under freedom of expression standards (such as online death threats to journalists), how they process legal expression which nevertheless at scale can cause harms (such as coordinated falsehoods about elections), and how they use personal data to impact what users see in their search results, content feeds, and recommendations.

Among the efforts to hold the companies accountable, Ranking Digital Rights, a civil society organization dedicated to fostering more democratic standards for the internet, conducts an annual appraisal of the disclosed policies and practices of 26 of the world's largest digital platforms and telecommunications companies. Their most recent report concludes that "the world's most important tech companies are failing to meet key metrics of corporate governance and accountability around privacy, security, content, and information risks to users and societies".⁹⁶

Much debate in recent years has also focused on how practices of content moderation and curation affect human rights. Increased moderation has been put in place in response to genuine and serious concerns about the proliferation of hate speech, child sexual abuse materials, and other criminal activities with expressions that are not protected under international freedom of expression standards. More complex is the treatment of content that is legal but which can be amplified and recommended, and even rewarded with advertising, where the result is to cause harms to human rights and issues like sustainable development (such as conspiracy theories and clickbait).

In all this, the opacity of companies' moderation and curation continues to raise concerns. Meta, for instance, has said that it uses artificial intelligence to weed out problematic posts and has also hired thousands of employees to review content, partnered with fact-checking networks, and even outsources moderation to consultancy firms.⁹⁷ But these kinds of measures are not verifiable to independent researchers, nor have they been conducted with adequate transparency to understand their impact on freedom of expression.⁹⁸ Various reports have revealed how these companies' own researchers have identified major limitations in the way AI is used to monitor potentially harmful content, including hate speech.⁹⁹ A host of other data has also emerged, especially through the efforts of journalists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and whistleblowers, showing that many algorithms work at cross-purposes, so that even automated content moderation efforts (such as those on hate speech) are undercut by the power of automated advertising, content promotion, and recommendation technological functions. At the same time, it has become evident that companies are not doing enough to help respect and protect the exercise of legitimate expression, such as that by journalists, but instead allow and even enable harms to mount (not least against women journalists, as is expanded upon in the following chapter of this Report).¹⁰⁰

A further issue concerns how companies define bona fide news media enterprises and include them in regard to prioritization in dedicated news feeds and results, and recognize a "carve out" for journalistic coverage of content issues that might otherwise face restrictions.

⁹⁶ MacKinnon, R., Villaseñor, M., and Brown, M. 2021. *Investors need an updated digital rights playbook for 2021*. Washington, DC, Ranking Digital Rights. <https://rankingdigitalrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Spring-2021-Investor-Update.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Satariano, A., and Isaac, M. 2021. The silent partner cleaning up Facebook for \$500 million a year. *New York Times*, 31 August. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/31/technology/facebook-accenture-content-moderation.html>.

⁹⁸ Puddephatt, A. 2021. *Letting the sun shine in: Transparency and accountability in the digital age*. Issue brief in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377231>.

⁹⁹ Seetharamn, D., Horwitz, J. and Scheek, J. 2021. The Facebook files: Facebook says AI will clean up the platform. Its own engineers have doubts. *Washington Post*, 17 October. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/articles/facebook-ai-enforce-rules-engineers-doubtful-artificial-intelligence-11634338184>.

¹⁰⁰ See also Posetti, J., Shabbir, N., Maynard, D., Bontcheva, K., and Aboulez, N. 2021. *The chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/publications/thechilling>.

To assess concerns related to how platform policies affect media freedom, greater transparency of internet companies has become an important priority, and the current limitations of data from the private sector are further addressed later in this Report. Notably, UNESCO has launched an initiative to enhance the transparency of internet companies, including a set of 26 high-level principles on transparency to be used by policy-makers, companies, and other actors.¹⁰¹

BOX 3-3:

UNESCO's work to promote media freedom

As the UN specialized agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression, UNESCO works across a number of areas to foster media freedom. In recent years, this has included:

1. STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES AND PROVIDING POLICY ADVICE

Over 23,000 judges and other judicial actors have been trained on international and regional standards on freedom of expression and access to information across the world through UNESCO's Judges Initiative. Since 2013, the Initiative has rolled out several regional online courses in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean, in addition to a global course, and has produced toolkits and guidelines for judicial workers.

In addition to the judiciary, UNESCO has also trained over 8,500 members of security forces on the importance of press freedom and on building constructive and transparent relationships with media workers.

UNESCO has produced several toolkits and other resources for judicial actors and security forces, including:

- *[Freedom of expression and public order: fostering the relationship between security forces and journalists](#)* (2018)
- *[Legal standards on freedom of expression: toolkit for the judiciary in Africa](#)* (2018)
- *[Guidelines for prosecutors on cases of crimes against journalists](#)* (2020)
- *[COVID-19: the role of judicial operators in the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of expression: guidelines](#)* (2020)
- *[Global toolkit for judicial actors: international legal standards on freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists](#)* (2021)
- *[UNESCO guide for amicus curiae interventions in freedom of expression cases](#)* (2021)

UNESCO also accompanies Member States seeking to reform their legal and institutional frameworks related to freedom of expression and media freedom through policy advice and technical support.

¹⁰¹ Puddephatt, A. 2021. *Letting the sun shine in: Transparency and accountability in the digital age*. Issue brief in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377231>.

In addition, UNESCO has contributed to normative standards in the field of freedom of expression and media development in the digital age. This includes the concept of “internet universality”, which was endorsed by UNESCO’s General Conference in 2015, and its accompanying R.O.A.M principles (for an internet that is human Rights-based, Open, Accessible to all, nurtured by Multi-stakeholder participation). UNESCO also developed the corresponding Internet Universality Indicators, which were endorsed by the Council of UNESCO’s IPDC in 2018. UNESCO has since worked to encourage Member States to conduct national assessments of internet development based on this set of indicators. Assessments based on the Internet Universality Indicators are currently underway or have been completed in 33 countries.

2. RAISING AWARENESS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ITS COROLLARIES

Commemorations of International Days are central to UNESCO’s approach in promoting freedom of expression, media freedom, the safety of journalists, and access to information.

Annual celebrations of World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May, have in recent years seen the setting in motion of important initiatives like the 2020 launch of the Forum of Legal Actors on Freedom of Expression, a network of legal operators to support and defend the right to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, and the signing of the [Hague Commitment to Increase the Safety of Journalists](#), a political commitment endorsed by close to 60 countries.

The 2021 celebration of World Press Freedom Day marked the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration for the Development of a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press, an historic affirmation of the international community’s commitment to media freedom which led to the proclamation of 3 May as World Press Freedom Day.

The Windhoek+30 Declaration of the 2021 conference and the subsequent endorsement of its principles by UNESCO’s Member States serve to take forward the spirit of the original Declaration and align its principles to current challenges to media freedom.

The declarations adopted at the annual celebrations of World Press Freedom Day since 2017 have been:

- 2017: [Jakarta Declaration: Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media’s role in Advancing Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#)
- 2018: [Accra Declaration: Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and the Rule of Law](#)
- 2019: [Addis Ababa Declaration: Media for Democracy: Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation](#)
- 2020: Hague Commitment was endorsed at the joint celebration of World Press Freedom Day, under the theme Journalism Without Fear or Favour, and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists
- 2021: [Windhoek+30 Declaration: Information as a Public Good](#)

Created by UNESCO in 2016, the International Day for Universal Access to Information was proclaimed by the 74th UN General Assembly in 2019. Since then, the International Day has served to raise awareness around the world on the importance of freedom of information for sustainable development and human rights, and particularly in times of crisis. It was celebrated in over 25 countries in 2021.

The annual themes of the International Day for Universal Access to Information since 2017 have been:

- 2019: [Access to Information: Leaving No One Behind!](#)
- 2020: [Access to Information: Saving Lives, Building Trust, Bringing Hope](#)
- 2021: [The Right to Know: Building Back Better with Access to Information](#)

3. POLICY RESEARCH

Under the umbrella of the World Trends series, several In Focus reports and issue briefs have been published since the last global report, offering analysis of specific emerging issues related to freedom of expression and media development. These include:

- [Elections and Media in Digital Times](#) (2019)
- [Access to Information: A New Promise for Sustainable Development](#) (2019)
- [Reporting Facts: Free From Fear or Favour](#) (2020)
- [Journalism, press freedom and COVID-19](#) (2020)
- [The right to information in times of crisis: access to information – saving lives, building trust, bringing hope!](#) (2020)
- [Letting the sun shine in: transparency and accountability in the digital age](#) (2021)

On the topic of media and elections, UNESCO has also produced a video explainer (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iQSNp8Yf70&list=PLWuYED1WVJIP6AR2z48IKHDZb3Pnt9Rtl&index=4>)

BOX 3-4:

Laureates of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize

Named in honour of Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist who was assassinated in front of the offices of *El Espectador* in Bogotá in 1986 in reprisal for his condemnation of drug trafficking mafias, the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Prize is awarded every year to journalists or organizations who have made a significant contribution to the defence of media freedom, especially in the face of danger or crisis.

Laureates of the Prize are recommended by an independent international jury made up of six members who represent all types of media, and are then selected by the Director-General of UNESCO. The most recent laureate was Maria Ressa, Filipino investigative journalist and media executive, who was awarded the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Prize in May 2021, and was later awarded the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize.

- 2017 – **Dawit Isaak**, Eritrea/Sweden
- 2018 – **Mahmoud “Shawkan” Abu Zeid**, Egypt
- 2019 – **Kyaw Soe Oo** and **Wa Lone**, Myanmar
- 2020 – **Jineth Bedoya**, Colombia
- 2021 – **Maria Ressa**, Philippines

Media pluralism

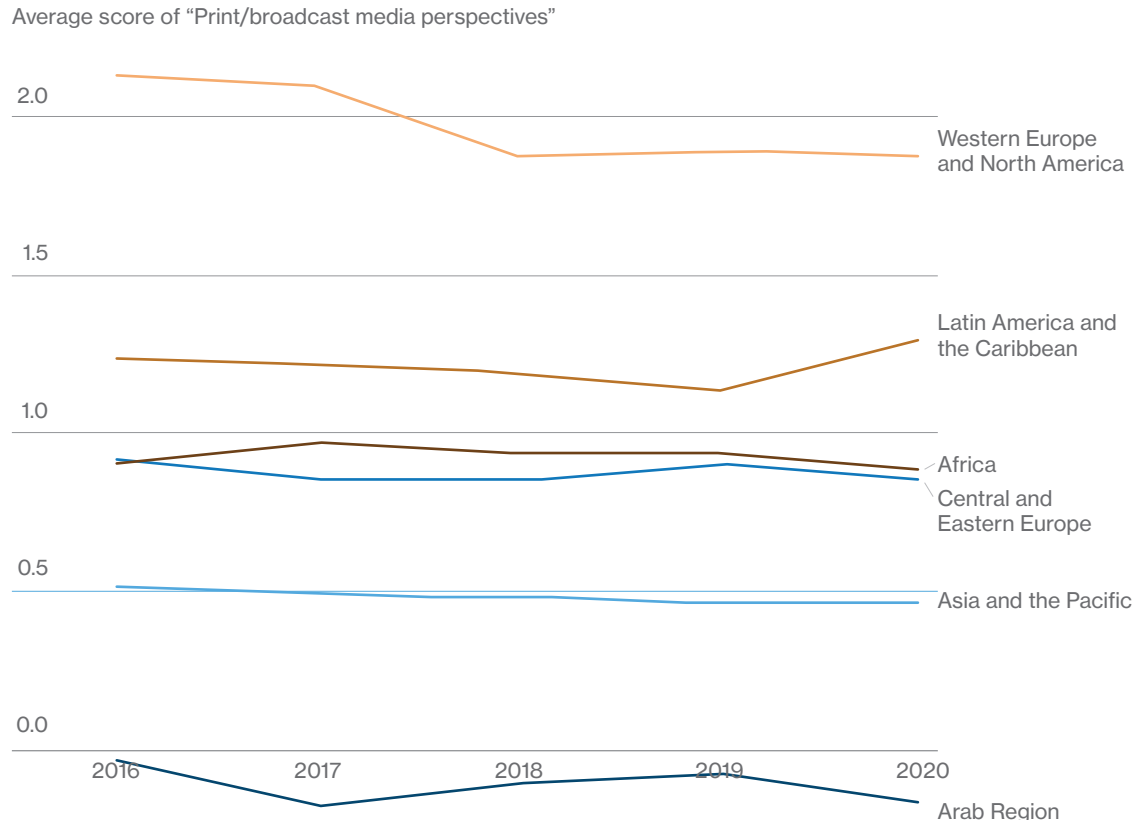
Just as the growth of online media was first viewed as a boon for media freedom, possibilities brought about by digital communications seemed likely to favour pluralism. Yet the reality is more nuanced, and to some degree still uncertain. As mentioned previously, pluralism relates to choice and diversity and to issues such as concentration, centralization, and monopolization of media-related institutions.

Media pluralism can be evaluated through the lens of three dimensions or requirements. First, pluralism should be reflected in a wide array, or plurality, of sources for news and information, thus providing a vibrant marketplace of information and ideas to inform public dialogue and debate. Second, pluralism can be viewed through the lens of accessibility, which depends as much on the availability and affordability of the physical infrastructure of communication (such as a smart phone, television, or radio) as it does on the content itself. Third and finally, genuine pluralism depends on a diversity of perspectives and opinions. Such diversity is seldom if ever delivered by a single news outlet, but it may exist across a range of outlets within a vibrant media system. This diversity of perspectives and content should similarly meet the needs and interests of a diverse audience, including women, youth, rural communities, and linguistic and cultural minorities.

In practice, those dimensions are nearly impossible to quantify at a global level, and what data are available are inevitably imprecise. However, V-Dem Institute's indicator on pluralism suggests the decline or stagnation of media pluralism in many regions of the world. This section delves further into some of the major factors affecting media pluralism, including market pluralism, access to the internet, and gender inclusion.

FIGURE 3-7:
Experts see
declining or
stagnant pluralism
in many regions

Source: V-Dem Institute. Expert panel responses to the question, "Do the major print and broadcast media represent a wide range of political perspectives?"



Market pluralism in the digital age

The perceived decline in media pluralism may come as a surprise in the digital age. The number of websites on the internet is now approaching two billion.¹⁰² Online streaming services like Netflix are flourishing and cater to international audiences, adding to an already growing menu of offerings available by satellite or digital broadcast. Social media, including blogging, allows anyone with a smart phone or computer and internet connection to seek a global audience. How could pluralism and diversity decline in this environment?

Because it is so resource-intensive, research on media market pluralism is often focused on a single country, region, or point in time, though at least one broader, comparative study of digital pluralism around the globe is currently in progress.¹⁰³ Often, in small media markets, the raw data simply does not exist, but where data can be found, the challenges to digital pluralism are becoming increasingly evident. For instance, studies undertaken at the national level in some countries have found growing concentration of news content—in other words, more homogeneous coverage—as newspapers increasingly relied on external sources, such as news agencies, and that search engines often direct traffic to only a handful of top news outlets.^{104 105}

Overall, it has also become evident that while the internet has increased the range and volume of voices in circulation, the supply of news as a proportion of the whole has massively declined. Predominant business models online further diminish the visibility and findability of journalism, notwithstanding its distinctive value in the wider content mix.

Greater transparency from the large internet companies will also be necessary to thoroughly evaluate and diagnose pluralism. Based on survey data from 36 countries, a 2019 study found Facebook to be among the top three channels for receiving news for respondents in 14 of those countries.¹⁰⁶ With that trend likely to grow, it will be impossible to understand what kind of news and information citizens are consuming without more detailed transparency reporting from online platforms. As we await more empirical data to shed light on pluralism in the digital age, analysts and academics point to two broader trends that are central to the fate of media pluralism, especially news media: media freedom and media viability.

Plurality, diversity, and access inextricably depend upon a free and independent news media and an open internet. In a nation where journalists are not free to practice their profession without undue restrictions or threats, plurality will be low. In contexts where the powerful infringe on media independence, diversity will be lost. Where the internet is restricted or controlled, access will also be diminished. Other sections of this Report outline a number of alarming trends with regard to the freedom and independence of media that are likely undermining media pluralism in many contexts and contributing to the apparent decline.

¹⁰² Armstrong, M. 2021. This is how many websites there are. World Economic Forum, 11 August. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/08/number-websites-2021-world-wide-web/>.

¹⁰³ Carleton University. 2021. SSHRC partnership grant: Global Media and Internet Concentration (GMIC) project. <https://carleton.ca/fpa/2021/sshrc-partnership-grant-global-media-and-internet-concentration-gmic-project/>.

¹⁰⁴ Vogler, D. Udris, L., and Eisenegger, M. 2020. Measuring media content concentration at a large scale using automated text comparisons. *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 11, pp. 1459–78. See also Hendrickx, J. 2020. Trying to survive while eroding news diversity: Legacy news media's catch-22. *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 5, pp. 598–614.

¹⁰⁵ Hong, S., and Kim, N. 2018. Will the internet promote democracy? Search engines, concentration of online news readership, and e-democracy. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 388–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2018.1534703>.

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, P. J., and Prat, A. 2019. Where do people get their news? *Economic Policy*, Vol. 34, No. 97, pp. 5–47.

Issues of pluralism are also linked strongly to media markets, the viability of journalistic business models, and laws, regulations, and anti-trust statutes pertaining to media ownership. The previous chapter of this Report, “Journalism as a public good”, deals with these issues in greater detail, pointing to a mix of factors that threaten news pluralism. It is worth recalling here that pluralism encompasses a recognition of public, private, and community media sectors. Not only are all three affected (albeit unevenly) by the viability crisis with concomitant impact on their contributions to journalism, but the distinctiveness between them (and between news and other forms of content) becomes blurred in online content feeds and search results.

Among the threats to media pluralism is the unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of two companies, Meta and Google. The precise nature and scale of that dominance is under dispute, and has been a major topic in over 100 platform regulation inquiries, reviews, and proceedings worldwide since 2016, according to a 2020 study.¹⁰⁷ Some national level studies have confirmed that Meta and its properties command the majority of total time spent on social media, while Google has a majority share of the search advertising market.¹⁰⁸ While data on the companies’ online traffic and internet user time is hard to find, anti-trust cases in several countries depict a similar level of gatekeeping power. The indispensability of Meta and Google to the daily lives of billions of people translates into opportunities to collect more user data, which in turn is used to sell targeted advertising. As noted above, two companies, Google and Meta, now receive approximately half of all global digital ad spend.¹⁰⁹

Fewer and fewer news outlets can break through in the noisy and crowded attention economy, and many find themselves further squeezed out by the algorithmic designs of digital intermediaries. In this environment, advertising revenues have shifted rapidly toward internet companies and away from news outlets, meaning less choice for news consumers. In the last five years, global newspaper advertising revenue dropped by half; when analyzed over the past ten years, that loss is a staggering two-thirds.¹¹⁰



Still, notwithstanding deficits in news supply and journalistic pluralism, the vast majority of people in many countries turn to television and radio as their primary sources of news and information, and in even greater numbers during the pandemic.¹¹¹ As such, it is important to point out that the migration from analog to digital broadcasting systems bodes well for pluralism in the broadcast field, depending on how it is managed (Figure 3-8).¹¹² Digital television has more “spectral efficiency” than analogue, meaning that more channels (and hence potentially greater plurality—although mainly taken up by entertainment programming rather than news) can be achieved on a given spectrum of broadcast frequency. Meanwhile, viewership of satellite television has begun to wane around the world but remains a source of news and information for many viewers.

¹⁰⁷ Winseck, D., and Puppis, M. 2020. Platform regulation inquiries. [Unpublished manuscript]

¹⁰⁸ Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). 2020. *Online platforms and digital advertising*. London, CMA. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5efc57ed3a6f4023d242ed56/Final_report_1_July_2020_.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ Zenith. 2020. *Advertising expenditure forecasts*, December 2020.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

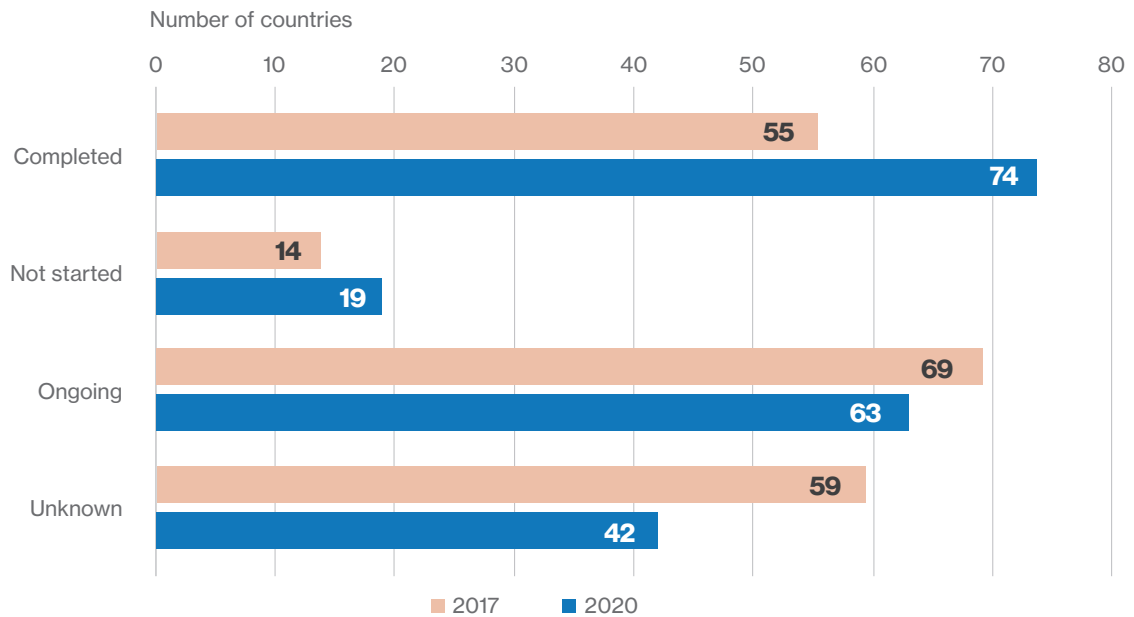
¹¹¹ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C.T., and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2021. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf.

¹¹² Foditsch, N. 2017. *The power of airwaves: The role of spectrum management in media development*. Washington, DC, Center for International Media Assistance. <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/power-airwaves-role-spectrum-management-media-development/>.

While social media platforms and internet governance receive a great deal of attention, the regulation and policy-directives affecting spectrum management and satellite television could still be marshalled to have a positive impact on pluralism in many parts of the world, independent of the many uncertainties regarding internet and platform governance. At the same time, the trend for video and audio consumption is increasingly one where the suppliers of news in these formats are being disintermediated by internet gatekeepers with interests other than promoting journalism. Pluralism in this regard may come to exist “off-field” and marginal to the real “game” (wherein news is a minor player), but a game whose business attracts and channels attention and which generates immense resources.

FIGURE 3-8:
Gradual transition
to digital terrestrial
television
broadcasting

Source: International
Telecommunication Union.



Access to the internet

In Target 9.C, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to significantly increase access to information and communication technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to internet in least developed countries. Through this and other international commitments, access to the internet has indeed expanded rapidly, from approximately 30 percent of the world’s population in 2010 to over 50 percent in 2020 (Figure 3-9).¹¹³ This growth owes much to the docking of new undersea cables and the expansion of data-ready mobile phone networks, both of which have improved the availability and affordability of the internet. As they expand, fifth generation (5G) mobile networks will also bring greater capacity for high-speed mobile broadband, which will be especially beneficial for parts of the world where users are dependent upon mobile connections.

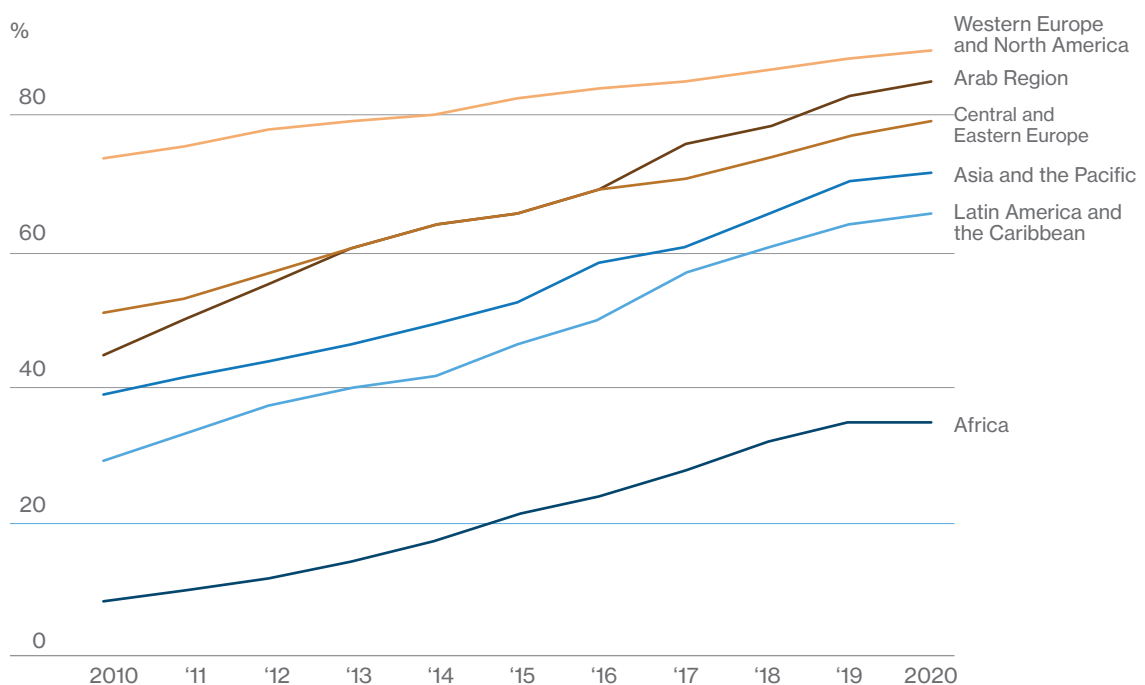
¹¹³ International Telecommunication Union (ITU). 2021. Statistics. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>.

Despite the technological gains, over the last five years, the growth of internet access has slowed as markets struggle to provide service to the world's poorest populations and amid enduring digital divides in some regions, evident in disparities based on issues such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and urban-rural divides, among others. This has happened in spite of the fact that 93 percent of the world's population lives within reach of the infrastructure needed for mobile broadband or internet services.¹¹⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many to work and study virtually, further exposed this digital divide, as children in homes lacking reliable internet connections suffered learning losses that will be difficult to overcome.¹¹⁵

Numerous barriers continue to perpetuate those digital inequities, including limited funding for fiber-optic cables and unfavourable market dynamics for rural and poor citizens. While many private companies currently lack the incentives to connect the last billion, the UN Secretary-General's *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* lays out five commitments for achieving universal connectivity by 2030.¹¹⁶ These include comprehensive connectivity plans and regulations to create a better enabling environment for smaller-scale providers, including broadband cooperatives, to lower costs.

FIGURE 3-9:
Internet
penetration
continues
steady growth
in every region

Source: International
Telecommunication
Union.



¹¹⁴ Bahia, K., and Delaporte, A. 2020. *The state of mobile internet connectivity in 2020*. GSMA.

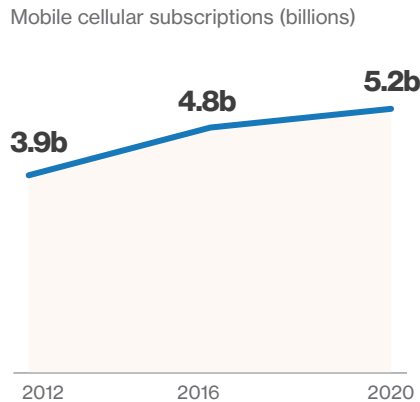
<https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GSMA-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2020.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Centro de Estudios Mineduc. 2020. Impacto del Covid-19 en los resultados de aprendizaje y escolaridad en Chile. https://www.mineduc.cl/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2020/08/EstudioMineduc_bancomundial.pdf.

¹¹⁶ United Nations. 2020. *Report of the Secretary-General: Roadmap for digital cooperation*. New York, United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/assets/pdf/Roadmap_for_Digital_Cooperation_EN.pdf.

FIGURE 3-10:
Mobile cellular
subscriptions
continue to boom
worldwide

Source: GSMA.

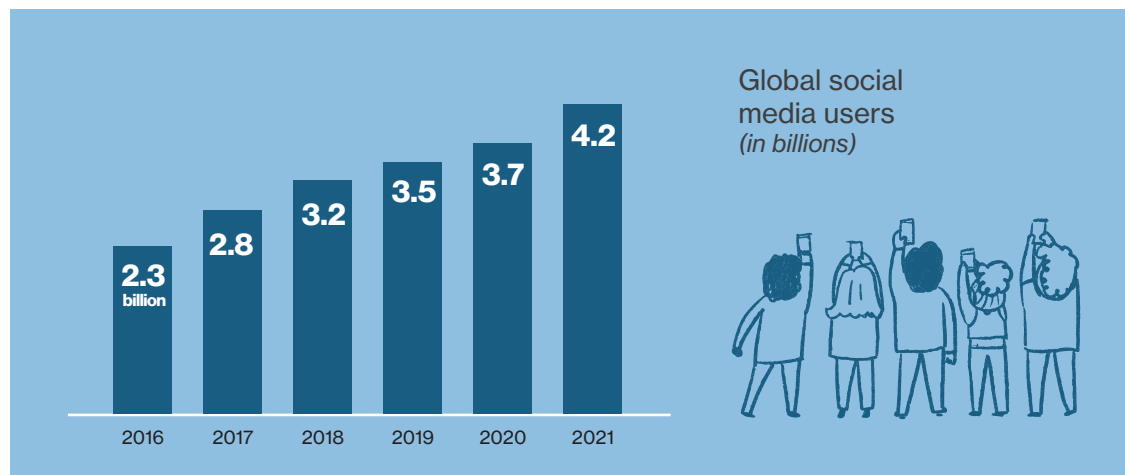


In **2020**, the number of mobile cellular subscriptions represented **67% of the population**, estimated to reach **70% by 2025**

In Africa, the significant digital gap to overcome is linked to high costs as well as gender inequalities in digital access, according to data collected for this year's Report. Even as the cost of internet access has decreased significantly in some African countries, the region still has the most expensive internet in the world. Another large driver of the digital gap in Africa is the "mobile gender gap". According to GSMA, across the world, women are seven percent less likely to own a mobile phone; in Sub-Saharan Africa, that gap grows to 13 percent. Gender gaps in mobile internet use are also greatest in the Africa region, where women are 37 percent less likely to use mobile internet—a striking number that has remained relatively stagnant since 2017.¹¹⁷

FIGURE 3-11:
Social media
use continues to
grow worldwide

Source: Kepios.



¹¹⁷ GSMA. 2021. *Connected women: The mobile gender gap 2021*. GSMA. <https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2021.pdf>.

Gender equality

For the achievement of equality envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the full participation of women in the public sphere is imperative, which in turn implicates gender issues in the supply, content of, and access to information. Unfortunately, by many measures, progress towards gender equality within news media has continued to stagnate in the last five years. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which has tracked women's marginalization in news media every five years since 1995, estimates that it will take another 67 years to close the average gender equality gap in traditional news media.¹¹⁸

Beyond issues of access, discussed above, gender equality in the media must take into account three levels of inclusion: representation in the newsroom and decision-making positions, across levels and beats; inclusion as sources of expertise and portrayal in the content of news; and consideration as a key demographic among news consumers. Research and assessments on gender inclusion therefore seek to understand the equality gap in these multiple and interconnected aspects.

The gender equality gap in news media was laid bare during the COVID-19 pandemic. While labour force statistics show that approximately half of health specialists are women, women accounted for just 27 percent of the health specialists cited in the thousands of coronavirus stories reviewed by GMMP. A study by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) similarly concluded that women were marginalized as both sources of news expertise and as news protagonists in the coverage of the pandemic.¹¹⁹ At the same time, the International Federation of Journalists found that women journalists were inordinately impacted by the pandemic, reporting negative consequences on their work-life balance, work responsibilities, and salaries.¹²⁰

Unfortunately, and as emphasized later in this Report, disaggregated data on these topics are scarce, especially in datasets that are comparable across countries and over time. Where data do exist, however, the trends across all of these aspects are discouraging. Women continue to be underrepresented in news organizations at leadership levels and on "hard news" such as beats related to politics. Both qualitative and quantitative studies of news content depict persistent biases in women's representation.

Relative to the gender gap in women's representation in newsrooms and news content, the gap in women's access and use of news is likely smaller. Again, studies specifically designed to assess the scale, causes, and consequences of the gender gap among news audiences are rare, with existing studies quickly becoming dated.¹²¹ One measure of the gender gap among news audiences comes from the World Values Survey, a global survey conducted every five years by a network of researchers. That data shows that the gap is largest in newspaper readership and smallest in television viewership. Analyzed in conjunction with data on news content, researchers have found a significant correlation between lower representation of women in the news and lower female news readership and viewership.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). 2021. *Who makes the news?* GMMP. https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL.pdf.

¹¹⁹ Kassova, L. 2020. *The missing perspectives of women in COVID-19 news*. Washington, DC, International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020.09.16-COVID-REPORT_exec_summary.pdf.

¹²⁰ IFJ. 2020. COVID-19 has increased gender inequalities in the media, IFJ survey finds. IFJ, 23 July. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/covid-19-has-increased-gender-inequalities-in-the-media-ifj-survey-finds.html>.

¹²¹ Benesch, C. 2012. An empirical analysis of the gender gap in news consumption. *Journal of Media Economics*, Vol. 25, No. 3, pp. 147–167. See also Ragnedda, M., and Muschert, G.W. (eds.). 2013. *The digital divide: The internet and social inequality in international perspective*. London, Routledge.

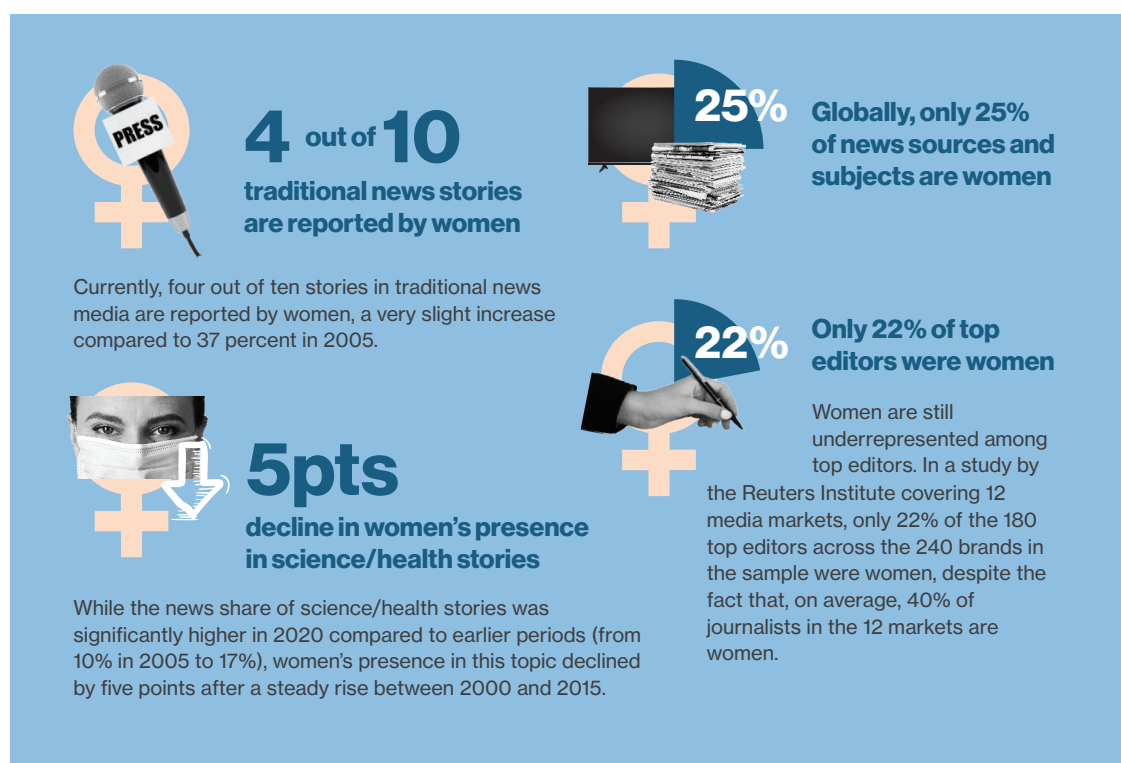
¹²² Djerf-Pierre, M., and Edström, M. (eds). 2020. *Comparing gender and media equality across the globe: A cross-national study of the qualities, causes, and consequences of gender equality in and through the news media*. Gothenberg, Sweden, Nordicom. <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publikationer/comparing-gender-and-media-equality-across-globe>.

Some evidence has suggested that digital news media in many cases offers more equal opportunities for women's leadership. One 2021 report surveyed over 200 digital native media outlets across Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa, and found that 32 percent of their founders were women, even in markets where women's share of traditional media ownership was as low as 1 percent.¹²³ Simultaneously, however, other studies have pointed to persistent gender biases in the online world. And as highlighted elsewhere in this Report, the online space has proven to be especially hostile for women journalists and news consumers. Online harassment of and threats against women journalists are rampant, while women who use the internet frequently—whether in a professional capacity or as private users—report higher levels of abuse than their male counterparts.

The persistent multi-faceted gender gap in news suggests the need for a redoubling of efforts for greater equality in news production, representation, access, and use. Furthermore, efforts are needed to ensure that the public sphere remains not only inclusive but enabling for women. In boardrooms, newsrooms, and online discourse, support and targeted actions are needed to continue the push against all forms of discrimination, misogyny, and patriarchal beliefs.

FIGURE 3-12:
Gender inequality in media management, workforce, and content

Sources: Global Media Monitoring Project and Reuters Institute.



¹²³ Sembramedia. 2021. *Inflection Point International: A study of digital media entrepreneurs in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa.* <https://data2021.sembramedia.org/>.

FIGURE 3-13:
Even as internet access increases, the gender gap persists

Source: The Inclusive Internet Index, Economist Impact.

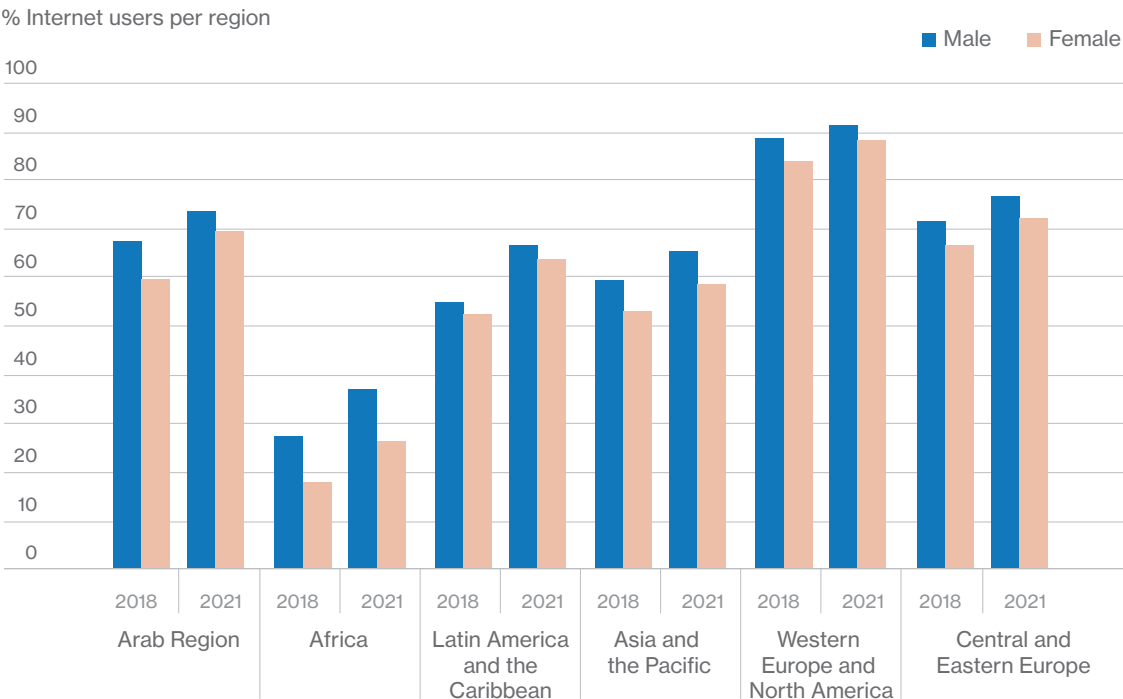
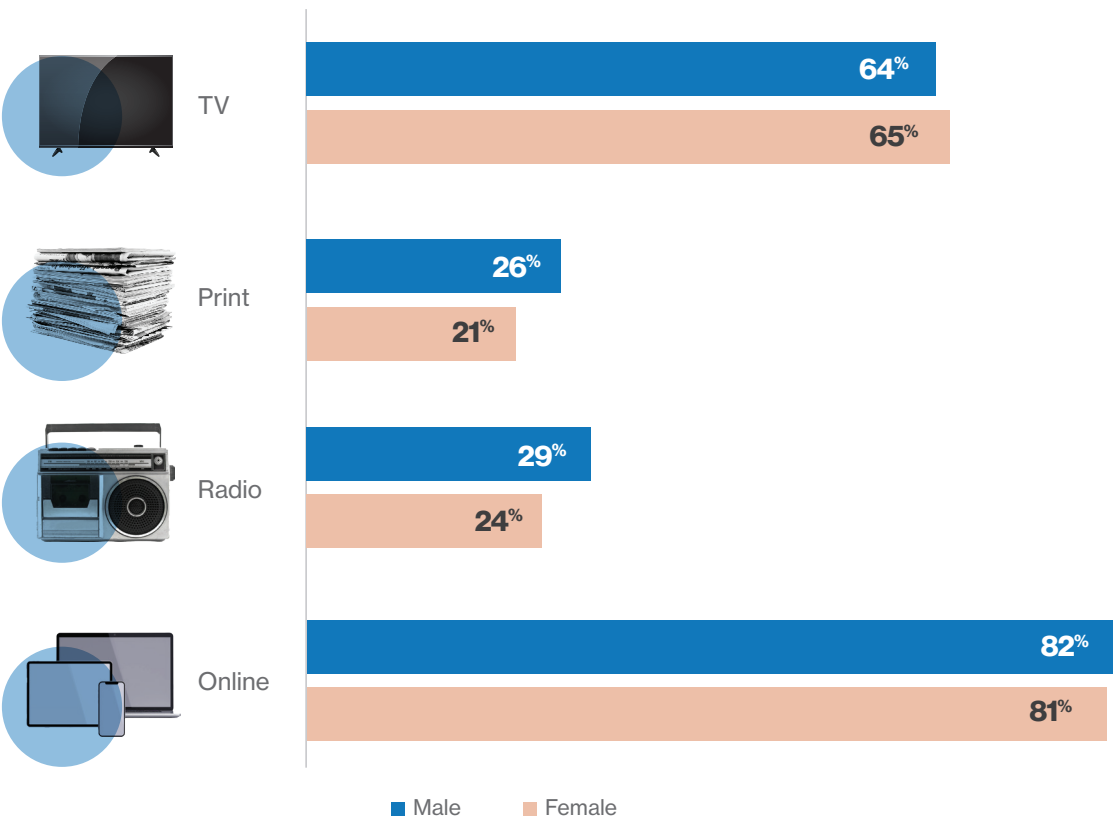


FIGURE 3-14:
News consumers by medium and sex, 2021

Source: Reuters Institute. Based on a sample of 46 countries.



Issues of media pluralism and diversity point not just to the supply of news and other kinds of information, but also to the ability of audiences to discern and discriminate between different kinds of content. The critical competence to evaluate content, to recognize why some content reaches and audience and what is left out, implicates media and information literacy. In the burgeoning communications environment, where news efforts struggle to find business models and are often drowned out, this literacy is ever more important. At the same time, there is still a lag in society's efforts to build audience capacities in relation to the need.

BOX 3-5:

UNESCO's work to promote media pluralism and media and information literacy

As the UN specialized agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression, UNESCO works across a number of areas to foster media pluralism. In recent years, this has included activities in several areas, including:

1. COMMUNITY MEDIA

With UNESCO's support, over 370 community media outlets and 10 community media networks have been empowered and improved policies through dialogue. Over 1,500 participants have been involved in capacity building activities and consultancies, and five training videos were produced, reaching more than 8,000 beneficiaries.

Through the IPDC, UNESCO has supported community media development worldwide. Through its calls for proposals and its rapid response mechanism, the IPDC finances media projects to promote media development and secure a healthy environment for the growth of free and pluralistic media in developing countries.

Based on UNESCO's Community Media Sustainability Policy Series, policy dialogue on community media was initiated through national multi-stakeholder consultations and baseline surveys. Local stakeholders, including duty bearers, drafted eight national strategy documents on community media sustainability.

2. RADIO

World Radio Day, observed on 13 February, continues to serve as a yearly occasion to celebrate and advocate for media pluralism, diversity, and sustainability of community media. Themes of its global celebrations in recent years have been:

- 2018: [Radio and Sports](#)
- 2019: [Dialogue, Tolerance and Peace](#)
- 2020: [We Are Radio, We Are Diversity](#)
- 2021: [New World, New Radio – Evolution, Innovation, Connection](#)

In 2020, 134 Member States celebrated World Radio Day, and 632 events were organized in 128 Member States in 2021.

3. GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH MEDIA

UNESCO offers advisory and training activities for Member States and civil society organizations to promote gender equality in and through the media, and it has also worked successfully with national media regulators in this regard. Furthermore, UNESCO supports media organizations and other stakeholders to report and raise awareness on gender-based violence in an ethical and informed manner.

UNESCO's Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM), launched in 2012, provide a framework for media to measure awareness of issues related to gender equality and representation of women within the media (i.e., working conditions) and in their editorial content. Since 2013, UNESCO has trained media outlets, organizations, and media associations in all world regions on the GSIM. Between 2018 and 2020 alone, more than 160 media organizations around the world applied or were trained to apply the GSIM.

Until 2019, UNESCO led the annual campaign "Women Make the News", to highlight gender (in) equalities in the news media. The latest editions focused on gender equality in the digital sphere (2019) and on gender equality in sports media (2018).

Resources:

- [*The Chilling: Global trends in violence against women journalists*](#) (2021)
- [*The big conversation: Handbook to address violence against women in and through the media*](#) (2021)
- [*Online violence against women journalists: A global snapshot of incidence and impacts*](#) (2020)
- [*Gender, media & ICTs: New approaches for research, education & training*](#) (2019)
- [*Reporting on violence against women and girls: A handbook for journalists*](#) (2019)
- [*Setting the gender agenda for communication policy: New proposals from the Global Alliance on Media and Gender*](#) (2019)
- [*UNESCO Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media*](#) (2012)

4. MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

UNESCO and partners have carried out training in close to 100 countries based on the Organization's Media and Information Literacy Curriculum, which was updated in 2021: [*Media and information literate citizens: think critically, click wisely! Media & Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators & Learners*](#). The curriculum has been piloted by hundreds of schools and training institutions around the world. At least 25 countries have taken steps to develop national policies and strategies for enhancing media and information literacy.

UNESCO has also supported over 370 youth organizations, over 100 of which are in Africa, to integrate and strengthen media and information literacy in their operations.

Between 2016 and 2020, 115 countries took action to increase Media and Information Literacy awareness through training and celebrated Global MIL Week with over 750 events under the following themes:

- 2016: [Media and Information Literacy: New Paradigms for Intercultural Dialogue](#)
- 2017: [Media and Information Literacy in Critical Times: Re-imagining Ways of Learning and Information Environments](#)
- 2018: [Media and Information Literate Cities: Voices, Powers and Change Makers](#)
- 2019: [MIL Citizens: Informed, Engaged, Empowered](#)
- 2020: [Resisting Disinfodemic: Media & Information Literacy for Everyone & by Everyone](#)
- 2021: [Media and Information Literacy for the Public Good](#)

UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/75/267, adopted in March 2021, proclaims Global MIL Week a UN international week. The number of events commemorating Global MIL Week have progressively increased in the past five years, with close to 800 events organized in 85 countries in 2021.

Resources:

- [MILID Yearbook 2016: Media and information literacy: Reinforcing human rights, countering radicalization and extremism](#) (2016)
- [MILID Yearbook 2018-2019: Media and information literacy in critical times: Re-imagining learning and information environments](#) (2018-2019)
- [Media and information literate citizens: Think critically, click wisely! \(Second edition of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Educators and Learners\)](#) (2021)

UNESCO also works to raise awareness around the impact of media ownership on freedom of expression, such as through the publication [Concentration of media ownership and freedom of expression: Global standards and implications for the Americas](#) (2017)

Media independence

Independence is a precondition for quality journalism, allowing for the production of verified information and informed analysis in the public interest. The professional standards of journalism mark out this kind of communications within the wider content mix and rely on space for self-regulation as well as independent regulatory institutions.

Such independence is of increasing importance in the face of the contamination of the online public sphere with mis- and disinformation, hate speech, and conspiracy theories. But this is also happening in parallel with a financial crisis for news outlets. That financial crisis in turn endangers editorial independence and professional standards. It deprives newsrooms of the resources needed to produce quality reporting and it makes them more vulnerable to pressures to serve political agendas or commercial prerogatives over public interest. When these trends are exploited by political and economic actors to erode journalistic autonomy, it is referred to as “media capture”.

At the same time, as elaborated later in this chapter, trust in news is falling in many countries around the world. The causes and consequences of the decline can be difficult to disentangle, while the political dynamics affecting trust in media are at times highly contextual. Declining trust in media is frequently accompanied by declining trust in other democratic institutions, reflecting what some see as a broader political crisis. Meanwhile, political actors in some countries are aggravating the problem by deliberately trying to delegitimize mainstream journalism to avoid accountability.

Media capture and independence

The erosion of media freedoms and challenges to financial sustainability in the news industry makes newsrooms in many countries more vulnerable to pressures both from external actors and from outlet owners and executives, placing professional standards at risk. In a captured media environment, news media are ostensibly free but compromised in terms of independence.

“This form of media control is achieved through a series of systematic and premeditated steps taken by governments and powerful interest groups”, explains one recent UNESCO report. “Their aim is to take over four levers of power: the regulatory mechanisms governing the media; state-administered media operations; public funds that finance journalism; and the ownership of privately held news outlets.”¹²⁴

Media licensing bodies and competition authorities are frequently the most influential regulatory bodies in the sector. Data assessing their independence are hard to find, but a 2018 analysis of media regulators in 43 countries, mostly from Europe, found only 5 countries with high regulatory autonomy on an index of indicators.¹²⁵ Compromised regulatory bodies can prevent independent media organizations from launching in the first place or allow for an unfair playing field to benefit one outlet over others.

State-controlled media often lack editorial independence; a recent study by the Center for Media, Data, and Society of 546 state-administered media entities in 151 countries found that nearly 80 percent of them lacked editorial independence.¹²⁶

Over the past five years, little has changed with regard to efforts to turn state-controlled media into genuine public service media, in which governance structures maintain the autonomy of national outlets that are financed through taxation or public fees. While many initiatives exist to create or strengthen public service media, most have been plagued by “contested and opaque” policy-making that prevents genuine and lasting reform, according to a study of these efforts in 56 countries.¹²⁷

In the past five years, as advertising revenue has fallen or stagnated, government advertising and other forms of state spending on the media have grown as a proportion of total media income. This trend also poses a threat to the independence and editorial freedom of news media. While data are too scarce to provide a global figure, evidence of the important and growing role of state funding in media can be found in many regions.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Dragomir, M. 2020. *Reporting facts: Free from fear or favour*. InFocus report in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375061>.

¹²⁵ Mutu, A. 2018. The regulatory independence of audiovisual media regulators: A cross-national comparative analysis. *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 33, No. 6, pp. 619–638. DOI: 10.1177/0267323118790153.

¹²⁶ Dragomir, M. and Söderström, A. 2021. *The state of the media: A global analysis of the editorial independence of state media and an introduction of a new state media typology*. Budapest, Center for Media, Data, and Society. <https://cmds.ceu.edu/sites/cmcs.ceu.hu/files/attachment/article/2091/the-state-of-state-media.pdf>.

¹²⁷ Tambini, D. 2015. Problems and solutions for public service broadcasting: Reflections on a 56 country study. K. Arriaza Ibarra, E. Nowak, and R. Kuhn (eds). *Public service media in Europe: a comparative approach*. Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, pp. 41–52.

¹²⁸ Dragomir, M. 2020. *Reporting facts free from fear or favour*. InFocus report in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375061>.

Finally, another troubling trend relates to the capture of private media through ownership. Outlets struggling financially have found themselves taken over by owners not motivated by profit or public service, but by personal interest. Financial woes at news outlets can also weaken adherence to professional norms and standards by individual journalists. Conflicts of interest, involving both financial gains and collusion with politics, damages editorial integrity and feeds mistrust of the media.

In the face of rising challenges, civil society, journalists, international organizations, and the media industry have also intensified their efforts to demand greater transparency in media ownership.¹²⁹ These include guidance from regional bodies such as the Council of Europe and Organization of American States, as well as research from NGOs like RSF. Media have also resisted capture through experimenting with new financing models (as discussed in the previous chapter), investigative journalism methods, and displaying solidarity.

FIGURE 3-15:
Independent
press councils
and oversight
bodies

Source: Accountable Journalism.



BOX 3-6: UNESCO's work to promote media independence

As the UN specialized agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression, UNESCO works across the community, national, and international levels to foster media independence and trust in media institutions. In recent years, UNESCO has worked in the following areas:

1. SUPPORT TO MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS AND SELF-REGULATORY MECHANISMS

In partnership with the European Commission, UNESCO has worked to build trust in media and promote media accountability regionally in South-East Europe and Turkey by providing direct support to the functioning of media self-regulatory mechanisms, raising awareness of media professional standards, good governance, and promoting journalists' labour rights.

2. NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS BASED ON UNESCO'S MEDIA DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED IN MORE THAN 20 COUNTRIES, INCLUDING, SINCE 2016:

Africa: Madagascar, Swaziland, Uganda,

Asia and the Pacific: Mongolia, Myanmar

Europe: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Latin America and the Caribbean: Bolivia, Curaçao, Dominican Republic, Uruguay

¹²⁹ Ibid.

3. JOURNALISM EDUCATION

The following guidebooks and manuals have been published since 2016:

- [*Terrorism and the media: A handbook for journalists*](#) (2017)
- [*Getting the message across: Reporting on climate change and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific – a handbook for journalists*](#) (2018)
- [*Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training*](#) (2018)
- [*Journalism, fake news & disinformation: A model course for journalism educators and trainers worldwide*](#) (2018)
- [*Media and information literacy in journalism: A handbook for journalists and journalism educators*](#) (2019)
- [*The Big Conversation: Handbook to address violence against women in and through the media*](#) (2019)
- [*Reporting on violence against women and girls: A handbook for journalists*](#) (2019)
- [*Reporting on migrants and refugees: Handbook for journalism educators*](#) (2021)

UNESCO has also produced a video explainer on the importance of media independence (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDqWLKXhhU&list=PLWuYED1WVJIP6AR2z48IKHDZb3Pnt9Rtl&index=1>)

Legitimacy and trust

People in many countries around the world have reported lower levels of trust in news media in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic may have temporarily halted or even reversed falling trust in some places, but trust is likely to remain fragile, with significant implications for the survival of independent media and the health of democratic politics in the years to come.¹³⁰

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer's survey in 28 countries, 59 percent of respondents believe that journalists are purposefully trying to mislead people and that news organizations are more interested in supporting a particular political position than in informing the public.¹³¹ The fact that trust in traditional media remains 18 points higher than trust in social media is perhaps a small consolation. A similar finding has been replicated in the latest Reuters Institute *Digital News Report*, which finds that trust in the news media has fallen by an average of 5 percent across 18 countries in the last five years.¹³² It is important to note that trust can be notoriously difficult to measure because it cannot be entirely divorced from people's political views, but the decline is nonetheless a troubling sign.¹³³

Declining trust can undermine the ability of citizens to make informed decisions—including about their health—and to hold leaders accountable. Without a commonly agreed upon set of facts, a “common currency” for political debates in society, social cohesion is weakened.¹³⁴ Low trust in the media is also associated with lower levels of trust in institutions of government and lower levels of political participation.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Fletcher, R. 2020. Trust will get worse before it gets better. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/publications/2020/trust-will-get-worse-gets-better/>.

¹³¹ Edelman. 2021. 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer. <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer>.

¹³² Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., Robertson, C.T. and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2021. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2021*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-06/Digital_News_Report_2021_FINAL.pdf.

¹³³ Strömbäck, J., Tsifti, Y., Boomgaarden, H., Damstra, A., Lindgren, E., Vliegthart, R., and Lindholm, T. 2020. “News media trust and its impact on media use: Toward a framework for future research.” *Annals of the International Communication Association*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 139–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1755338>.

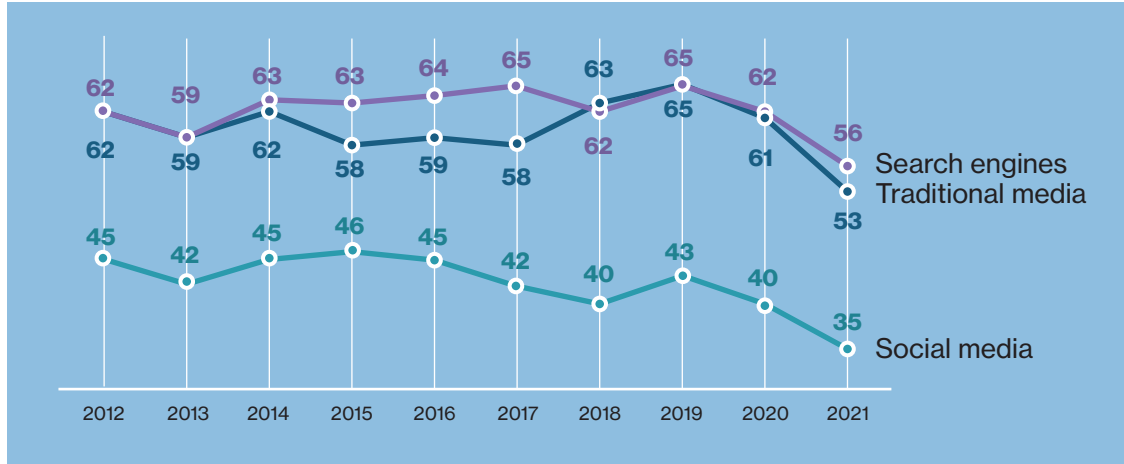
¹³⁴ Coleman, J.S. 1990. *Foundations of social theory*. Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

¹³⁵ Hanitzsch, T., Van Dalen, A., and Steindl, N. 2018. Caught in the nexus: A comparative and longitudinal analysis of public trust in the press. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217740695>.

Studies suggest that people with less trust in traditional news media are more likely to seek out information in alternative sources and are more vulnerable to mis- and disinformation. People are also less likely to pay for news in countries where trust is low. Furthermore, some political leaders have exploited the current environment of mis- and disinformation and skepticism to attack the legitimacy of critical, independent media.

FIGURE 3-16:
Trust in
information
sources
continues to
decline

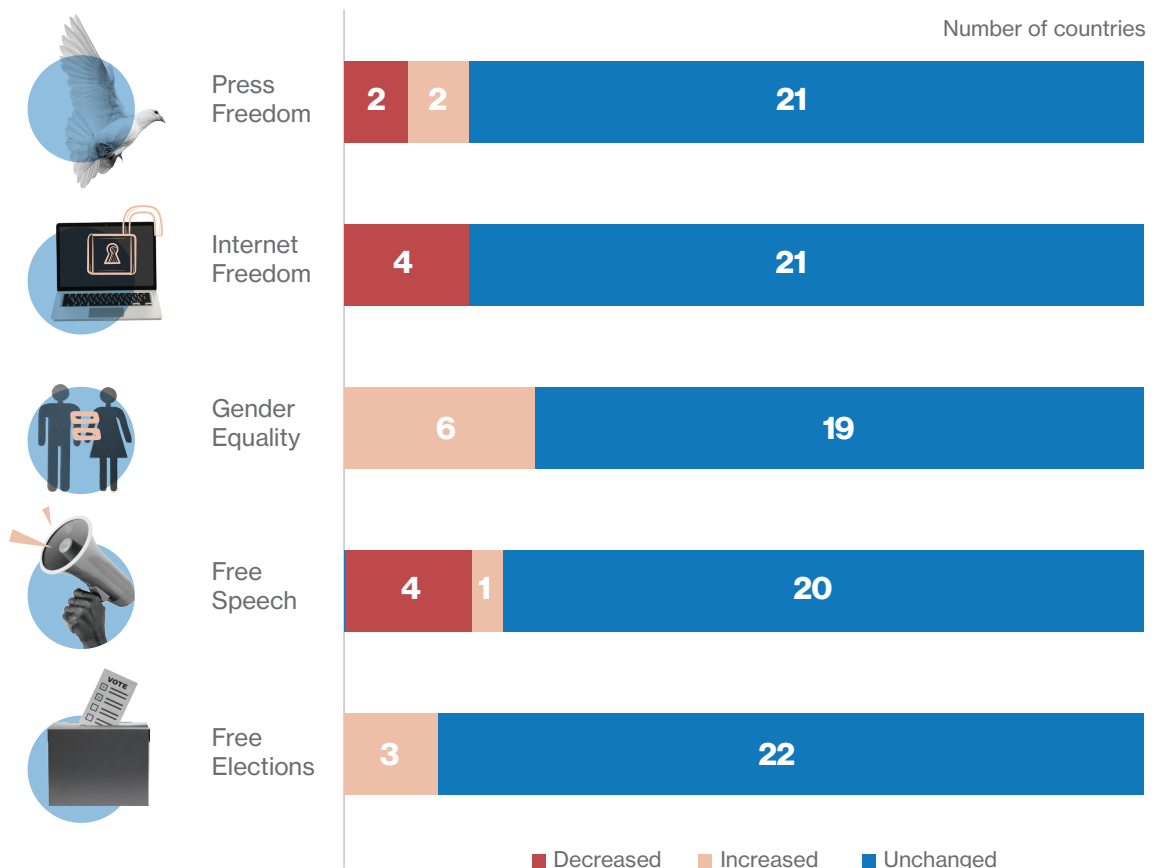
Source: Edelman
Trust Barometer.



Public support for press freedom, free speech, and freedom of expression are holding steady just above the majority threshold in most countries. However, faced with the proliferation of misinformation and hate speech online and active campaigns around the world to discredit journalism, public opinion could turn, opening the way for leaders who would roll back freedoms even further.

FIGURE 3-17:
Public support for
press freedom and
other democratic
principles holds
steady

Source: Pew
Research Center.



Transparency and multi-stakeholderism in approaches to mis- and disinformation are essential in rebuilding the foundations of trust among the many actors whose decisions now shape the public sphere. How can states be trusted to formulate legislative, regulatory, and policy responses to counter mis- and disinformation? How can platforms be trusted to make decisions about removing or limiting the distribution of certain content, applying false information labels, and de-monetizing or de-platforming users? How can advertisers trust that their brands will not be jeopardized by being placed next to false or polarizing content, and how can they use their financial power to better support quality, independent media? In an environment rich in choice and frequently contaminated by mis- and disinformation, how can consumers find the signals needed to navigate towards trustworthy media and information?

Media and information literacy can be an important tool to counter mis- and disinformation and build trust, particularly to address the impact of massive volumes of user-generated, algorithmically filtered content on social media platforms. When people can understand and critically assess the media they are exposed to, they are better equipped to navigate today's information landscape and are less vulnerable to mis- and disinformation. Building the media and information literacy capacities of citizens concerns every demographic—children as well as adults. The education sector is certainly implicated in this endeavour, but a range of other stakeholders also play a role.

Media and information literacy was enshrined as the third pillar of the Windhoek+30 Declaration, reflecting a growing international commitment to leverage the benefits of a media and information literate society. These principles have also been recognized through the *2020 Seoul Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone: A Defence against Disinfodemics* and many other statements marking commemorations of World Press Freedom Day and the International Day for Universal Access to Information. In particular, the Global Media and Information Literacy Week has become a rallying point for raising awareness of the importance of media and information literacy. The number of countries celebrating this week has also increased progressively in recent years, from 30 in 2016 to 85 in 2021.

At least 25 countries are currently taking steps to develop national media and information literacy policies and strategies. These typically involve making it a requirement for school systems to teach media and information literacy as part of their curriculum.

News outlets can also do more to win and preserve the trust of audiences in a way that sustains their financial viability. Based on a review analyzed for this Report of 539 sites across 15 countries, the Global Disinformation Index found that 58 percent of the sites do not publish a corrections policy and offer no means for the public to communicate potential errors. The same study found that 77 percent of those news websites do not publish a statement of editorial independence. Only 15 percent of the sites surveyed offer comprehensive transparency about the outlet's funding.¹³⁶

Trust ultimately must be built with more reliable signals of trustworthiness from publishers and platforms, and greater media and information literacy among audiences, to ensure a system in which pluralism, serendipity, choice, and freedom of expression can be preserved.

¹³⁶ Global Disinformation Index. 2021. Mitigating disinformation risk in the age of digital media. How well do digital news and information sites adhere to basic operational policies? Prepared by Viola Roggia, Research Associate, Global Disinformation Index in August 2021 and presented for this Report.

Declining credibility and the rise of mis- and disinformation

It may well not be coincidental that a decline in the credibility of news as being independent and verified information in the public interest has been paralleled by an explosion in false and misleading content. Disinformation and misinformation provide not just alternative takes on reality, but often directly attack journalism, science, and other aspirations for truth-telling, and can be used to fuel discrimination against minorities, hate speech, and violent extremist ideologies.

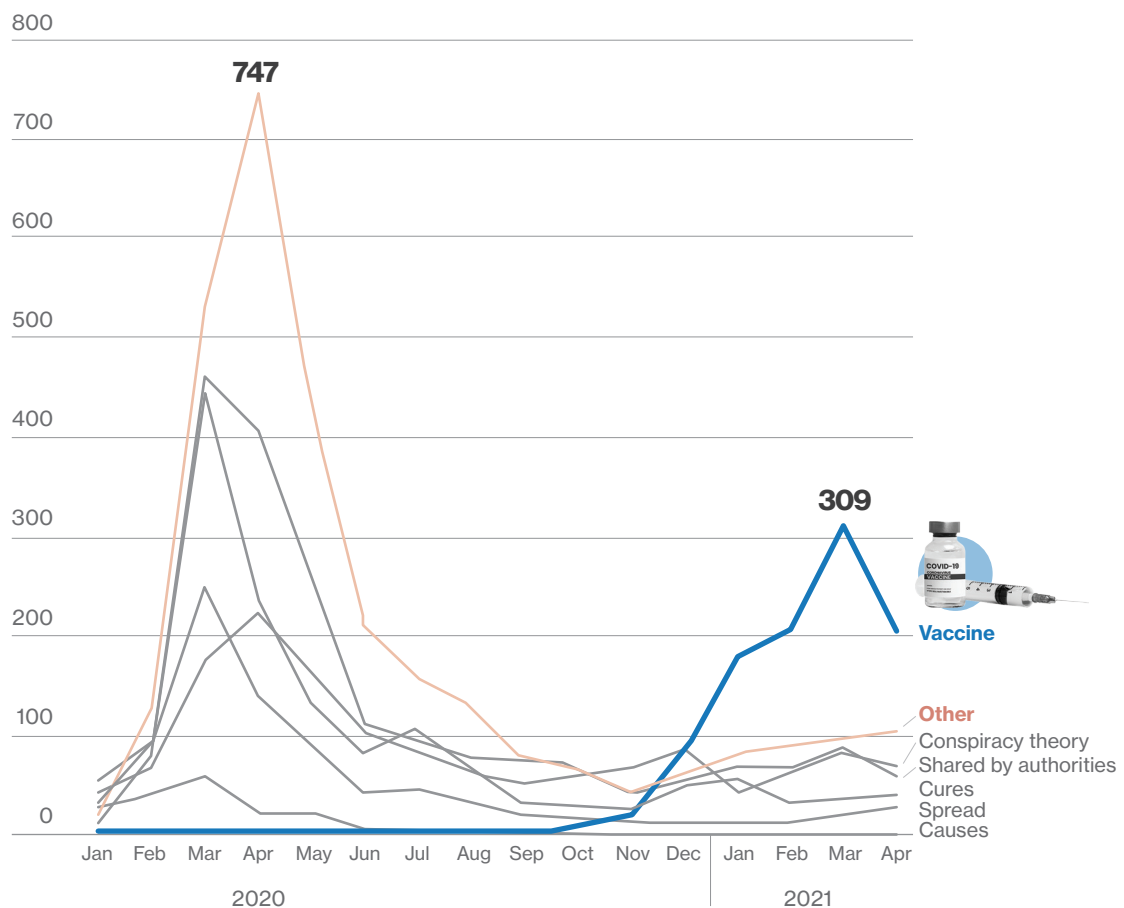
The mis- and disinformation challenge was brought into sharp relief amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which was accompanied by such a quantity of myths, rumours, and outright lies as to be dubbed a “disinfodemic”, a pandemic of false information. As an illustration of the scale of the disinfodemic, in the spring of 2020, as lockdowns and travel restrictions were being implemented, a network of more than 100 fact-checking organizations and news outlets calling themselves the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance worked to debunk as many as 1,700 false claims per month related to COVID-19.

An analysis by UNESCO of data collected by the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance captures the ebbs and flows in the emergence of new false claims. As the virus spread throughout the world, the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance sorted through thousands of new false claims related to government actions, cures, and the spread of the disease, among other topics. By the fall, those false claims continued to circulate on social media—sometimes gaining traction—even though many had already been debunked.

FIGURE 3-18:
Fact-checkers
battled shifting
topics of the
“disinfodemic”

Source: Poynter
Institute, data from
the #CoronaVirusFacts
Alliance.

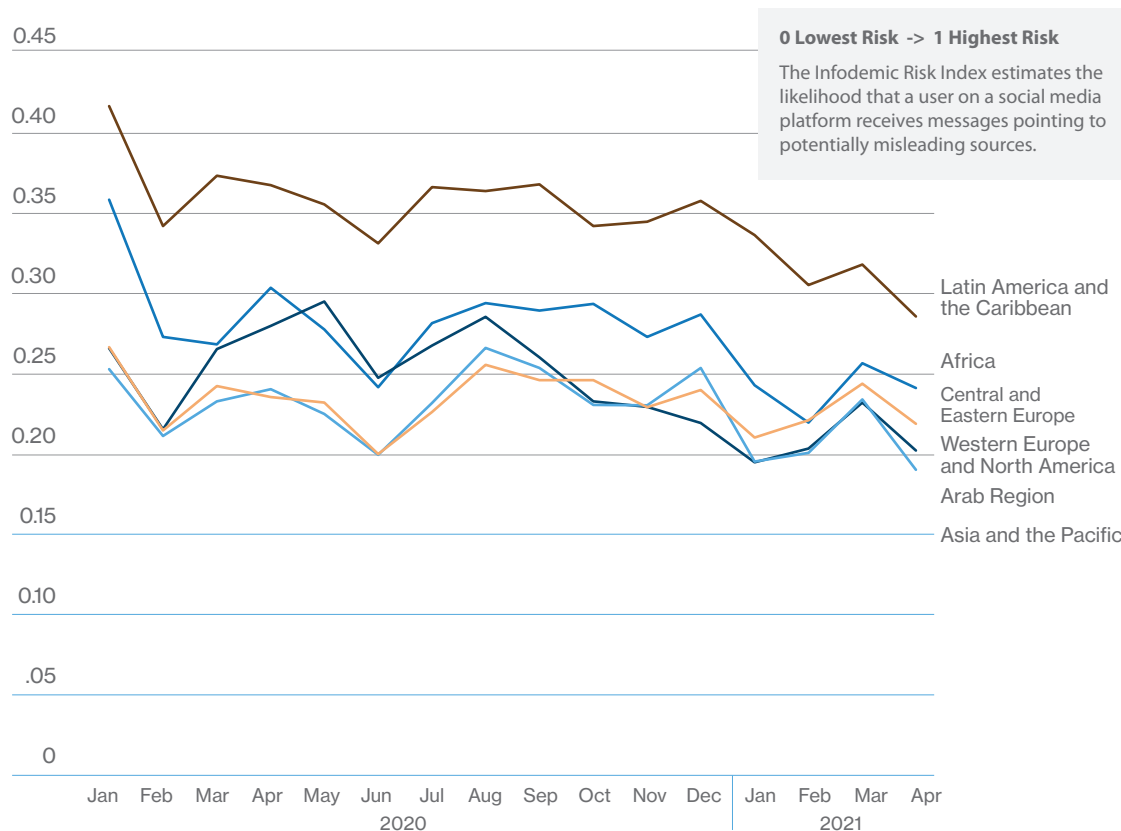
Disinfodemic trends by topic



In September 2020, for instance, over 1 million posts were circulating on Twitter with inaccurate, unreliable, or misleading information related to the pandemic.¹³⁷ Meta also reported that, from the start of the pandemic to August 2021, it had removed over 20 million posts on Facebook and Instagram for promoting COVID-19-related misinformation.¹³⁸ These false claims were often amplified by unscrupulous or misguided public figures. In the spring of 2021, a wave of new falsehoods emerged in relation to vaccines and their rollout, starting a new cycle in the battle against the disinfodemic. The mis- and disinformation surrounding COVID-19 was often also accompanied by high volumes of hate speech.

FIGURE 3-19:
COVID-19
mis- and
disinformation
consistently
threatened to
reach social
media users in
every region

Source:
Information Risk
Index, Fondazione
Bruno Kessler,
using Twitter data.



Mis- and disinformation, however, was already recognized as a growing threat to information as a public good, with internet companies serving as vectors and even accelerants. In a 2019 poll conducted by Gallup in 142 countries, 57 percent of internet users said they were worried about receiving false information.

Governments, health institutions, and civil society have all acknowledged the importance of the issue. Where prevalent, mis- and disinformation poses a threat to free and fair elections. It undermines public policy and good governance. It can exacerbate polarization and social fractures. Mis- and disinformation also threatens independent media by sowing confusion, undermining trust, and creating an environment in which professional, independent media can be delegitimized. In June 2020, more than 130 UN Member States and permanent observers, acknowledging these risks, called for new measures to counter the spread of mis- and disinformation.

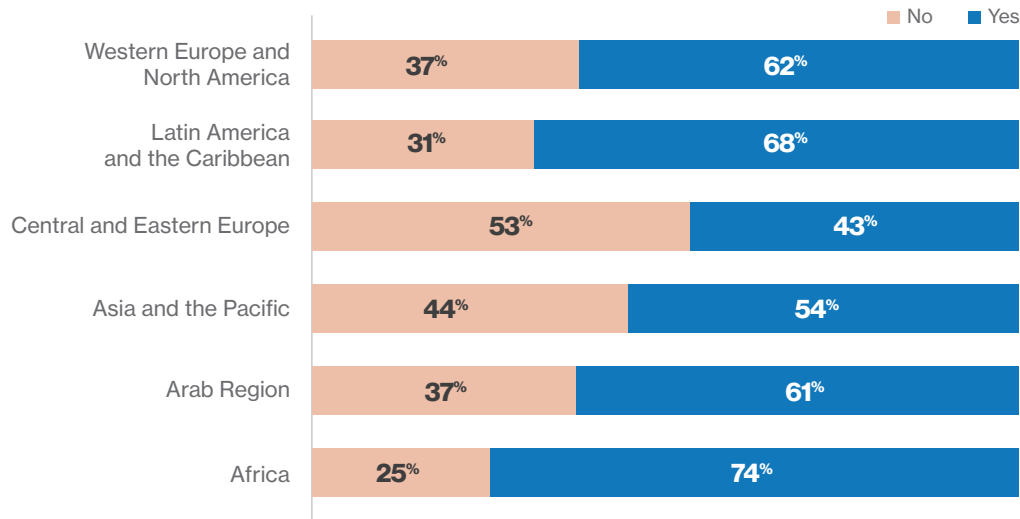
¹³⁷ Covid19 Infodemics Observatory. 2021. Social media indices. <https://covid19obs.fbk.eu/#/>. Data analysed by Data-Pop Alliance for this Report.

¹³⁸ Rosen, G. 2021. *Community Standards Enforcement Report, Second Quarter 2021*. Facebook, 18 August. <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/community-standards-enforcement-report-q2-2021/>.

FIGURE 3-20:

Globally, internet users remained wary of receiving false information

Source: Gallup, 2019. Yes/No answer to the question “When using the internet or social media do you worry about... receiving false information, such as news or information which is not true.”



Large social media platforms are at the centre of the debates surrounding mis- and disinformation. A study conducted by Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers using Twitter data found that falsehoods on that platform “diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth.”¹³⁹ This was especially true for falsehoods related to politics. Another study found that Facebook, owing in part to the size of its membership, had “a central role in spreading content from untrustworthy websites relative to other platforms.”¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, mis- and disinformation remains virtually impossible to trace on encrypted messaging apps, though evidence suggests such platforms can also be a powerful and dangerous vector.

Why are social media platforms such vectors for mis- and disinformation? First, social media platforms are in a constant cat-and-mouse game to identify and take down coordinated campaigns to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion. According to a 2019 study by the Oxford Internet Institute, such campaigns—which make use of computer-operated profiles, or “bots”, content farms, astroturfing, and cyber troops—were evident in at least 70 countries in 2019, up from 28 countries in 2017.¹⁴¹

Second, mis- and disinformation studies consistently find that people are more likely to share false content that is novel, emotionally evocative, and that confirms their existing political views. Since social media platforms are paid according to how many visitors click on ads placed on their websites, their algorithms are designed to amplify posts with the greatest engagement. These algorithms can exploit and amplify human biases, with the result of producing a toxic information environment for some users.

¹³⁹ Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., and Aral, S. 2018. The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, Vol. 359, No. 6380, pp. 1146–1151. <https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.aap9559>.

¹⁴⁰ Guess, A.M., Nyhan, B., and Reifler, J. 2020. Exposure to untrustworthy websites in the 2016 US election. *Nature Human Behaviour*, Vol. 4, pp. 472–480.

¹⁴¹ Bradshaw, S., and Howard, P.N. 2019. *The global disinformation order: 2019 global inventory of organised social media manipulation*. Oxford, Oxford Internet Institute. <https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>.

Social media platforms routinely report their efforts to identify and take down this content, though questions remain about how effective those efforts are, especially when disinformation campaigns operate across platforms. Facebook and Twitter have taken other steps aimed at tamping down the spread of false information. For instance, Facebook has a third-party fact-checking programme, which relies on certified fact-checking organizations (such as those in the #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance) to assist the platform to decide which posts should be removed, reduced in visibility, or given a warning label. Community standards at Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube also allow the platforms to punish those who share disinformation by potentially limiting their reach, applying fact-checked labels, temporarily locking their accounts, preventing them from earning revenue through the platform, or removing the user permanently from the platform. However, implementation is widely seen to be patchy, and very uneven in terms of international application due to gross imbalances in resources dedicated to enforcement in different languages.

While more action is needed to contend with mis- and disinformation, caution is in order. As underlined in the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development report entitled *Balancing act: Countering digital disinformation while respecting freedom of expression*, it is of vital importance that such responses respect norms and international frameworks for freedom of expression and promote an enabling environment for a free press to operate without restrictions.¹⁴²

The report offers a typology of 11 responses to mis- and disinformation and a 23-step tool to assess whether those responses respect international human rights and strengthen freedom of expression. The recommendations target international organizations, states, political parties, law enforcement agencies, and internet companies, among others, emphasizing the need for transparent and multi-stakeholder led responses.

Furthermore, more study is required to understand the nature of the mis- and disinformation problem at the level of the information system and across diverse contexts. In many countries, where most people still consume their news primarily via television, the quality of mainstream media remains an important avenue for addressing disinformation and polarization. Furthermore, studies on mis- and disinformation have focused inordinately on the Global North. More data and research are needed to understand the production, spread, and reception of mis- and disinformation in the Global South.

The issues of disinformation and media capture have contributed to patterns of declining trust in news media so widespread as to stoke concerns of a “post-truth era” in which citizens eschew facts for content that instead appeals to their emotions or political beliefs. This bodes poorly for the sustainability of mainstream media and for democratic politics, which depend upon some common ground of shared facts among competing interests.

Growing concerns over these trends, however, have also bolstered international awareness of and commitment to media independence and of media and information literacy as a tool to address negative trends related to mis- and disinformation, hate speech, and other harmful content.

¹⁴² Bontcheva, K., and Posetti, J. (eds). 2020. *Balancing act: Countering digital disinformation while respecting freedom of expression*. Geneva/Paris, Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development/ITU/UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379015>.

BOX 3-7:**UNESCO's work to counter COVID-19 mis- and disinformation**

The rise of mis- and disinformation is a factor that undermines the credibility of independent journalism. This was particularly evident in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where even a number of mainstream media compromised their factual coverage (and/or overshadowed it with uninformed opinion) by giving free rein to lies and conspiracy theories.

As part of its mandate to promote “the free flow of ideas by word and image” and the right to access information, UNESCO has adopted a multi-faceted approach to address mis- and disinformation. The unprecedented information flows around the pandemic have led to the escalation of mis- and disinformation, posing considerable risks to public health and putting many lives at risk. Some areas of UNESCO's work to respond to this “disinfodemic” include:

1. AWARENESS-RAISING

Awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic and mis- and disinformation was raised through radio spots developed by UNESCO and through radio programmes broadcasted by community media and radios supported by the Organization.

Together with members of the Global Alliance for Partnership on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL), UNESCO launched the “MIL Alliance Response to COVID-19”, which raises awareness on the importance of media and information literacy competencies in response to the disinfodemic through series of webinars and educational resources.

The 2020 edition of the Global MIL Week was observed under the theme “Resisting Disinfodemic: Media & Information Literacy for Everyone & by Everyone”.

Also in 2020, UNESCO launched the [#ThinkBeforeSharing campaign](#). Implemented jointly with the European Commission, Twitter, and the World Jewish Congress, the campaign calls attention to the dangers of conspiracies theories and raises awareness about how to identify, debunk, react to, and report on conspiracies theories to prevent their spread.

2. CAPACITY-BUILDING

In May 2020, UNESCO and the World Health Organization launched, together with the Knight Center for Journalism and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), a global Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for journalists entitled “[Journalism in a Pandemic: Covering COVID-19 Now and in the Future](#)”, through which over 9,000 attendees from 160 countries gained knowledge on how to report safely and debunk mis- and disinformation. This was followed by a second MOOC in March 2021 titled “[Covering the COVID-19 Vaccine: What Journalists Need to Know](#)”. Both MOOCs remain available as self-directed courses.

UNESCO also builds the capacities of journalists and media workers in the field in a variety of countries, notably through training sessions on science journalism and fact-checking.

Together with the European Union, UNESCO launched in April 2020 the “#CoronavirusFacts: Addressing the ‘disinfodemic’ on COVID-19 in conflict-prone environments” project, with the aim of strengthening citizens’ resilience to COVID-related mis- and disinformation. This is being done through capacity-building for media, the strengthening of local fact-checking, and the promotion of media and information literacy in four regions and nine target countries.

The year 2021 also saw the launch of the EU-supported Social Media 4 Peace, focused on strengthening resilience to potentially harmful online content, particularly hate speech (which has often accompanied waves of disinformation during the pandemic), in three pilot countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, and Kenya.

As part of UNESCO’s work on hate speech, UNESCO has also produced several video explainers. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JirA4suOdXI&list=PLWuYED1WVJIP6AR2z48IKHDZb3Pnt9Rtl&index=3>)

3. RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

UNESCO has published several guidebooks and manuals on mis- and disinformation (see Box 3-7) and on media and information literacy (Box 3-6).

From the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, UNESCO created a [resource center for responses to COVID-19](#), which contains tools to support media in their reporting on the pandemic. UNESCO also supported the creation of [PortalCheck.org](#), the first digital platform in Latin America and the Caribbean aimed at collecting resources to counter COVID-19-related mis- and disinformation in the region.

The threats posed by COVID-19-related disinformation to freedom of expression and access to information were explored through various UNESCO publications, such as:

- [Journalism, press freedom and COVID-19](#) – issue brief in the World Trends Report series (2020)
- [The right to information in times of crisis: Access to information – saving lives, building trust, bringing hope!](#) (2020)
- [Disinfodemic: Deciphering COVID-19 disinformation](#) (2020)
- [Disinfodemic: Dissecting responses to COVID-19 disinformation](#) (2020)
- [Balancing act: Countering digital disinformation while respecting freedom of expression](#) (together with the Broadband Commission, 2020)
- [Combater la infodemia en América Latina y el Caribe: desinformación y fact-checking durante la pandemia](#) (2020)
- [Disinformation during the pandemic and Latin America's regulatory response](#) (2021)

In response to challenges brought on by legislation adopted by States in response to the crisis, including anti-disinformation legislation, UNESCO issued guidelines for judicial actors entitled “[COVID-19: The role of judicial operators in the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of expression](#)” (2020).

The independence of media is at stake in how countries respond to the challenges of disinformation, media capture, and the trust crisis. The strengthening of independent media—in terms of its reach, financial sustainability, and professionalism—is also an integral part of that response. As both an outcome and an input into how we govern the public sphere to contend with the seeming disorder of our information systems, the independence of media is a core concern. Reforms of the media sector can work hand-in-hand and contribute to reforms in other areas, and, conversely, internet governance efforts to address the broader set challenges linked to the digital media system must consider the potential impact on the independence of news media.

Conclusion

Particularly in the context of the pandemic, the importance of a free, independent, and pluralist media sector has never been more clearly illustrated. At the same time, the health crisis has exacerbated downward trends in all of these areas, including in regard to issues of media viability, internet transparency, and audience media and information literacy and related perceptions of the credibility of independent news.

Laws and policies that sometimes claim to fight mis- and disinformation and hate speech on paper have had negative effects on freedom of expression. The documented continued decline of media freedom sends clear warning signals about the erosion of the foundations of democratic society. In many areas, we are seeing vicious circles of increasing mis- and disinformation and decreased trust in quality journalism. Inequalities still shape our information landscape—whether we are talking about gender gaps in news coverage or geographic gaps in access to internet services, these disparities pose challenges to implementing the goal of information as a public good.

At the same time, the international community is mobilizing to address these issues, particularly in light of the complex freedom of expression challenges that have accompanied digital transformations. The renewed Windhoek+30 Declaration is a chief example of such commitment. In 2019, the United Kingdom and Canadian governments launched the Media Freedom Campaign, triggering the creation of a coalition of governments and working in partnership with civil society organizations. The Hague Commitment to Increase the Safety of Journalists, endorsed by almost 60 countries in 2020, marked further international commitment to investigate and prosecute all forms of online and off-line attacks on journalists. High-level representation at two conferences has yielded new pledges, including the creation of the Global Media Defence Fund. The Freedom Online Coalition, a partnership of 33 governments, has recently rekindled its efforts to support internet freedom and protect human rights online.

These efforts to support a free and independent media sector cannot be carried by one actor alone. Media freedom, independence, and pluralism are inextricable from many other issues covered in this Report, not least the financial viability of media outlets as a factor in reinforcing pluralism and independence, and likewise with the ability of journalists to safely carry out their jobs.

Threats that Silence:

Trends in the Safety of Journalists

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Introduction

Despite growing global efforts, journalism remains a dangerous profession. Recent years have highlighted both the vital role that journalists occupy in maintaining the flow of information and the great risks (old and new) associated with this task. Hostile actors threaten journalists with harassment, imprisonment, violence, or death—simply for doing their jobs.

Killings of journalists remained a serious issue in the five-year period ending in 2020. Although numbers have decreased in comparison with the previous five-year period, the risk of violence, and even murder, remains a persistent threat. In some regions, the decrease in journalist killings is partially attributable to fewer killings in countries experiencing armed conflict. However, the ratio of journalists killed in those countries compared to countries not experiencing armed conflict has also declined: a larger percentage of journalist killings in the past five years has occurred in countries not considered to be actively experiencing armed conflict.¹⁴³ While this shifting trend is partially due to the decrease in killings in areas of conflict, simultaneously, some countries not experiencing armed conflict have reported higher numbers of journalist killings in the past five years.¹⁴⁴

Compounding these fatal attacks is impunity for crimes against journalists, and this Report shows no significant improvement: nearly nine in ten cases of killings remain unresolved.¹⁴⁵ Research for this Report further shows that this impunity rate is not correlated with general levels of criminal impunity amongst the affected states. This research also confirms that where the number of journalist killings is high, so too is impunity for these killings, threatening a continued cycle of violence as lethal crimes against journalists often go unpunished. Meanwhile, the number of countries which responded to requests by UNESCO for information on judicial follow-up fell compared to the previous year, and the number of unresolved cases continues to accumulate. In recognition of this persistent challenge, UNESCO leads the commemoration of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November of every year.

The past five years also show the importance of considering other rising levels of threat against the safety of journalists, threats which not only violate press freedom and the right to free expression, but can also harm and intimidate journalists in ways that impact negatively on their ability to keep the public informed.

Among these threats is imprisonment. New UNESCO analysis, using data on journalist imprisonment gathered by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), shows that globally, journalist imprisonment is inversely related to journalist killings: even as journalist killings decline, imprisonments are on the rise (see Box 4-1). Countries with the highest numbers of killings tend to have relatively few imprisonments, while countries with many imprisoned journalists do not register similarly high levels of killings. Throughout, it is important to recognize that while these trends are considered globally, many countries continue to exhibit neither journalist killings nor imprisonment.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Killings were considered to have occurred in a country experiencing armed conflict if the country was included in the annual report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in the year in which the killing took place. Countries included in the Secretary-General's report vary from year to year.

¹⁴⁴ This chapter was first released in November 2021 as "Threats that silence: Trends in the safety of journalists," an Insights discussion paper from the World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022. Where updated information is available, this publication now includes additional 2021 data.

¹⁴⁵ Throughout this Report, impunity is measured cumulatively, assessing the resolution or lack thereof of all cases since UNESCO began systematically monitoring journalist killings and impunity in 2006. Analysing impunity cumulatively, rather than by number of cases and resolutions in an individual year, allows for the time required in resolving some cases and takes into account the accumulation of unresolved cases.

¹⁴⁶ As in previous World Trends Reports, UNESCO does not examine the question of which of these imprisonments could be assessed as arbitrary, but rather looks at the trends over the years.

International organizations, civil society, and researchers have also given greater attention in recent years to threats, including various forms of online violence, that inordinately affect women journalists and those who represent minority groups in the profession. According to UNESCO research, seven out of ten women journalists who participated in a global survey reported experiencing online violence during their work, in some cases spurring self-censorship.¹⁴⁷

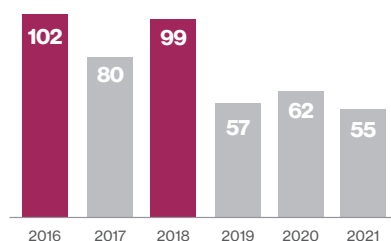
Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these and other ongoing challenges to journalist safety. While the financial impact of the pandemic has threatened many media workers with salary cuts or job loss, even those who have been able to continue work face the risk of exposure to the virus and psychological trauma in covering the unprecedented health crisis. The pandemic has further spurred freedom of expression-restricting legislation and policies, which addressed the spreading of “rumours” and disinformation around the pandemic but were often broad enough to be used to detain journalists for their coverage of the crisis and of government responses.

At the same time, mobilization efforts have rallied to protect and promote the safety of journalists and freedom of expression worldwide. These efforts were made all the more relevant as the world recognized the fundamental role of a free, pluralistic, and independent press in combatting the global health crisis.

Global and regional trends in killings of journalists, 2016–2020

Between the start of 2016 and the end of 2020, 400 journalists across the world were killed for doing their jobs. Still, this is nearly a 20 percent decrease from the previous five-year period, 2011–2015, in which UNESCO registered 491 killings. The downward trend, however, remains a stuttering one, as numbers continue to rise and fall from year to year (Figure 4-1). Over the past five years, 2016 was the deadliest year for journalists, as 102 were killed while on the job or targeted for their work. Another peak was registered in 2018 but was immediately followed in 2019 by the lowest number of killed journalists in a decade (57). A slight rise was registered again in 2020, when 62 journalists were killed for their work. The downward trend in journalist killings continued again in 2021, when 55 journalists were killed for their work or while on the job.

FIGURE 4-1:
The number of journalists killed has varied from year to year, with peaks in 2016 and 2018



Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

Life-threatening risks exist for journalists everywhere. However, the number of killings varies strongly between regions.¹⁴⁸ The Asia and the Pacific region, as well as the Latin America and the Caribbean region, show the highest numbers of killings of journalists between 2016 and the end of 2020 (123 journalists killed in each region), followed by the Arab region (90 journalists killed), while less than a quarter of the total number of killings took place in Africa, Western Europe and North America, and Central and Eastern Europe

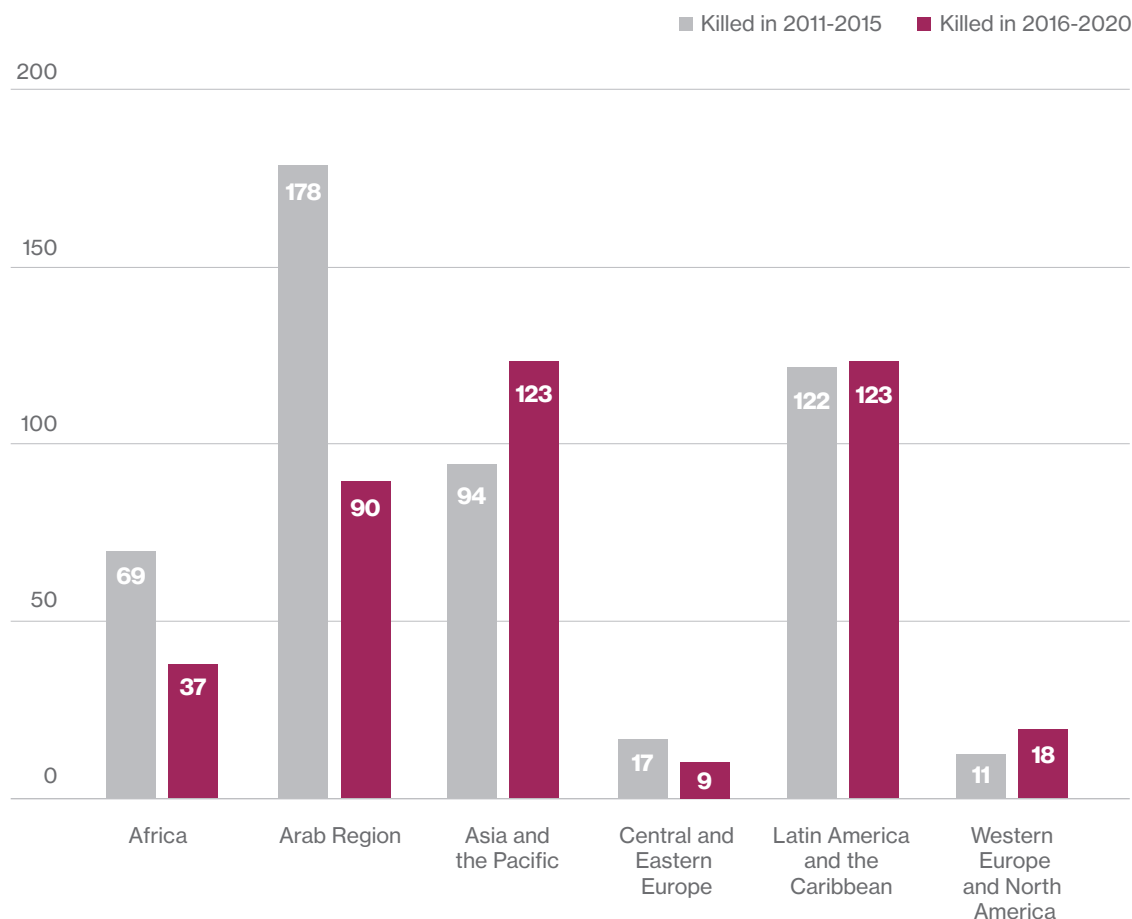
combined. Though Western Europe and North America reported just 5 percent of all killings from 2016 to 2020, the past five years registered a marked increase for the region with 18 journalists killed, compared to 11 killings between 2011 and 2015 and three killings between 2006 and 2010. The rise in killings in the region was largely attributable to a mass shooting in 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Posetti, J., Aboulez, N., Bontcheva, K., Harrison, J., and Waisbord, S. 2020. *Online violence against women journalists: A global snapshot of incidence and impacts*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>.

¹⁴⁸ This analysis was conducted according to six regional groups as defined by UNESCO (see Appendix D).

FIGURE 4-2:
Journalist killings
have nearly halved
in some regions,
but increased in
others

Source: UNESCO
Observatory of
Killed Journalists.



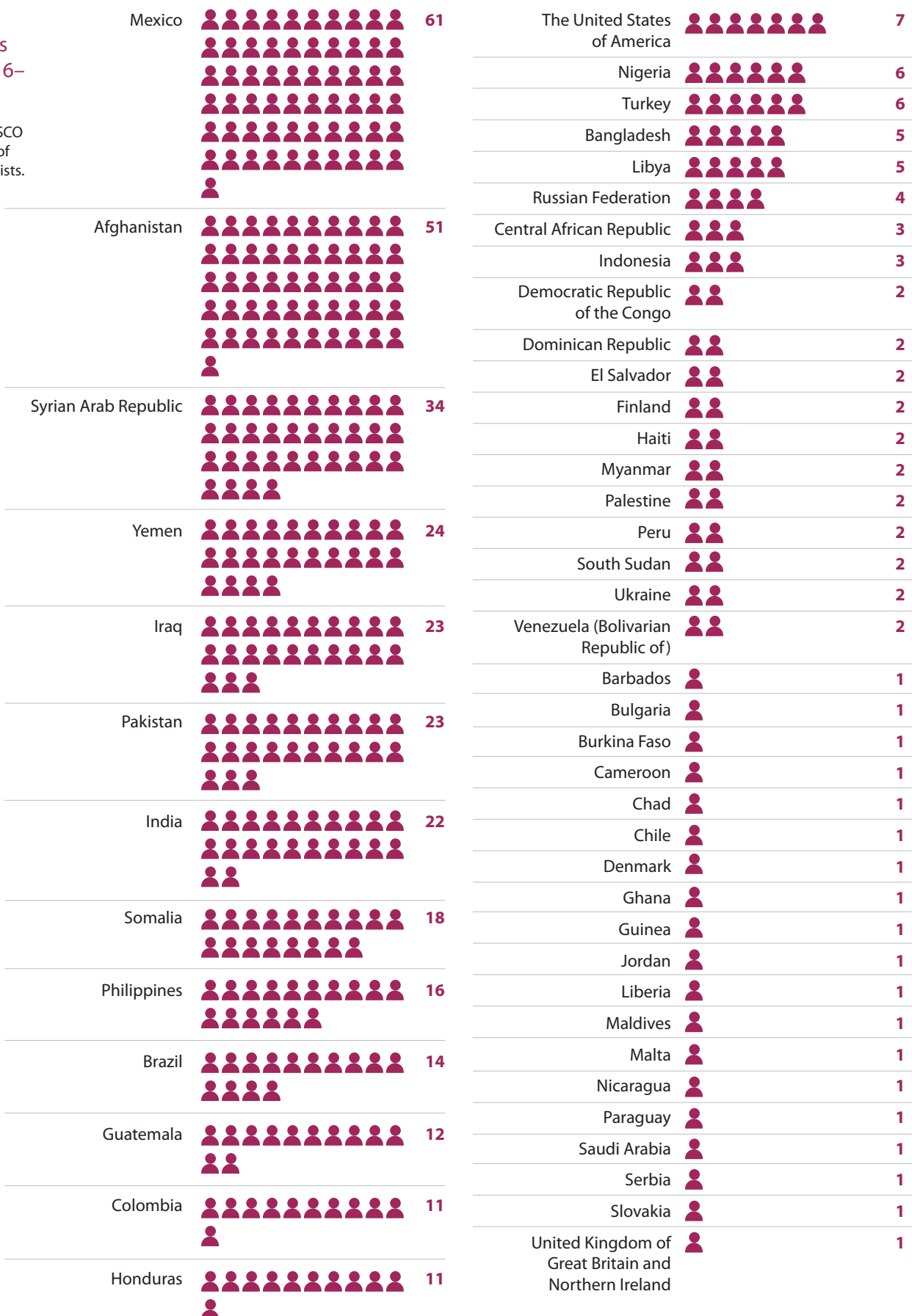
⁶ This analysis was conducted according to six regional groups as defined by UNESCO (see Annex I).

In some regions, substantial shifts in journalist safety have occurred over the past five years. Most significantly, in the Arab region, Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe, the numbers of killed journalists nearly halved compared to the previous five-year period. In the Arab region, this decrease is largely attributable to the previously high levels of killings in countries experiencing armed conflict. While journalists' killings in the region remain high, numbers have decreased after peaking before 2016. Similarly, conflicts in some countries caused higher numbers of killings in Africa from 2011 to 2015, while the armed conflict beginning in 2014 resulted in higher numbers in Central and Eastern Europe.

From 2016 to the end of 2020, Mexico, followed by Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, recorded the highest number of journalist killings (Figure 4-3). The only region in which numbers of killings of journalists were considerably higher from 2016 to 2020 as compared to the previous five-year period is Asia and the Pacific, which registered an increase of 31 percent.

FIGURE 4-3:
Journalists
killed, 2016–
2020

Source: UNESCO
Observatory of
Killed Journalists.



This shift in deadliest regions reflects a notable trend: over the past five years, out of all killings of journalists, the proportion that occurred outside of countries experiencing conflict has been steadily rising, from 50 percent in 2016 to 61 percent in 2020 (Figure 4-4). Overall, journalist killings have decreased worldwide, but in the past five years, the number of journalists killed in countries experiencing armed conflict has declined more significantly (Figure 4-5).

FIGURE 4-4:

The proportion of journalists killed outside of countries experiencing conflict increased significantly over the past five years

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

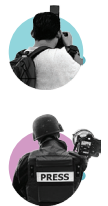
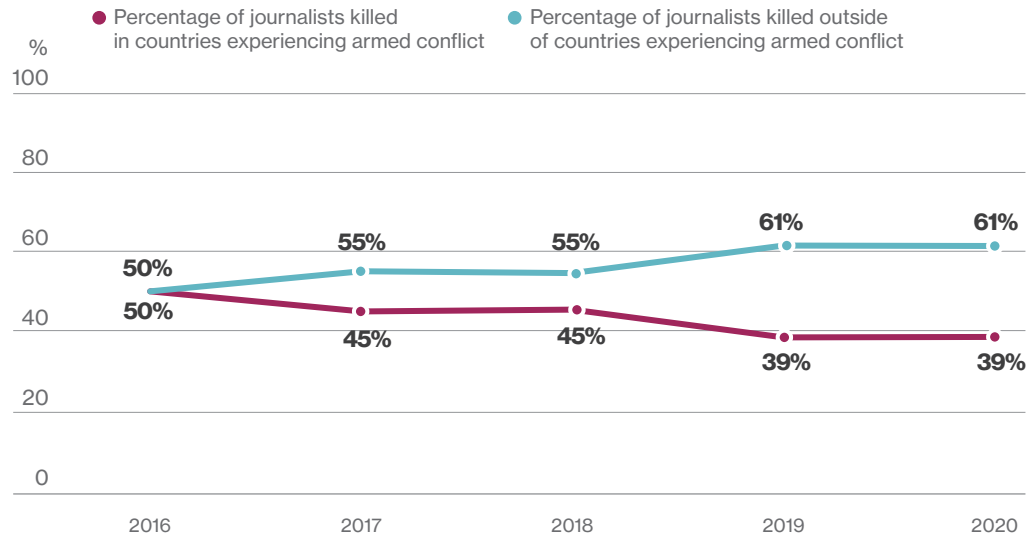


FIGURE 4-5:

While journalist killings have declined globally, the trend is most evident in countries experiencing armed conflict

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

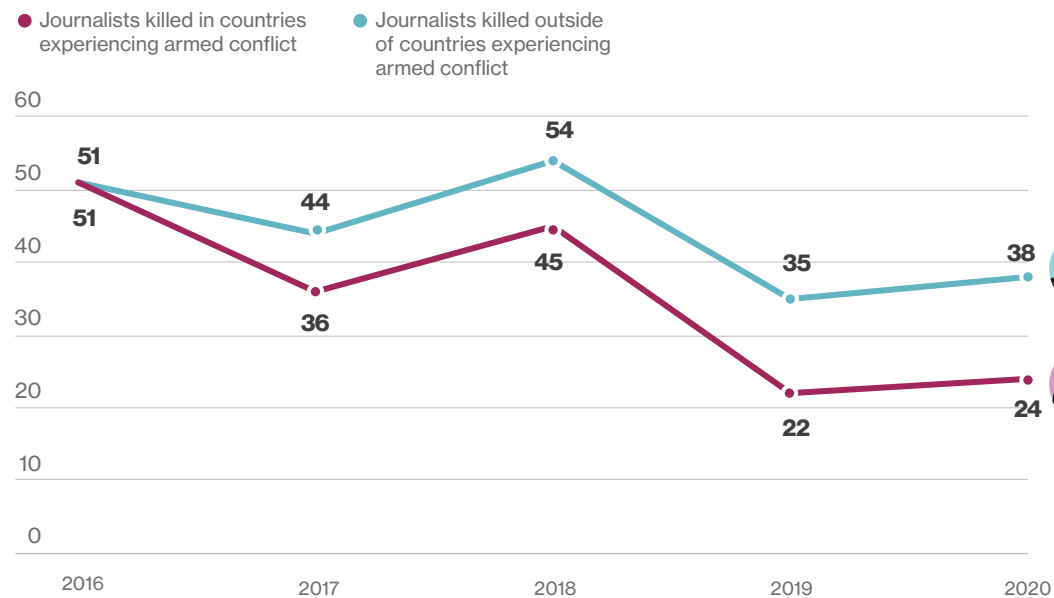
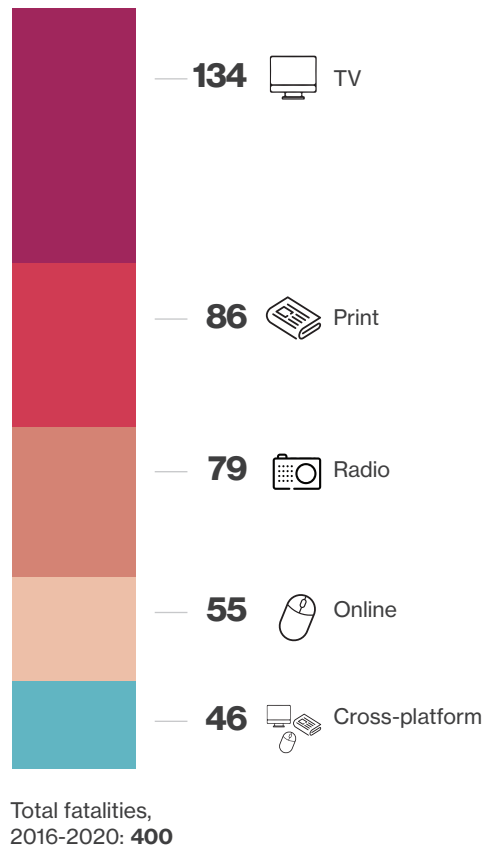


FIGURE 4-6:

TV journalists, followed by print journalists, remain most vulnerable

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.



Television journalists are by far the most attacked group among journalists, accounting for 134 journalist fatalities, or 34 percent, in the past five years (Figure 4-6). Those covering conflict are especially vulnerable and at high risk of being either killed in crossfire or directly targeted. Since 2016, print journalists account for the second most vulnerable group (22 percent), followed by radio journalists (20 percent).

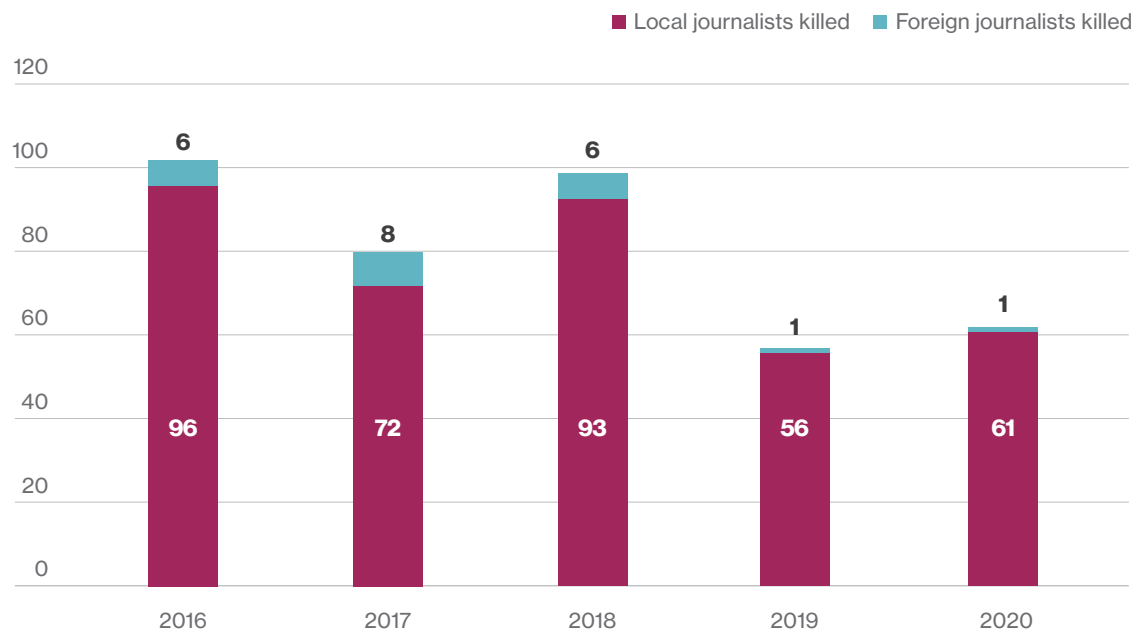
In the previous five-year period, from 2011 to 2015, television and print journalists were represented at almost equally high levels among victims of fatal violence (148 print journalists and 147 television journalists). Though print journalists therefore now seem less vulnerable, this perceived shift may be due to the increase of journalists now working across platforms, not solely in print.

Among the 400 journalists killed from 2016 through 2020, 22 were foreigners; the vast majority of killed journalists were killed in their country of nationality. In fact, in the past two years, only one journalist each year was killed while working abroad. As highlighted in a recent UNESCO issue brief, published under the umbrella of the World Trends Report series, the low number of foreign journalists among fatal victims may be connected to increasing reliance on local journalists to report for international news outlets.¹⁴⁹

FIGURE 4-7:

In the last five years, killings of foreign correspondents decreased

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.



¹⁴⁹ Horsley, W., and Selva, M. 2021. *Freedom of expression and the safety of foreign correspondents: Trends, challenges, and responses*. Issue brief in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378300>.

Global and regional trends in levels of impunity for crimes against journalists

Impunity for the killing of journalists remains a persistent concern worldwide, as both an obstacle to ensuring journalist safety and a chilling contributor to self-censorship. While the killings of journalists have decreased, the global impunity rate has remained very high, and nearly nine out of ten cases (87 percent) of journalist killings remain unresolved.

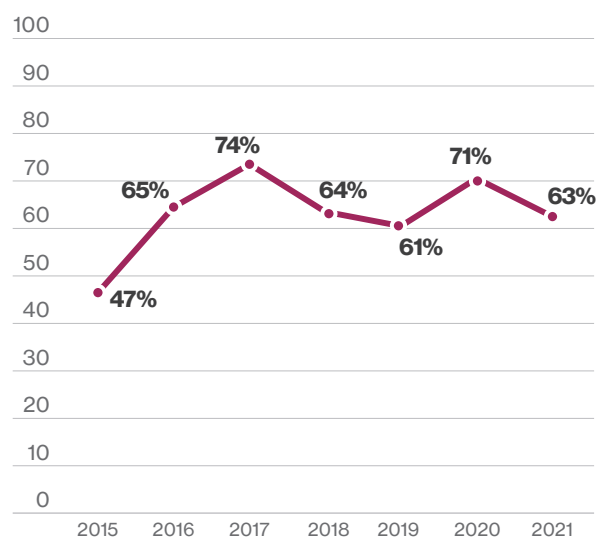
Original research commissioned by UNESCO in 2021 confirms what many have long suspected: at the country level, journalist killings and impunity rates are typically proportional, and high rates of fatalities are associated with high rates of impunity. As journalist homicides go unresolved and unpunished, there is little to deter the continued threat of violence.

Furthermore, the analysis finds that there is no clear correlation between impunity of journalist killings and impunity for other crimes in the country. Similarly, though many some may assume that journalist killings are correlated with overall homicide levels in any given country, UNESCO analysis for this Report finds that that is often not the case. Rather, the killing of journalists—and impunity for that crime—is a unique issue across the globe, reinforcing the clear intentionality in targeting media professionals.

Pursuant to UNESCO Executive Board Decision 196 EX/31, and in line with the mandate of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), UNESCO collects data each year to monitor impunity for crimes against journalists. Accordingly, every year, States are requested to report on the status of ongoing investigations into cases of killed journalists. Their responses are recorded as “resolved”, “ongoing/unresolved”, or “no response”.

FIGURE 4-8:
State responses to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial inquiry remain inconsistent, in spite of previous positive trends

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.



In 2021, UNESCO sent requests for information on unresolved cases to 64 States¹⁵⁰ and received some form of response from 40 of them (63 percent), a decrease from 71 percent in 2020 (45 States out of 63). Since 2016, the response rate has fluctuated but remained over 60 percent each year, with peaks in 2017 and 2020 (Figure 4-8). Additionally, in 2021, 30 States (47 percent) provided specific information on the status of judicial investigations of killed journalists. The remaining ten States that provided a response acknowledged the request but did not provide concrete information on the status or advancement of cases (Figure 4-11).

¹⁵⁰ Though not a UNESCO Member State since 1 January 2019, the United States of America has continued to respond to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial investigations regarding cases of killed journalists that occurred within its borders.

Global level of impunity remains high

As of 31 December 2020, a total of 1,229 journalists had been killed since UNESCO began systematically monitoring journalist killings and impunity in 2006. Of those, 163 cases (13 percent) are now considered fully resolved, the same resolution rate as that recorded the previous year. Of the remaining cases, 706 are considered ongoing or unresolved, and UNESCO has not received any information on the status of 360 cases (Figure 4-9).

FIGURE 4-9:
In the past 15 years, 87 percent of cases of killed journalists remain unresolved or unreported

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.



The Arab region registers the highest level of impunity, as in previous years, with 98 percent of cases considered unresolved. However, a number of states in the Arab region have never submitted information on individual cases to UNESCO, and a large portion of the “unresolved” cases are those that have not been reported on.

The Arab region is followed by Asia and the Pacific (89 percent of cases unresolved) and Africa (87 percent) as the regions with the highest levels of impunity for journalist killings. Latin America and the Caribbean (67 percent), Western Europe and North America (53 percent), and Central and Eastern Europe (52 percent) register lower impunity levels (Figure 4-10). Still, even excluding cases for which no information has been received, more than half of all cases registered by UNESCO are considered ongoing or unresolved.

The two regions with the lowest levels of impunity are also the only two regions in which Member States have provided information to UNESCO about all cases recorded by the Organization.

FIGURE 4-10:
Status of judicial investigations by region, as of 2021

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

REGION	TOTAL CASES 2006-2020	CASES RESOLVED	ONGOING/ UNRESOLVED	NO INFORMATION RECEIVED	% UNRESOLVED OR UNREPORTED
Africa	142	18	72	52	87%
Arab Region	379	6	170	203	98%
Asia and the Pacific	332	37	204	91	89%
Central and Eastern Europe	46	22	24	0	52%
Latin America and the Caribbean	298	65	219	14	78%
Western Europe and North America	32	15	17	0	53%
TOTAL	1,229	163	706	360	87%

As part of the annual request, States are also asked to submit information on “actions taken to promote the safety of journalists and to combat impunity, including action taken to monitor and tackle gender-specific risks, as a way to share good practices”. In 2021, 28 States reported on measures taken to bolster the safety of journalists and 11 reported specific measures to address the safety of women journalists (discussed later in this chapter). Eighteen out of the 40 States that responded to the Director-General’s request in 2021 also gave permission to publish official documents online on the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

FIGURE 4-11:
Responses received by States to the 2021 request by UNESCO’s Director-General for information on the status of judicial investigations

Source: UNESCO.

- ✓ Information provided on judicial case
- Acknowledgement

COUNTRY	RESPONSE BY COUNTRY ON STATUS OF JUDICIAL INVESTIGATIONS	COUNTRY	RESPONSE BY COUNTRY ON STATUS OF JUDICIAL INVESTIGATIONS
Afghanistan	✓	Mali	
Angola	●	Malta	✓
Bahrain		Mexico	✓
Bangladesh	✓	Mozambique	●
Barbados		Myanmar	✓
Brazil	✓	Nepal	✓
Burkina Faso		Nicaragua	✓
Burundi		Nigeria	✓
Cambodia	✓	Pakistan	●
Cameroon		Palestine	✓
Central Africa Republic		Paraguay	✓
Chad		Peru	✓
Colombia	✓	The Philippines	✓
Congo		Russian Federation	✓
Democratic Republic of the Congo	●	Saudi Arabia	
Dominican Republic	✓	Slovakia	✓
Ecuador	✓	Somalia	
Egypt		South Sudan	
El Salvador	✓	Sri Lanka	
Eritrea		Syrian Arab Republic	
Ghana		Thailand	●
Greece	●	Turkey	✓
Guatemala	✓	Uganda	
Guinea		Ukraine	●
Guyana, Republic of		United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✓
Haiti	✓	United Republic of Tanzania	
Honduras	●	United States of America	✓
India		Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	✓
Indonesia	✓	Yemen	●
Iraq	✓		
Kenya	✓		
Kyrgyzstan	✓		
Liberia			
Libya	●		
Maldives			

Total countries: 64

Responses: 40 reactions (63%), among which 30 responses providing concrete information on judicial cases (47%) and 10 acknowledgements (16%)

Other attacks on and threats against journalists

Journalists continue to be victims of a range of repression tactics: non-lethal physical attacks, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, threats, harassment offline and online, and retaliation against family members. All of these attacks pose a considerable threat to journalists' ability to perform their critical work and help serve people's right to information.

Against this background, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicator 16.10.1 encompasses cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists, and human rights advocates.

The metadata for the indicators includes a reference to also measuring "other harmful acts" against these persons. Recent statements at the international level have called for strengthened monitoring mechanisms of non-fatal attacks against journalists.

- The IPDC Council in 2018 invited the UNESCO Director-General to enhance "current monitoring in collaboration with UNESCO's Institute of Statistics (UIS) as appropriate, in order to align and reinforce synergies with the methodology of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the overall reporting on SDG 16.10.1."¹⁵¹
- The IPDC Council in 2020 encouraged Member States to appoint a focal point on the issue of safety of journalists and impunity.¹⁵²
- The Human Rights Council, in its 45th session in 2020, expressed deep concern and condemned unequivocally "all attacks, reprisals, and violence against journalists and media workers", including non-fatal attacks.¹⁵³
- The Windhoek+30 Declaration, adopted at the 2021 World Press Freedom Day global conference, expressed alarm over "enduring and new threats to the safety of journalists and the free exercise of journalism, including killings, harassment of women, offline and online attacks, intimidation and the promotion of fear, and arbitrary detentions."¹⁵⁴

Adding to an unsafe environment over the past five years, journalists have been increasingly stigmatized and denigrated in public speech, sometimes by political figures. As noted by the UN Human Rights Council, this "increases the risk of threats and violence against journalists and undermines public trust in the credibility of journalism".¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). 2018. Decisions taken by the 31st Council Session of the IPDC. Paris, UNESCO. (CI/2018/COUNCIL.31/H/1) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266235/PDF/266235eng.pdf.multi>.

¹⁵² IPDC. 2020. Thirty-second session of the IPDC. Paris, UNESCO. (CI-20/Council.32/9) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374994/PDF/374994eng.pdf.multi>.

¹⁵³ UN Human Rights Council. 2020. Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. (A/HRC/45/L.42/Rev.1) <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/45/L.42/Rev.1>.

¹⁵⁴ UNESCO. 2021. *Windhoek+30 Declaration*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378158>. (Full text available in Appendix B.)

¹⁵⁵ UN Human Rights Council. 2018. The safety of journalists. (A/HRC/RES/39/6) https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/39/6.

Journalists silenced by enforced disappearance, kidnapping, and arbitrary detention

While killings remain the ultimate threat against journalist safety, enforced disappearances, journalists reported as “missing”, and arbitrary detentions are urgent concerns in protecting the safety of journalists and their ability to carry out their jobs. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), ten journalists were reported missing during the period between 2016 and the end of 2020.¹⁵⁶ Journalists also continue to be held hostage by non-state actors: RSF reported 54 journalists held as hostages in 2020, compared to 57 in 2019, 60 in 2018, and 54 in 2017. All incidents occurred in countries experiencing armed conflict, with the vast majority taking place in the Arab region. Globally, journalists forced into exile also remains an issue of concern.

Arbitrary detention is a continuing threat for journalists around the world. As defined in SDG Indicator 16.10.1 metadata, detention is considered arbitrary when it does not conform to existing national laws, or when it is deemed unjust or unnecessary.¹⁵⁷ National authorities predominantly justify the arrest and detention of journalists by pressing anti-state charges, including charges of terrorism, espionage, and conspiracy. Disproportionate libel and defamation laws, as well as the proliferation of cyber-laws and anti-“fake news” legislation, have also served to imprison members of the media.

“We are not intimidated. No amount of legal cases, black propaganda, and lies can silence Filipino journalists who continue to hold the line...”

Maria Ressa

Co-founder and CEO, *Rappler*, and Laureate of the 2021 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Prize and the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize¹⁵⁸

In 2020, CPJ registered at least 280 cases of imprisoned journalists, then the highest number recorded since 1992.¹⁵⁹ Of these, 184 journalists (67 percent) were detained on “anti-state” charges and 34 journalists (12 percent) had been imprisoned on “fake news” charges.¹⁶⁰ RSF, which also includes media support staff in its reporting, recorded 389 cases of imprisoned journalists and media workers in 2019 and 387 in 2020, similarly noting historically high levels. It also reported that more than half of the world’s imprisoned journalists (61 percent) as of December 2020 are being held in just five countries in Asia and the Pacific and in the Arab region.¹⁶¹ The conditions in which journalists are detained have led both CPJ and RSF to report instances of mistreatment, negligence, and sometimes torture. In recent years, a number of journalists have died while imprisoned, sparking calls for further investigations from UNESCO and other international bodies and free speech advocates.

BOX 4-1:

Global trends in journalist imprisonment

Though killings of journalists have decreased over time, as discussed above, CPJ reports that imprisonment of journalists around the world has simultaneously increased. Original UNESCO analysis further confirms that those countries that register higher numbers of journalist killings typically report low numbers of imprisonment, and vice versa. In considering this relationship, however, it is important to recall that killings are often—though not always—carried out by non-state actors or occur in countries experiencing armed conflict.

¹⁵⁶ Data extracted from RSF annual round-up reports, available at https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/rsfs_2020_round-up_0.pdf.

¹⁵⁷ United Nations. 2018. SDG indicator metadata. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-10-01.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Rappler. 2019. Rappler statement on Maria Ressa’s arrest: ‘We will continue to tell the truth’. Rappler, 13 February. <https://www.rappler.com/about/rappler-statement-maria-ressa-arrest-cyber-libel-february-2019>.

¹⁵⁹ These numbers refer to overall numbers of imprisoned journalists, not only arbitrary detentions. As in previous years, UNESCO does not enter into assessment of which detentions are arbitrary, but rather examines the overall trends in numbers imprisoned. Note also that previous estimates from CPJ reported at least 274 journalists imprisoned in 2020; as of December 2021, CPJ revised that number to 280.

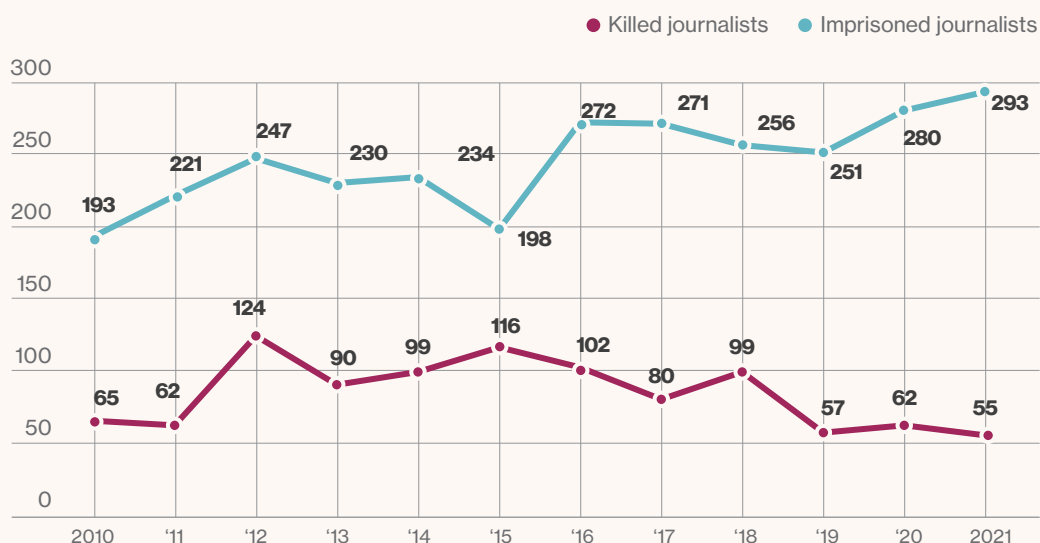
¹⁶⁰ Beiser, E. 2020. Record number of journalists jailed worldwide. Committee to Protect Journalists. <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/record-number-journalists-jailed-imprisoned/>.

¹⁶¹ RSF. 2020. *Round-Up 2020: Journalists detained, held hostage and missing*. RSF. https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/rsfs_2020_round-up_0.pdf.

FIGURE B4-1.1:
Trends in
journalist
killings and
imprisonment,
2010–2021

Sources:
UNESCO Observatory
of Killed Journalists
and CPJ.

The variation in case numbers from one year to the next frequently reflects changes in just a few countries, as was evident in the impact of fewer journalist killings in the Arab region. For both killings and imprisonment, the majority of cases occur in fewer than two dozen countries; while these trends are considered globally, many countries continue to exhibit neither journalist killings nor imprisonment. Still, the rise and stagnation of imprisonment numbers signals that there could be increasing repression of press freedom in several regions, even as the decline in killings sparks hope for progress in journalist safety.



Spotlight on threats against journalists

Aside from the types of violence explicitly mentioned in SDG Indicator 16.10.1, journalists face other menacing issues with effects on their physical and psychological safety, including threats of violence offline and online. A recent study by RSF showed that, of the 139 journalists killed from 2011 to the end of 2020 in the four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 41 percent had received threats prior to their assassination.¹⁶²

The UN has recognized the need to address threats against journalists with the full force of the law, and in March 2021, the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice adopted its final Declaration, calling for Member States to “investigate, prosecute and punish threats and acts of violence, falling within their jurisdiction, committed against journalists and media workers, (...) with a view to ending impunity for crimes committed against them”.¹⁶³ In its 66 years of existence, this was the first time that the UN Crime Congress had recognized the specific threats faced by journalists, also in conjunction with journalists’ role in uncovering crime and corruption.

¹⁶² RSF. 2021. 2011–2020: A study of journalist murders in Latin America confirms the importance of strengthening protection policies. RSF, 13 May. <https://rsf.org/en/reports/2011-2020-study-journalist-murders-latin-america-confirms-importance-strengthening-protection>.

¹⁶³ UN Office on Drugs and Crime. 2021. *Kyoto Declaration on advancing crime prevention, criminal justice and the rule of law: Towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York, United Nations. https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_30/Kyoto_Declaration_V2102815.pdf.

This need was likewise emphasized by previous resolutions adopted by various UN bodies, including the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly, and the Security Council (see Appendix E). For instance, Resolution A/HRC/RES/33/2,¹⁶⁴ adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2016, called on Member States to “develop and implement strategies for combating impunity for attacks and violence against journalists” through measures such as the creation of special investigative units, the appointment of specialized prosecutors, the establishment of monitoring and rapid response mechanisms, and the training of members of the judiciary on the safety of journalists.

In the 2019 Report to the Human Rights Council on investigating the killing of Jamal Khashoggi,¹⁶⁵ the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions recommended establishing “a Standing Instrument for the Criminal Investigation into Allegations of Targeted Killing, or other acts of violence against journalists, human rights defenders or others targeted because of their peaceful activities or expressions”, and stated that this instrument should “investigate such violations, in accordance with criminal law standards; identify possible avenues for the administration of justice at national, regional and international levels; prepare files to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings (...); [and] identify other mechanisms for delivery of justice and ending impunity, including at political and diplomatic levels”.

Safety of journalists covering protests

“Journalists have a critical role in reporting and informing audiences on protest movements.”

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO¹⁶⁶

UNESCO has observed a problematic trend of heightened attacks against journalists covering protests, emanating from multiple sources, including both security forces and protest participants. From January to August 2021, UNESCO registered attacks against journalists in connection with the coverage of protests, demonstrations, and riots in at least 60 countries worldwide.¹⁶⁷ In some cases, the attack was directed against one journalist; in other instances, multiple journalists were targeted. Since 2015, at least 13 journalists have been killed while covering protests.¹⁶⁸

A large majority of these cases were perpetrated by security forces and included attacks such as beatings, the use of tear gas, and arbitrary arrests. At the same time, a significant number of attacks against journalists were perpetrated by citizens participating in the protests, including both physical and verbal attacks. Journalists have also been threatened with raids of media offices and the physical destruction of journalistic material in retaliation for coverage of protests.

No global monitoring mechanisms of attacks against journalists covering civil unrest exist to date. In countries where national monitoring mechanisms exist, a high level of attacks has been recorded, suggesting the potential of large underreporting elsewhere.

¹⁶⁴ UN Human Rights Council. 2016. The safety of journalists. (A/HRC/RES/33/2) <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/33/2>.

¹⁶⁵ UN Human Rights Council. 2019. Annex to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions: Investigation into the unlawful death of Mr. Jamal Khashoggi. (A/HRC/41/CRP.1) https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session41/Documents/A_HRC_41_CRP.1.docx.

¹⁶⁶ UNESCO. 2020. UNESCO sounds the alarm on global surge in attacks against journalists covering protests. <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-sounds-alarm-global-surge-attacks-against-journalists-covering-protests>

¹⁶⁷ Recorded by UNESCO, drawing on credible documentation by national and international partners.

¹⁶⁸ Smyth, F. 2020. *Safety of journalists covering protests: preserving freedom of the press during times of turmoil*. Issue brief in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374206>.

Trends in digital safety

Global awareness of the digital threats that journalists face has increased in recent years. Online harassment, mass and targeted surveillance, data storage vulnerabilities, and digital attacks (including hacking) are among the many ways that digital tools have been used to jeopardize the safety and integrity of journalists as well as their sources. Both state and non-state actors use these tactics to gain access to confidential information and intimidate journalists. There is evidence to suggest that digital threats faced by journalists are growing: in its 2021 report on the first 10,000 cases of its Digital Security Helpline, Access Now recorded an increase in requests for urgent support from journalists and activists working in conflict settings and in countries experiencing shrinking civic space overall.¹⁶⁹

Alongside a rise in digital attacks, threats to the safety of journalists have been compounded by the passage of legislation that grants security forces greater powers of surveillance, often under the justification of national security or public health. Surveillance and hacking compromise the protection of journalists' sources,¹⁷⁰ as recently illustrated by the "Pegasus Project" revelations, following which UN human rights experts called for all States to impose a global moratorium on the sale and transfer of surveillance technology, until regulations that ensure that such technology complies with international human rights standards are put in place.

Protecting against digital threats has become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, with more journalists working remotely and relying on personal devices. In a global survey on journalism during the pandemic, conducted by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, a significant portion of the 1,406 respondents reported blatant threats of government surveillance (7 percent); targeted digital security attacks, including phishing, distributed denial of service (DDoS), or malware (4 percent); or forced data handover (3 percent).¹⁷¹ Digital tools also served as a vector for psychological attacks: 20 percent of respondents reported that their experience of online abuse, harassment, threats, or attacks was "much worse than usual" during the pandemic.

While spyware, surveillance, and other digital attacks are increasingly recognized as serious threats to journalism, many journalists do not have adequate access to or knowledge of (digital) tools that can help protect them. Often, the onus is put on the individual to ensure their own digital safety, as other actors, including internet companies and media organizations, very often do not offer adequate support.¹⁷²

End-to-end encryption has been increasingly recognized as one important tool for protecting the safety of journalists and their sources, therefore strengthening the right to privacy and to freedom of expression.¹⁷³ In 2020, the UN Human Rights Council called on Member States to "refrain from interference with the use of technologies such as encryption and anonymity tools".¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Access Now. 2021. *Strengthening civil society's defenses*. New York, Access Now. <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/06/Helpline-10000-cases-report.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ UNESCO. 2015. *CONNECTing the Dots: Options for Future Action Outcome Document*. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/connecting_dots_outcome_document.pdf. See also Posetti, J. 2017. *Protecting journalism sources in the digital age*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248054>.

¹⁷¹ Posetti, J., Bell, E., and Brown, P. 2020. *Journalism & the pandemic: A global snapshot of impacts*. ICFJ and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University. <https://www.icfj.org/our-work/journalism-and-pandemic-survey>.

¹⁷² Høiby, M. and Mariateresa, G.V. 2020. Reconsidering journalist safety training. *Media and Communication*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 68–77. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i1.2525>.

¹⁷³ Schulz, W., and van Hoboken, J. 2016. *Human rights and encryption*. Paris, UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246527_eng.

¹⁷⁴ UN Human Rights Council. 2020. *The safety of journalists*. (A/HRC/RES/45/18) <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/45/18>.

Violence against women journalists

“We knock on many doors, thousands of doors, for only one to open, and to be believed. And the most difficult thing, I think, is when it involves a crime of sexual violence. Because you have to fight every day for people to believe you were raped.”

Jineth Bedoya Lima

Colombian journalist and UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize laureate

In recent years, civil society, researchers, and international bodies have increasingly recognized the extent and impact of violence against women journalists—off-line and online, verbal, visual, and physical. Many women journalists report suffering physical and online violence perpetrated by colleagues, sources, public figures, anonymous perpetrators, and strangers. That violence, in its many forms, poses a threat to diversity in the media, as well as equal participation in democratic deliberation and the public’s right to access information.

From 2016 through 2020, 37 women journalists were killed, accounting for roughly 9 percent of the total 400 killings recorded in those five years. This proportion is consistent with previous years. Research on the global level as to why women journalists are underrepresented among fatal victims is still lacking. In some cases, women journalists may be less involved in traditionally dangerous beats: according to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), women reporters were least likely to cover issues of “Crime and Violence” (33 percent women) and “Politics and Government” (35 percent women).¹⁷⁵

Further, in many countries, women are excluded from top editor and manager positions.¹⁷⁶ This means that issues that affect women journalists, such as misogynistic online violence, may also be less likely to be prioritized at a decision-making level, including the fact that women journalists face specific challenges related to gender-based violence that may go beyond longstanding understandings of journalist safety.

Mapping the scale of online abuse and hostility

Women in the public sphere, off-line or online, risk being targeted for gendered harassment, abuse, and violence that seeks to make their participation in public space difficult or impossible. The more public visibility a woman has, the more she is exposed to these risks. Recent research has shown that gender is only one of many factors that impact the likelihood that a person will be targeted by abuse, harassment, and violence in the public sphere. Mounting calls for integrating an intersectional perspective on gendered harassment of journalists have highlighted how individuals are targeted by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This dynamic was clearly illustrated in a 2016 study of abuse in comments on *the Guardian* news site, which found that violence against women journalists was compounded by stereotypes and prejudice related to ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation/gender identity.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ GMMP. 2021. *Who makes the news?* GMMP. https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁷⁶ Andi, S., Selva, M., and Kleis Nielsen, R. 2020. *Women and leadership in the news media 2020: Evidence from ten markets*. Oxford, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/women-and-leadership-news-media-2020-evidence-ten-markets>.

¹⁷⁷ Gardiner, B., Mansfield, M., Anderson, I., Holder, J., Louter, D., and Ulmanu, M. 2016. The dark side of Guardian comments. *The Guardian*, 12 April. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments>.

In 2021, the findings were released of a two-year global research project led by UNESCO in cooperation with the ICFJ on online violence faced by women journalists. The study included a large-scale global survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries, as well as long-form interviews with 173 journalists and experts and two case studies analysing over 2.5 million social media posts directed at prominent journalists Maria Ressa (The Philippines) and Carole Cadwalladr (United Kingdom). The survey found that 73 percent of women journalist respondents said they had experienced some form of online violence.¹⁷⁸ Twenty percent had also been attacked or abused off-line in connection with the online violence they had experienced.¹⁷⁹ The survey further showed that harassment was compounded with multiple stereotypes and prejudice related to ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation/gender identity, as respondents identifying with these categories experienced both the highest rates and most severe impacts of online violence. The study additionally established that attacks against women journalists are also often closely related to coordinated disinformation campaigns.

BOX 4-2:

Online violence and harassment of women journalists remains a serious threat

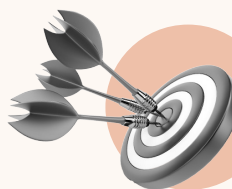
Out of the **714 respondents** to the UNESCO-ICFJ survey who identified as women...



1 in 4

experienced threats of physical violence

One in four of respondents who said they had experienced online violence said this had included **threats of physical violence**, including sexual violence, and more than one in ten had also received threats against those close to them.



4 in 10

appeared to be targeted by orchestrated disinformation campaigns

Four in ten reported being targeted in online attacks that appeared to be linked to **orchestrated disinformation campaigns**.



1/4

experienced mental health impacts

A quarter of respondents reported experiencing **mental health impacts** as a result of online violence, and more than one in ten having sought medical and/or psychological help.



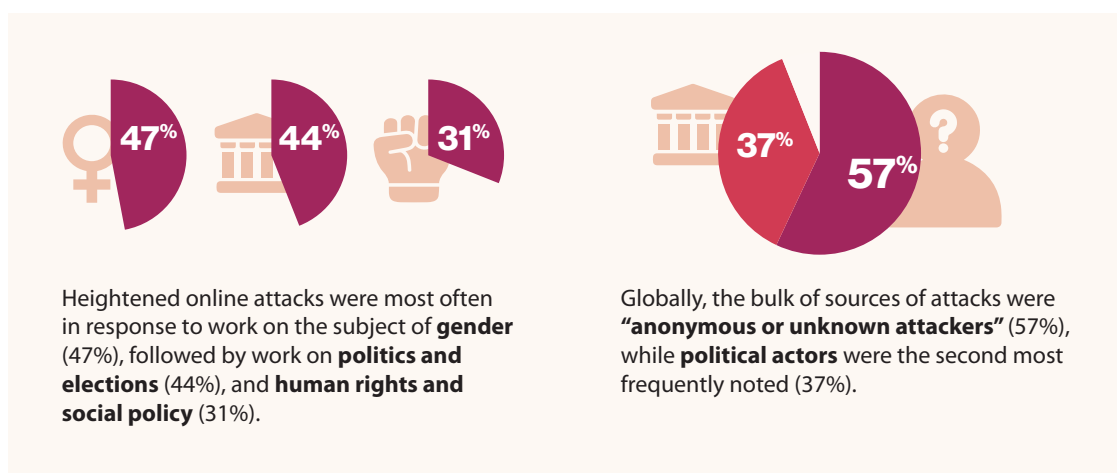
1 in 10

reported online violence to the police

Only one in ten (11%) of the women journalists surveyed had **reported instances of online violence to the police** and only 8% had taken legal action.

¹⁷⁸ Expressed as a percentage of the 625 women journalists who responded to the question.

¹⁷⁹ Expressed as a percentage of the 596 women journalists who responded to the question.



The study also found that online attacks on the women journalists surveyed had increased in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic-induced reliance on online spaces for communication, a rise in online abuse against women has become one of many "shadow pandemics", similar to the "disinfodemic". In the case of women journalists, this mirrors how media workers have become even more reliant on online tools to perform their work, but also how online abuse has worsened for members of marginalized groups. In December 2020, a UNESCO-supported study by African Women in Media (Awim) found that 69 of the 108 women journalists surveyed had experienced increased online harassment during the pandemic.¹⁸⁰

A growing coalition to fight gender-based violence targeting journalists

The Coalition Against Online Violence, launched in 2020 and spearheaded by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), brings together over 30 civil society organizations to advocate for change and offer journalists collective support. A variety of other civil society organizations have also begun new initiatives to support journalists targeted by online harassment. Trollbusters, OnlineSOS, Vita Activa, and the Coalition Against Online Violence typically serve individual women journalists and provide capacity-building for newsrooms.

International organizations have also emphasized the issue of gendered online violence in their own campaigns. These include the Safety of Female Journalists (#SOFJO) initiative of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which also published a resource guide on the issue,¹⁸¹ and UNESCO's #JournalistsToo campaign. In line with the UNESCO General Conference 39C/Resolution 39, which invited the UNESCO Director-General to "reinforce activities (...) aimed at addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists, both online and off-line", ¹⁸² UNESCO has prioritized the gender dimension of journalist safety through research, outreach, and training initiatives.

¹⁸⁰ Njoroge, D. 2020. *The impact of COVID-19 on East African women journalists*. African Women in Media (AWIM) and UNESCO. <https://africanwomeninmedia.com/impact-covid19-east-african-women-journalists/>.

¹⁸¹ Chocarro, S., Clarke, S., Gutiérrez, P., Taing, J. 2020. *Safety of female journalists online: A #SOFJO resource guide*. Vienna, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/468861>.

¹⁸² UNESCO. 2017. *Records of the General Conference, 39th session, Paris, 30 October–14 November 2017, v. 1: Resolutions*. (39 C/Resolution 39) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260889>.

Increased recognition of the problem at the international level has also helped to produce a series of resolutions and decisions within the framework of international human rights law. Two recent examples include the UN Human Rights Council Resolutions 39/6 (2018)¹⁸³ and 45/42 (2020),¹⁸⁴ which recognize the specific risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work and underline the importance of taking a gender-responsive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists.

Safety of journalists during COVID-19

“Journalists are on the frontline and put their safety in peril every day to bring citizens reliable and verified information on the pandemic. Their contribution has been invaluable for us all. But many lack protective equipment and access to healthcare, and some have been made to pay the ultimate price for their coverage of the health crisis.

I stand in solidarity with media workers and their families during this demanding and perilous time.”

Audrey Azoulay

Director-General of UNESCO, 9 June 2020¹⁸⁵

The COVID-19 health crisis has created new challenges for the safety of journalists and considerably exacerbated existing ones. When covering the pandemic and its repercussions in the field, journalists have inevitably risked exposure to the virus, and many (especially freelancers) lack protective equipment, sanitary safety training, and/or access to healthcare. The non-governmental organization Press Emblem Campaign recorded at least 1,967 deaths of journalists having contracted COVID-19 between 1 March 2020 and February 2022.¹⁸⁶

Many media workers covering the pandemic have experienced psychological stress and trauma, both from the nature of the assignment and from job insecurity caused by the rising financial instability of many media outlets. Loss of revenue has put many journalists' jobs in jeopardy and constitutes a severe threat to the very existence of many independent media outlets.

In addition, media workers around the world have been subject to harassment, persecution, and detention as a result of their work to inform citizens about the crisis. Some have been the subject of accusations of spreading disinformation when reporting on the pandemic and on governments' responses to the crisis. In some of the worst cases, journalists have been physically assaulted by anti-vaccination protestors, as well as by government officials and security forces, or imprisoned for their coverage of state contracts issued under the pandemic. Many of these charges or arrests have been grounded in existing laws. Additionally, in some

countries, governments have introduced new legal measures which are often so broadly worded as to criminalise legitimate journalism. As a result, there is a risk that the COVID-19 pandemic could also lead to a rise in arbitrary detentions of journalists. While exhaustive monitoring and analysis of reprisals in connection with COVID-19 reporting does not exist, one report recorded that, between January 2020 and June 2021, at least 76 journalists suffered retaliation after reporting on or criticizing the COVID-19 response.¹⁸⁷ These reprisals included criminal charges, physical abuse and torture, threats, and harassment. In its 2020 report, RSF reported that as of 1 December 2020, 14 journalists were still being held in connection with their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁸³ UN Human Rights Council. 2018. The safety of journalists. (A/HRC/RES/39/6) https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/39/6.

¹⁸⁴ UN Human Rights Council. 2020. The safety of journalists. (A/HRC/RES/45/42)

¹⁸⁵ UNESCO. 2020. UNESCO deplores fatalities among journalists covering the COVID-19 pandemic. UNESCO, 9 June. <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-deplores-fatalities-among-journalists-covering-covid-19-pandemic>.

¹⁸⁶ This number includes all journalists and media workers that contracted COVID-19, including when the contraction of the virus cannot be clearly linked to the execution of the profession. Press Emblem Campaign. 2021. Countries with the most COVID-19 related journalist deaths. <https://www.presseemblem.ch/-1.shtml>.

¹⁸⁷ Antúñez, D. 2021. *Unhealthy silence: Development banks' inaction on retaliation during COVID-19*. Coalition for Human Rights in Development, ARTICLE 19, and IFEX. https://rightsinddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Unhealthy-silence_full-report.pdf.

The UN Secretary-General further expressed concern for detained journalists, specifically with COVID-19 spreading in prisons, and called for the immediate release of “journalists who have been detained for practicing their profession”.¹⁸⁸

Good practices and positive measures recently reported by Member States

Under the umbrella of the 2021 Director-General’s request for information on judicial follow-up to cases of killings of journalists, 28 countries (44 percent) have reported to UNESCO positive steps that they have taken in establishing and implementing stronger protection, prosecution, prevention, and reporting measures to enhance the safety of journalists.¹⁸⁹ These encompass the examples below.

Monitoring and research initiatives

Several States have reported implementing national and subnational monitoring mechanisms for the safety of journalists. In Latin America, for instance, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Paraguay have established monitoring protection measures and incidents of threats and violence, typically within the framework of a national policy programme for supporting journalists and human rights defenders. Monitoring mechanisms within national protection units or task forces were similarly reported by Kenya, Palestine, and the Philippines. In many Member States, civil society also plays a vital role in monitoring violence against journalists.

Several Member States have also recognised the importance of research initiatives in order to better understand the challenges that journalists in a particular context may face. Brazil, Kenya, Nepal, and Thailand, for example, recently reported having undertaken or commissioned studies on key issues (such as SLAPP actions or review of media sector policies) related to safety of journalists in their countries.¹⁹⁰

Action plans, legislation, and reforms in law enforcement procedures

Improving reporting mechanisms, sensitizing and building the capacity of the law enforcement system, and creating extensive policy frameworks at the national level are all important steps for promoting the safety of journalists. Ecuador, Malta, Slovakia, and the Philippines reported having proposed or implemented new legislation towards this aim. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also reported introducing a National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. In Yemen, a National Committee on human rights violations investigates crimes against journalists.

¹⁸⁸ UN Secretary-General. 2020. Note to correspondents – in response to questions on a recent letter from the Committee to Protect Journalists. New York, United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2020-09-17/note-correspondents---response-questions-recent-letter-the-committee-protect-journalists>.

¹⁸⁹ These countries are: Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Venezuela, and Yemen.

¹⁹⁰ SLAPP actions, short for Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, are a form of legal harassment used to intimidate and restrict critical voices and free expression through expensive and time-consuming legal proceedings.

Inter-institutional cooperation was emphasized in the reports of many Member States. For example, Ecuador highlighted that its Inter-institutional Committee for the Protection of Journalists and Communication Workers at the National Level and the Coordination of Actions on an International Scale has met regularly in recent years to implement a range of reforms. These include strengthening the capacity of the police to undertake individual risk assessments, considering intimidation of journalists as a crime under Ecuador's criminal code, and including threatened journalists in victim and witness protection mechanisms. This kind of cooperation was also presented by Venezuela, which reported that the Public Prosecutor's Office collaborates with various investigative divisions.

Mexico has introduced a special department within the office of the Attorney General to investigate crimes against freedom of expression, which is also present at the subnational level in certain states. Similarly, Guatemala reported the creation of a Division on Crimes Against Journalists within the Public Prosecutor's Office, and Iraq reported the establishment of a special investigative unit on crimes against journalists within the Ministry of Interior. Indonesia has introduced a special prosecutor for crimes against journalists. Like the Philippines, it has also established a special task force for the safety of journalists.

In Peru, journalists facing threats or harassment can report to the Ombudsman's Office. In addition, the government has prepared guidelines for the Ombudsman's office on how to react to safety threats and infringements of freedom of expression reported by journalists.

The introduction of special reporting mechanisms for journalists, such as hotlines, was also highlighted by Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, and the Philippines.

Trainings and capacity-building

Many Member States reported having focused on trainings and capacity-building measures with a variety of actors. Bangladesh, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine all reported having conducted multistakeholder training programmes targeting the media sector, law enforcement, civil society, and other actors. Common focus areas included improving communication between law enforcement and the media, gender-based violence, and safety protocols in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Advocacy and awareness-raising

The United States of America reported diplomatic efforts in promoting freedom of expression and of the media, through initiatives such as advocacy for the release of imprisoned journalists and supporting multilateral commitments on media freedom.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ As noted above, though not a UNESCO Member State since 1 January 2019, the United States of America has continued to respond to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial investigations regarding cases of killed journalists that occurred within its borders.

UNESCO activities to advance the safety of journalists

BOX 4-3:

UNESCO's work to promote the safety of journalists

UNESCO, as the UN agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom, is spearheading the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. This systematic UN-wide plan was adopted in 2012 with the aim of working towards a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, and with a view to strengthen peace, democracy, and development. Within this framework, UNESCO's work to advance the safety of journalists is structured around six axes:

1. STANDARD-SETTING AND POLICY-MAKING

UNESCO has provided input into the 28 resolutions and decisions on journalists' safety that have been adopted between 2016 and 2021 by the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO bodies, and regional organizations.

The Organization also contributes to data collection on an indicator on the safety of journalists (SDG Indicator 16.10.1) has been established to measure achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly of Target 16.10 on public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms. UNESCO contributes data to the UN Secretary-General's annual monitoring report.

2. AWARENESS-RAISING

Over 150 events marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) have been held around the world since its first commemoration in 2014. In recent years, UNESCO led several global communications campaigns around IDEI to raise awareness of the dangers faced by journalists around the world. In 2018, the #TruthNeverDies campaign was covered by 900 news articles. The 2019 #KeepTruthAlive campaign was covered by 300 news articles, received over 1 million impressions on Twitter, and was displayed on billboards in 60,000 locations in France, Belgium, and Mexico. In 2020, the "Protect Journalists. Protect the Truth" campaign highlighted findings from the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. It was the most viewed video ever on UNESCO's Twitter channel, and its content directly reached 3 million people on social media.

Annual commemorations led by UNESCO have produced important commitments to the safety of journalists. These include, for instance, the 2019 announcement by the Mexican

Presidency that the government would take into account recommendations by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to strengthen national protections mechanism for human right defenders and journalists. Additionally, in 2020, during joint commemorations of World Press Freedom Day (WPF) and IDEI of the “Forum of Legal Actors”, a network of legal operators was launched to support and defend the right to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

UNESCO has also produced a video explainer on how to fight impunity for crimes against journalists. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuQTq2Ej6q8&list=PLWuYED1WVJIP6AR2z48lKHDZb3Pnt9Rtl&index=2>)

3. MONITORING AND REPORTING

UNESCO’s Director-General has condemned every killing of a journalist or media worker since 1997.

Since 2008, following a decision by the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC, the Director-General has compiled a biannual analytical [Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#), which contains updated information on killings of journalists and the status of judicial enquiries into each of them, based on information provided by the country in which the killing took place.

This information is also made publicly available through [UNESCO’s Observatory of Killed Journalists](#), an online database which was launched in 2018.

4. CAPACITY-BUILDING

UNESCO conducts capacity-building for journalists on physical safety in the field, digital safety, and psychosocial safety in various countries around the world, and particularly in countries experiencing conflict.

UNESCO has also strengthened the capacities of over 23,000 judicial actors and 8,500 members of security forces around the world on freedom of expression of the safety of journalists, aided by UNESCO resources (see Box 3-3).

Other resources include UNESCO and RSF’s [“Safety guide for journalists: a handbook for reporters in high-risk environments”](#), which was updated in 2017 to include increased focus on the safety of women journalists; and UNESCO and the International Federation of Journalists’ [“Model course on safety of journalists: a guide for journalism teachers in the Arab States”](#) (2017), which was integrated into the curricula of various journalism schools across the Arab region.

5. ACADEMIC RESEARCH

In 2016, UNESCO held its first academic conference on the safety of journalists as part of the global conference celebrating WPF. On this occasion, the Journalism Safety Research Network (JSRN) was launched, with the aim of strengthening research and contributing to safer environments for journalists.

Since then, academic conferences on the safety of journalists have been organized yearly as part of WPFJ celebrations, bringing together universities from around the world, the JRSN, as well as the UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity at Sheffield University, which was created in 2018.

Assessments based on UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators have been conducted in ten countries, with further assessments currently underway.

Together with ICFJ, in 2019 UNESCO launched a comprehensive study on online violence against women journalists and on best practices to counter it. [Its findings were published in 2021](#), some of which are discussed above in Section 6.

6. COALITION-BUILDING

Informal "Groups of Friends" of Member States that support the safety of journalists have been set up at UNESCO and at the UN in New York and Geneva. Similar groups exist at the OSCE and at the Council of Europe. UNESCO, together with its Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, organized conferences on online harassment of women journalists (2019) and on the role of the judiciary and international cooperation in fostering the safety of journalists (2021).

Concrete, action-oriented proposals for strengthening the implementation of the UN Plan of Action were produced through a four-month multistakeholder consultation, including a major conference in Geneva in 2017.

Together with OHCHR, UNESCO has coordinated the UN Focal Points Network on Safety of Journalists, which spans 14 UN agencies and entities. Since 2018, this Network has carried out concerted preventative actions across the UN system regarding the safety of journalists, including in specific cases of attacks against journalists, as well as activities to sensitize UN staff in Headquarters, regional hubs, and in the field.

Spotlight on funding modalities and the safety of journalists

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION (IPDC)

Since 2009, UNESCO's IPDC has supported 149 projects that promote the safety of journalists in more than 45 countries. In the first half of 2021, 21 IPDC projects dealing with safety were approved. These grassroots projects, together with a wide range of other activities and initiatives supported by the Programme's different funding modalities, have supported national monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the safety of journalists; capacity building, including of judicial operators; awareness-raising; development of safety guidelines; and country assessments using UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSI). The JSI is a research framework of the IPDC, which provides a mapping of the key features that indicate the extent to which journalists are or are not able to carry out their work under safe conditions. UNESCO has published JSI assessments on Afghanistan, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, and Pakistan, and further assessments are currently ongoing.

GLOBAL MEDIA DEFENCE FUND (GMDF)

The Global Media Defence Fund, established in 2020 with significant support from the Governments of Canada and the United Kingdom, finances local, regional, and international projects seeking to strengthen the legal protection of journalists and/or enhance media freedom through investigative journalism or strategic litigation. The Fund has since also received generous voluntary contributions from Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Serbia, Slovakia, and Switzerland.

The first Call for Partnerships of the Fund in 2020 received 110 partnership proposals from not-for-profit organizations, representing all regions of the world and targeting over 50 countries. UNESCO is currently supporting the implementation of 41 projects selected out of the 2020 Call, a majority from the Global South, and 17 of which are being implemented in Africa. The second Call for Partnerships of the Fund was launched in April 2021 and received over 140 proposals from candidates from around the world.

UNESCO'S MULTI-DONOR PROGRAMME ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS (MDP)

The MDP serves to further strengthen UNESCO's work on freedom of expression at global, regional, and national levels by channelling funds towards emerging priorities and the most pressing needs. Since its inception in 2017, the MDP has supported the creation and reinforcement of monitoring, reporting, protection, and prevention mechanisms, as well as of networks of safety focal points. It has also strengthened the capacities of thousands of judicial actors on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

Mainstreaming freedom of expression and safety of journalists in the Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process involving the review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States by the UN Human Rights Council. This peer-to-peer review provides an opportunity to assess whether legal domestic frameworks sufficiently guarantee freedom of expression and access to information, and whether laws are being effectively implemented by Member States. According to a 2021 research project undertaken by Sciences Po under the supervision of UNESCO,¹⁹² 79,387 recommendations were made over the three UPR cycles covered in this report.¹⁹³ Of these recommendations, 3,205 related to freedom of expression in general. Out of these, 17 percent enjoyed support by States under review, meaning that they agreed to work towards their achievement.



Recommendations on safety of journalists constituted 23% of all recommendations related to freedom of expression

This highlights the importance of the issue on the international human rights agenda and the international political will to protect journalists.

Recommendations have included calls to “adopt effective measures to prevent any harassment or intimidation” of journalists, to “end intimidation, threats, and physical attacks” against them, and to “adopt a national policy on the protection of journalists and human rights defenders”. UNESCO contributes to the UPR, advocating for the alignment of domestic laws with internationally recognized standards in the field of freedom of expression, a gender sensitive approach to protection, and the adoption of specialized normative frameworks for journalists.

While the commitments made by Member States during the UPR are important steps forwards, proper follow-up must be undertaken at the domestic level to ensure compliance. In 2021, UNESCO released guidelines for UN Country Teams on how to effectively engage with the UPR to foster freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists.¹⁹⁴ These guidelines will be complemented by resources addressed to other stakeholder groups.

¹⁹² Note that this report was performed for UNESCO's internal use and analysis.

¹⁹³ At the time of this research, Cycle 3 was still ongoing, with 126 out of 193 reviewed by the Human Rights Council.

¹⁹⁴ Cook Maude, D. 2021. *The Universal Periodic Review and its potential to foster freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists: Guidelines for United Nations Country Teams*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377808>.

Conclusion

While several important steps have been taken towards achieving a safer environment for journalists in the past five years, the challenges have both remained significant and become more diversified.

Though killings of journalists have decreased by nearly 20 percent in the past five years compared to the previous quinquennium, other types of attacks against journalists are numerous. Additionally, while killings have decreased everywhere, the proportion of targeted killings outside of countries experiencing armed conflict has steadily increased over the past five years. This trend may suggest that even as fewer journalists have suffered fatal attacks while covering armed conflict, they risk their lives when reporting on topics such as corruption, crime, and politics.

Impunity for crimes against journalists remains high and just 13 percent of cases documented by UNESCO are currently considered resolved. In the remaining 87 percent of cases—nearly nine out of ten—UNESCO considers the case as ongoing, unresolved, or has not received information on the judicial procedure from the concerned Member State.

In 2022, the framework under which much of the international cooperation to ensure a safer environment for journalists turns a decade old. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity has been an effective tool for multistakeholder cooperation, together with an unprecedented number of coalitions and national, regional, and international initiatives to monitor, prevent, protect, and prosecute, a recent selection of which were detailed above. Additionally, international awareness on issues such as intersectional types of violence against journalists, the impact of threats, digital safety, and other issues has grown.

In the past five years, UNESCO has issued a series of recommendations and suggested actions, outlined in the documents and reports cited above and in Box 4-3. These recommendations were formed in dialogue with the analysis and trends summarized above and are important elements towards improving the national, regional, and global policies to protect journalists and prevent and prosecute crimes against them and the vital service they provide.

Better Data

for Better Understanding of
Freedom of Expression and
Media Development

-
- 110** Introduction
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Introduction

Throughout this Report, we have indicated how the configuration of digital transformations has shaped developments in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists. Underlying this analysis is the fact that the rise of digital communications technologies, in conjunction with particular business models which generally do not include transparency-by-design, have ushered in a “data revolution”, leaving no aspect of society untouched. Audience behaviour, preferences, and choices in daily life are recorded to leave behind data—whether or not the user is aware of it or intends to leave that digital trail. Taken together, these traces form masses of complex and granular signals about human behaviour at an unprecedented scale, which are variously converted into information or used as raw materials in automated processing, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) development and application. In the fields of freedom of expression and media development, the data explosion has already had profound and far-reaching consequences: data have not only become a tool for (and sometimes against) individual journalists, but have also changed the strategies of the media sector as a whole and the ways in which it can be understood and supported—or competed with by non-media companies set on winning attention and advertising.

Data can create immense economic and social value, capturing and conveying characteristics, trends, and patterns that can be used as evidence and knowledge to shape behaviours, preferences, and policies that will lead to real world changes. This tremendous opportunity was emphasized, for instance, by the *World Development Report 2021: Data for better lives*.¹⁹⁵ Data in this sense can “serve a public good by informing the design, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of public policy and programmes”, and for building systems of accountability, as stated in the “data for social good” theory of change.¹⁹⁶ Data are also key to measuring and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, data can be used for arbitrary commercial and political surveillance, for surreptitious manipulation of personal agency, and for undermining the right to freedom of expression and of opinion.¹⁹⁸

For scholars, lawmakers, and citizens working to advance freedom of expression and media development, data presented in this Report are used to produce meaningful information: they help communicate milestones reached so far towards universal access to free, pluralistic, and independent news and they help us to signal the roadblocks and detours ahead. As the rapid growth of digital and dominant business models based on data aggregation, mining, and monetization has brought journalism into uncharted and increasingly treacherous territory, new signs and signals are needed about the health of freedom of expression and media development.

Given the central role of data in our societies, it is important to analyse and interrogate how data are collected, produced, distributed, and used. Which indicators could shed light on progress in enabling freedom of expression and media development, and help answer new and old questions? How can relevant data be identified, accessed, analysed, and used to track, predict, and bolster free, pluralistic, and independent media and the safety of journalists? What types of data gaps exist, and which ones seem to be especially difficult to fill? And what are the main requirements and priorities for leveraging the full potential of data to promote freedom of expression and media development?

¹⁹⁵ World Bank. 2021. *World Development Report 2021: Data for better lives*. Washington, DC, World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2021>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ UN Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG). 2014. *A world that counts: mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development*. <https://www.undatarevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-World-That-Counts2.pdf>.

¹⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Council. 2021. *Disinformation and freedom of opinion and expression: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Kahn*. (A/HRC/47/25) <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/25>.

To begin unpacking and addressing these questions, this chapter first describes the current data ecosystem, highlighting a selection of data initiatives and innovations. It then presents a novel framework to define and discuss data gaps in the domain, addressing issues of availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability. Finally, it provides a vision for the data ecosystem pertaining to the scope of this Report by laying out specific recommendations for the creation of a data agenda relevant to freedom of expression and media development.

The current data ecosystem

A data-driven approach

This chapter was largely informed by the data-driven analysis that bolsters this Report. Recognizing the breadth and value of data now available across the fields of freedom of expression and media development, UNESCO partnered with Data-Pop Alliance (DPA) to map relevant sources, collect data, and produce detailed analysis and data-based evidence of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and journalist safety over the past five years.

This work followed a set of consultations and preliminary research to determine the approach to data that would be taken by UNESCO for the World Trends Report. In 2019, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) commissioned an expert study on the feasibility of collecting statistics for the World Trends Report and the Internet Universality Indicators. This study then informed an expert meeting in February 2020, which gathered media development experts to discuss existing datasets and research projects and identify opportunities for cooperation. The meeting highlighted the lack of global, up-to-date datasets that cover the full range of issues in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and safety of journalists, with a particular dearth of data from the Global South. These conclusions offered valuable inputs for the continued work of UNESCO and DPA.



Through a systematic, comprehensive, and iterative mapping exercise, DPA built a database of sources, ultimately identifying over 160 data sources from 120 organizations relevant to the fields of freedom of expression and media development (see Appendix C, Methodology). Organizations of all sectors collecting and holding data were considered, including public organizations, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, academia, and NGOs. DPA sought to identify both traditional data sources, such as surveys, and non-traditional data sources—including large volumes of data not otherwise publicly available and usually (but not exclusively) collected by social media and other internet companies.

Of the numerous data sources used to inform this Report, the various initiatives highlighted below are among those prioritized through DPA's selective criteria based on: the reputation of the data holder and rigour of the methodology; sector of the data provider organization; geographic scope of the dataset; innovative approach; and sustainability of the data source. Further details are included in the Methodology of the full Report (Appendix C).

Key terms

As the data ecosystem continues to grow and evolve, there is still no universal definition for several foundational terms in the field. For the purposes of this chapter, the working definitions of three distinct concepts are as follows.

- **“Standard” or “traditional” data sources:** Data that are collected using research methods that have been most common historically (such as surveys) and meant to be used for statistical inference.
- **Big data:** “High-volume, high-velocity, and/or high-variety information assets that demand cost-effective, innovative forms of processing that enable enhanced insight, decision making, and process automation.”¹⁹⁹
- **Open data:** Data that can be openly used, reused, retained, and redistributed by anyone, subject to acknowledgement.²⁰⁰

It is important to distinguish between Big Data and Open Data as movements, and big data and open data as types of data. As a movement, Open Data focuses on promoting greater availability, accessibility, and transparency of data, based on the theory of change that transparency will change incentives and behaviours, and therefore will change outcomes.²⁰¹ Open data and the movement around it are particularly relevant for research purposes, including those efforts that bolstered this Report—as will be discussed below, the availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of quality data are integral in better understanding and supporting the larger media ecosystem.

Big Data, as a movement, is approached as a new kind of data ecosystem, part and parcel of larger social phenomena driven by developments in digital technology, especially commercial developments and evolving business models (for instance, the contestation around third-party cookies). This Big Data ecosystem can be characterized as the union of 3 Cs: big data crumbs, capacities, and communities.²⁰² “Crumbs” refers to digital breadcrumbs, or data that were, for the most part, passively left behind by humans using digital devices and services, even if actively prompted to do so by entities with interests in this resource. The scholar Shoshana Zuboff, professor emerita and writer, distinguishes between the collection of data to improve a given service and “surplus data”, which is mined for purposes way outside this remit, what she calls “surveillance capitalism” that depends on being outside of users’ consciousness.²⁰³ “Capacities” encompasses tools, methods, software, and hardware, including statistical machine-learning techniques and algorithms that can look for and unveil patterns and trends in vast amounts of complex data. “Community” refers to the individual and institutional actors (and notably corporates) that aim to interpret and analyse these massive datasets, as well as the individuals who—consciously or not—contribute to them. Therefore, it is not the size of the dataset that determines the distinction between big data and standard or traditional data, but rather how it is collected and used.

All three concepts are necessary for understanding the current data ecosystem, and they interact and intersect in different ways. Some sources of big data are aggregated and structured for specific purposes and made available for public use, becoming open data. Reciprocally, large amounts of open data can be considered big data and lend themselves to big data analytical techniques, such as pattern recognition.

¹⁹⁹ Gartner. 2022. Gartner Glossary: Big data. <https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/big-data>.

²⁰⁰ UNESCO General Conference. 2021. *Draft Recommendation on Open Science*. (41 C/22) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378841>.

²⁰¹ Opendatasoft. 2017. Interview with Emmanuel Letouzé on open data, big data, data science, and algorithms. Opendatasoft, 28 February. <https://www.opendatasoft.com/blog/2017/02/28/open-data-big-data-data-science-algorithms>.

²⁰² Letouzé, E. 2015. *Big data and development: An overview*. Data-Pop Alliance, World Bank Group, and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. <https://datapopalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Big-Data-Dev-Overview.pdf>.

²⁰³ Zuboff, S. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York, PublicAffairs.

Sources of data



The majority of the data related to freedom of expression and media development, and thus most of the data analysed in this report, comes from NGOs, think tanks, and universities. These data initiatives often fall under the purview of civil society organizations, research centres, and networks that work for the explicit mission of promoting freedom of expression and media development. However, it is important to also consider data sources that may be less obvious. While both traditional and big data are gathered from a wide variety of research methods and mediums, as suggested above, some of these potential sources of data could be more prominently considered as relevant for the topics covered in this Report.

Governments depend on data for their decision-making processes. They also play a central role in strengthening and shaping the data ecosystem; they have the resources and responsibility to drive data collection efforts and support third-party initiatives, as well as to regulate issues of personal data protection, retention, and use. Regional bodies can also play a role in this regard. National and regional statistics offices are typically charged with collecting and distributing data for the purposes of public policy. Governments also often have the advantage of full access to administrative data, which are not always open or accessible to external researchers. While increasing numbers of countries have access to information laws (as discussed in greater detail earlier in this Report), many are still lagging regarding how this relates to access to datasets.

The principles and practices determining the way that governments use, collect, and distribute data fall under the purview of data governance: the systemic and multi-dimensional approach to setting policies and regulations, establishing institutional coordination and national strategies, nurturing an enabling data ecosystem, and streamlining data management.²⁰⁴ Though significant progress has been made in recent years to improve Open Data practices among governments, according to a recent assessment of datasets across 115 countries, only one in ten government datasets are open.²⁰⁵ The Open Data Barometer further warns that many governments treat Open Data as a “side project” rather than integrating principles of data transparency and accessibility in their regular activities. Therefore, an open data policy that is fully aligned with the international commitments regarding the right to universal access to information—expressed, for instance, by the target SDG 16.10, indicator 2—is necessary to reach the goal of a more coherent and comprehensive approach in this area. Closer cooperation with civil society and other actors that can ensure data is made available that address pressing policy challenges is also needed. For example, data on homicides is not always available with sufficient disaggregation to identify killings of journalists in particular, nor any other demographic disaggregation (such as by gender). Data about government spending and allocation to advertising is typically rare. Even data showing trends in the numbers of working journalists are hard to find in national employment statistics in many countries.

There are many networks and organizations that work to improve these practices. For instance, the Open Government Partnership, established in 2011, now includes 78 countries and 76 local jurisdictions that have issued Action Plans—drafted in cooperation with civil society—for Open Data, transparency, and accountability. Other global initiatives that advocate for better Open Data practices among governments include Open Data Watch and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.

²⁰⁴ United Nations. 2020. UN/DESA Policy Brief #89: Strengthening data governance for effective use of open data and big data analytics for combating COVID-19. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 21 December. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-des-policy-brief-89-strengthening-data-governance-for-effective-use-of-open-data-and-big-data-analytics-for-combating-covid-19/>.

²⁰⁵ World Wide Web Foundation. 2017. *Open Data Barometer 4th Edition – Global Report*. <https://opendatabarometer.org/4thedition/report/>.

These issues are also gaining prominence on the international agenda. In 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation*, addressing how the international community can better harness the opportunities presented by digital technologies while addressing their challenges. The roadmap argues for the importance of “digital public goods”, which include open data as well as opensource software, AI models, and other digital assets.²⁰⁶

Several cross-national research projects also collect data relevant for freedom of expression and media development. These can be particularly useful to gather quantitative data about journalism as a profession. For instance, the occupational status of journalists is most prominently assessed through the Labour Force Survey (LFS) using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) definitions. The LFS is a sample-based household survey that takes place in the majority of countries, often carried out by national statistics offices. The LFS does not ask respondents whether they are “professional journalists”, but rather what kinds of paid work they spend the most time doing. The LFS thus captures a wide range of people who identify as “journalists”, as long as they engage in paid “journalistic” activities relatively frequently. These numbers can also be compared to membership statistics from national professional organizations for journalists. At the same time, these data do not easily allow for analysis of diversity and gender equality issues, which are important matters for assessing power and representation in the media.

Opinion surveys covering public confidence in the press have also existed since at least the beginning of the 20th century, often implemented by research carried out on a national level. As covered elsewhere in this Report, these surveys permit us to assess that such confidence has been on the decline since at least the 1990s. One major source of consistent data for this question is the World Values Survey, covering over 60 countries.



In the digital age, an increasingly important source of data comes from private internet companies. While data from tech giants such as Google, Meta, and Twitter remain opaque and difficult to access, public calls for greater transparency have nevertheless resulted in a series of reports from some of these companies aiming to provide more insight into their operations and user activities.²⁰⁷ In 2022, UNESCO envisages global consultations about what data would be useful to the issues of media viability and online safety of journalists. This may include, for instance, what data about news consumers is held by the internet gatekeepers, and what data exists about actions taken to protect women journalists who are attacked online that may help end the reigning impunity for the perpetrators of such violations.

The data ecosystem also includes initiatives tracking audience and advertising indicators such as television viewers, readership of print media, and online media advertising expenditure. Such initiatives tend to be led by private companies such as PwC and Insider Intelligence, which periodically publish the *Global Entertainment & Media Outlook* report and *The Global Media Intelligence* report, respectively. Regionally-focused equivalents such as Media Partners Asia also provide such research. These represent end-products of major data collection and analysis efforts, but are available for purchase, rather than being open data.

Large scale data are also collected and stored by major industry agencies in the media and communications sector. For instance, WAN-IFRA has in the past conducted cross-national surveys on a range of topics, most recently focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on news organizations.

²⁰⁶ UN General Assembly. 2020. Road map for digital cooperation: Implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation. Report of the Secretary-General. (A/74/821) <https://undocs.org/A/74/821>.

²⁰⁷ See also Puddephatt, A. 2021. *Letting the sun shine in: Transparency and accountability in the digital age*. Issue brief in the series *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377231>.

Similar initiatives by national journalist unions can also be important sources of data. However, such initiatives often face resource constraints that do not allow for regular or sustainable data collection.

Data journalism

The varied and numerous potential sources of data have, in turn, offered multiple opportunities to the media sector, perhaps first and most evidently encompassed by data journalism, which leverages and conveys data to tell stories in more user-friendly ways. While data journalism could be said to have started as many as fifty years ago, its popularity has soared in recent years.²⁰⁸



This fast-growing field includes a set of practices for the collection, analysis, interpretation, visualization, and publication of data with a journalistic purpose, usually adopting a data-storytelling approach.²⁰⁹ As journalists can appeal to increasingly abundant sources of raw data to inform their work, the inherent complexity and sheer amount of that data have spurred data-friendly and sometimes interactive visualizations to process information and deliver compelling news.

Examples of data journalism include *The Guardian's* Datablog, the Sinar Project in Malaysia, the data team at the Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, the Arab Data Journalists' Network, and the work of impactAFRICA and PesaCheck, based on data from Code for Africa. WanaData, a Pan-African initiative from Code for Africa, comprises a network of women journalists, data scientists, and technologists working to "change the digital media landscape by producing and promoting data-driven news."²¹⁰ Beyond the newsroom, projects like DataJournalism.com and Data^N offer a plethora of free resources, materials, courses, and guides to support the data journalism community. The growing trend of data-driven reporting and analysis highlights the vast expansion of and demand for data-led efforts to better inform the public. International journalistic cooperation around massive datasets has been a feature of the investigative reporting that led to the publication of the Panama, Pandora, and Paradise papers which, like the CumEx files, have exposed global corruption, tax evasion, and money laundering. Such examples of data journalism's significant contributions signal how much the field could contribute if expanded to investigating other key issues like journalists' safety, the role of internet companies in the spread of mis- and disinformation or their impact on elections, among other key topics.

Innovative approaches

As evidenced by the 120 organizations referenced for this Report and their data contributions in the field (discussed above and in the Methodology section), many organizations and initiatives collect, produce, distribute, and make use of data relevant to freedom of expression and media development. These range from national and regional levels, such as Afrobarometer and Latinobarómetro, to large international initiatives by organizations such as Access Now and the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg.

Many new projects are also taking innovative approaches to using data for understanding issues related to freedom of expression and media development. The Dangerous Speech Project,²¹¹ for instance,

²⁰⁸ Banda, F. 2013. *Model curricula for journalism education: a compendium of new syllabi*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000221199>.

²⁰⁹ Berret, C., and Cheryl, P. 2016. *Teaching Data and Computational Journalism*. New York, Columbia Journalism School. https://journalism.columbia.edu/system/files/content/teaching_data_and_computational_journalism.pdf.

²¹⁰ WanaData. 2019. About us. <https://medium.com/wanadata-africa/about-us-a4c53027b716>.

²¹¹ Dangerous Speech Project. 2021. What we do. <https://dangerousspeech.org/what-we-do/>.

mixes human and machine learning approaches to identify online speech that could incite violence offline. Its framework aims to mitigate hate speech while also protecting freedom of expression. Towards that end, the project gathers and analyses current and historical data that exemplify dangerous speech in different countries around the world to better understand the link between speech and violence. The data are then manually analysed to identify “coded language” that, combined with additional considerations (like the prominence of the content creator), may indicate a real threat and incitement to violence.

Another innovative approach, the “human rights locker”, proposes the creation of a digital locker system to avoid the erasure of online tracks and historic evidence by allowing third parties or internet companies themselves to collect, preserve, and verify shared content—even if it has already been removed from the public feeds or platforms—for future research and investigation.²¹² Such a system requires that standards are put in place to address how the digital information will be stored, who can access it, and under which credentials, alongside safeguards to protect privacy and to prevent abuse of the data.

Complementary to these projects is the work of organizations attempting to mash and mine existing data to train AI—requiring large amounts of data, often collected by internet companies. Hatebase, for instance, is the world’s largest structured repository of regionalized multilingual hate speech; by pulling data from a variety of sources, the initiative helps companies, government agencies, NGOs, and research organizations detect, monitor, and analyse hate speech in over 95 languages and 175 countries.

While it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations about the strengths and weaknesses of all such data initiatives, DPA’s mapping exercise, described above and in the Methodology section of this Report, suggests some analytical conclusions on the overall state of data relevant to media freedom and media development. Many of these initiatives respond to policy challenges related to freedom of expression, while also embracing Open Data principles and forming partnerships with a variety of stakeholders. Nevertheless, some gaps and room for further improvement remain. These gaps are outlined in more detail in the following section.

BOX 5-1: UNESCO’s work on data

1. Data for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Following the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals framework by the UN General Assembly, UNESCO was designated as the custodian agency for SDG Indicator 16.10.2 on public access to information. The Organization also provides information for Indicator 16.10.1 on the safety of journalists, through its monitoring of killings of journalists and follow-up on judicial proceedings. Annual reports on both topics are produced by UNESCO.

²¹² Donovan, J., and Lim, G. 2021. The internet is a crime scene. *Foreign Policy*, 20 January. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/20/internet-crime-scene-capitol-riot-data-information-governance/>.

a. Sustainable Development Indicator 16.10.1: Safety of journalists and media workers

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 16.10.1 looks at “the number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates [...]”. UNESCO monitors the killings of journalists and judicial follow-up of each registered case through its [Observatory of Killed Journalists](#) and through condemnations of these killings by the UNESCO Director-General. Since 2008, the Director-General has delivered to the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC a biannual analytical [Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#). Information compiled through this mechanism then informs reporting on Indicator 16.10.1 and the Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council.

In addition, UNESCO provides support at national and regional levels to assist Member States in setting up or reinforcing monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the safety of journalists, including through its Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists.

b. Sustainable Development Goals Indicator 16.10.2: Public access to information

SDG Indicator 16.10.2 looks at “the number of countries that have adopted and implemented constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to Information.” In line with its role as the UN custodian agency for this SDG Indicator, UNESCO has been mandated by its Member States to monitor and report progress on this indicator worldwide. For this purpose, UNESCO conducts regular surveys offering Member States the chance to report national progress on access to information. The objective of the survey is to collect global data on the adoption of legal guarantees on access to information, as well as to map main trends in the implementation of these guarantees.

Using this method, in 2021, UNESCO collected information from 102 countries and territories. The data show a correlation between having a specialised Access to Information oversight institution and the implementation and enforcement of the access to information law in the country in questions. This is evident in the pattern of the higher scores obtained by countries that have such a specialised body.

2. Other data initiatives

UNESCO also supports Member States to conduct assessments of their media landscapes based on UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators, Internet Universality Indicators, Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media, and Journalists’ Safety Indicators.

The Regional Centre of Studies for the Development of the Information Society (CETIC.br), a UNESCO Category II Centre, aims to “contribute to building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication”, for which it conducts surveys and compiles data on information communication technology (ICT) in electronic government, education, culture, and health, among others.

In 2021, the International Research Centre on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) was launched as a Category II Centre under the auspices of UNESCO. Among IRCAI's objectives are undertaking research to make AI fair and transparent, monitoring the use of AI for addressing the SDGs, and the development of indicators to feed into policy innovation. UNESCO's work on data is also supported by UNESCO Chairs and Networks of Chairs, that focus on issues such as data science and statistics.

The 2021 UNESCO World Atlas of Languages offers a new perspective for more inclusive, comprehensive, and transversal understanding of linguistic diversity. It builds on a comprehensive methodology developed by UNESCO, consisting of 35 descriptors and two indicators for the assessment of linguistic diversity around the world. The World Atlas of Languages aims to stimulate new research and innovation, create demand for new language resources and tools, contribute to the formulation of inclusive language policies and legislation, and forge new partnerships and collaboration among multiple actors.

UNESCO is also working to develop draft Guidelines for Open Data, which will aim to empower Member States to develop open data policies and to ensure its ethical and productive usage.

3. Collaborations on data

UNESCO has been engaged in the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, which has been working to develop SDG-related guidelines and resources to support countries in their monitoring and reporting on the global goals.

In 2020, UNESCO launched the Open for Good Alliance together with partners such as the International Development Research Centre; FAIR Forward / GIZ; the Mozilla Foundation; the Radiant Earth Foundation; the <A+> Alliance for Inclusive Algorithms; the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, and Makerere University. This Alliance aims to create synergies to stimulate the use of localized data in AI to address local problems. As part of this alliance, UNESCO has supported the development of datasets in nine low-resource African languages that are used across 22 countries.

Together with the World Health Organization, UNESCO co-convened inter-agency discussions in the UN about common interests in accessing data that would help to understand and counter mis- and disinformation. This included a side event at the UN General Assembly in 2021, titled "Promoting Transparency to Counter Disinformation and Build Trust". The occasion launched [two discussion papers](#) about interests by UN agencies in access to data.

4. Resources

- [*From promise to practice: Access to information for sustainable development, 2020 UNESCO report on the monitoring and reporting of SDG indicator 16.10.2 \(Public access to information\)*](#) (2020)
- [*Powering sustainable development with access to information: highlights from the 2019 UNESCO monitoring and reporting of SDG indicator 16.10.2*](#) (2019)
- [*UNESCO's Internet Universality Indicators: a framework for assessing Internet development*](#) (2019)

Data gaps

Despite these opportunities and areas of progress, much remains to be done to fill data gaps pertinent to freedom of expression and media development. Significantly, these “data gaps” are not restricted to and synonymous with “gaps in data”, but rather include other related systemic issues, such as the use of data. To understand and conceptualize the gaps, one could apply a framework like “FAIR,”²¹³ which helps assess the extent to which a data source is findable, accessible, interoperable, and reproducible. However, the FAIR framework omits constraining and enabling features and factors that fall outside the scope of the characteristics of the data themselves. This includes, for instance, cultural and other systemic factors that determine the level and use of knowledge in a domain. In other words, the FAIR framework is focused on desirable data features, rather than desirable factors that allow data to be useful.

For a fuller understanding of current data gaps, this Report proposes instead a four-pillar “knowledge security” framework, based on and in reference to the food security framework developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).²¹⁴

FIGURE 5-1:
FAO’s food
security
framework

Source: FAO.

Physical AVAILABILITY of food	Food availability addresses the “supply side” of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels and net trade.
Economic and physical ACCESS to food	An adequate supply of food at the national or international level does not in itself guarantee household level food security. Concerns about insufficient food access have resulted in a greater policy focus on incomes, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security objectives.
Food UTILIZATION	Utilization is commonly understood as the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. Sufficient energy and nutrient intake by individuals is the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of the diet and intra-household distribution of food. Combined with good biological utilization of food consumed, this determines the nutritional status of individuals.
STABILITY of the other three dimensions over time	Even if your food intake is adequate today, you are still considered to be food insecure if you have inadequate access to food on a periodic basis, risking a deterioration of your nutritional status. Adverse weather conditions, political instability, or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) may have an impact on your food security status.

Adapting this framework from food security to *knowledge security*, these four pillars become data availability, data access, data utilization, and data stability. Just as nutritional aspects are key to the food security framework, the knowledge security framework addresses data quality under the pillar of data availability.

²¹³ Wilkinson, M.D., Dumontier, M., Aalbersberg, I.J., et al. 2016. The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. Scientific Data Vol. 3, 160018. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18>.

²¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2008. An introduction to the basic concepts of food security. EC-FAO Food Security Programme. <http://www.fao.org/3/al936e/al936e.pdf>.

FIGURE 5-2:
A knowledge
security
framework

Source: Knowledge security framework, adapted by Emmanuel Letouzé based on the food security framework.

Availability

Is relevant,
geographically
diverse data of good
quality available?

Accessibility

How easy is it to
access data and
information?

Utilization

How easily can the
data be used and
compared?

Stability

Is the production and
distribution of data
sustainable?

Availability

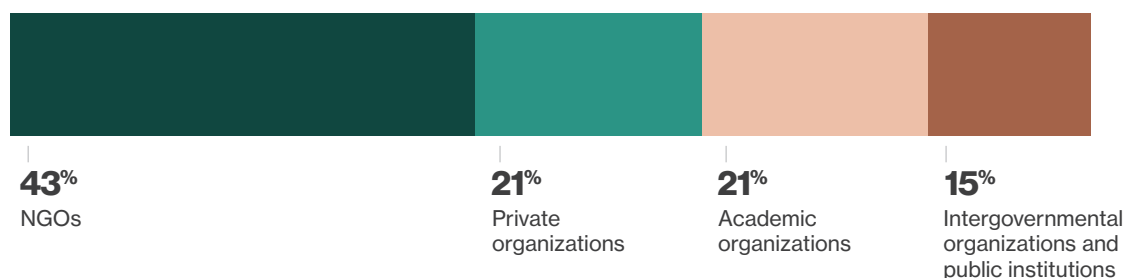
The concept of data availability captures the level of relevant, quality data available in the ecosystem. Availability emphasizes the importance of producing and/or capturing data that meet societal demands and needs, capable of answering questions that societies deem worth asking. The systematic collection of relevant data sources and indicators conducted by DPA for this Report, as well as a consultation of data experts convened by UNESCO in February 2020, revealed three important gaps:

- lack of data about and produced in specific geographic regions and by specific sectors;
- unbalanced coverage of themes within the realm of freedom of expression and media development; and
- issues with the quality of the datasets even when such datasets exist.

Economic inequality between countries and regions of the world shows in many areas, and data production is no exception. Some of the most comprehensive and prominent data-driven initiatives have emerged from institutions located in the Global North, particularly in Europe (including, for instance, the European Union's Data.europa.eu and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom). Fewer such sources and reference points are readily accessible from organizations in the Global South, particularly in Asia and the Pacific and in the Arab region. Several examples highlighted above and referenced elsewhere in the Report, however, point to growing attention to innovative data-driven initiatives in Africa and Latin America, a development that should be continually encouraged and supported.

A related issue is the lack of diversity of data sources. The research conducted for this Report found that data holders were most often NGOs, including international NGOs, together representing 43 percent of the total identified sources, while private and academic organizations represented nearly the other half (21 percent each). Intergovernmental organizations and public institutions amounted to 15 percent of identified sources. It is very likely that private companies and governments do collect and possess pertinent data that are not easily available and therefore not included in this analysis.

FIGURE 5-3:
Data sources
continue to lack
diversity - types
of data holders
providing data
for this Report



Source: UNESCO.

Without available data on integral issues and trends, it is all the more difficult to detect and overcome obstacles to freedom of expression and media development. Within the field of media freedom, for example, various projects monitoring changes in freedom of expression laws and regulations have emerged in the last decade, yet “a big gap remains regarding the level of implementation and effectiveness of existing legislation”, according to Matías González, coordinator of the Center for Studies on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (CELE).²¹⁵ The complexity of collecting data for indicators that can be subjective or difficult to quantify, especially at a regional or global level, could be at the root of the issue.

Measurements of media pluralism, for instance, remain difficult to pinpoint and standardize at a large scale. Initiatives like the Media Pluralism Monitor, Media Ownership Monitor, and the Media Influence Matrix offer significant resources but are difficult to scale up and limited in their geographic coverage. As evidenced by the 2015 publication *Who Owns the World’s Media?*, global data collection on the complexities of national media environments is both resource-intensive and often requires subjective analysis.²¹⁶

The lack of data about journalists’ working conditions around the world is also notable, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects both on the media industry and on factors such as mental health. Similarly, the lack of gender-disaggregated data continues to be one of the most salient quality gaps in available data. The research for this Report also suggests a lack of data that would enable insights about vulnerable groups, such as migrants and refugees, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic and religious minorities, and the LGBTI community. Such data are necessary for intersectional research practices, allowing for multiplicative effects of different but interdependent categories and factors. Efforts to resolve this gap will also face one key challenge: further disaggregation of survey data will require larger sample sizes, which requires more funding.

Accessibility

The second pillar of the knowledge security framework assesses the ease with which the data are findable and accessible, alongside issues of transparency in the data ecosystem. Open data is a key strategy towards achieving greater accessibility: privately-owned data by definition is not generally available except under certain conditions and depending on the business model of the owner. Though the push for open data continues to gain traction worldwide, fewer than half of the data sources identified for this Report are open-source and therefore publicly available for analysis. Additionally, a number of high-value datasets remain behind paywalls, inherently limiting their users and subscribers to elite academic institutions or select organizations. Some initiatives use a mixed approach. For example, while Meta’s Data for Good initiative offers some of its products openly, most require data-sharing agreements. Though some organizations have developed interactive platforms to facilitate a more basic or narrow use of their data, limited access to the granular data impedes in-depth analysis by external actors and researchers.

²¹⁵ González, M. 2021. Interview with Nicholas Benequista and Ivette Yañez for this Report.

²¹⁶ Noam, E.M. 2015. *Who Owns the World’s Media? Media Concentration and Ownership around the World*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Access to data controlled by private companies also faces ongoing challenges. This concern includes not just how content is treated, but also the personal data collection practices and holdings of the companies. Sharing such sensitive data—or even indicators derived from these data—raises significant technological, ethical, and commercial issues. A discussion must be deepened with these companies about possible modalities that would balance various considerations, including individual and group privacy, reputational risks, financial aspects, and societal benefits. While social media companies have begun releasing a selection of statistics on their users and practices (notably through transparency reports), these do not generally constitute datasets that can be utilized by external researchers.

It is typically difficult and resource-intensive to access social media data. The types and amounts of data that are available to researchers through tools such as application programming interfaces (APIs) have been shrinking in recent years, partly motivated by increased awareness of issues around data privacy. In one highly criticized move, in August 2021, Facebook shut down the personal accounts of New York University researchers studying misinformation spread through political ads on the social network, with the argument that the study breached the platform's privacy rules. However, it is worth noting that, apart from Twitter, most other large internet companies have not established ongoing data-sharing programmes with independent researchers at all.²¹⁷

Also important to consider here is data accessibility to *whom*. Increasingly, there is recognition, at least among internet companies, that different regimes could apply to different stakeholders—for example, a tiered system linked to the character of would-be users: regulators, law enforcement, accredited researchers, journalists, UN agencies, and the wider public.²¹⁸

These matters are subject to the evolving mix of regulation and self-regulation of both privately and publicly held data. Governments have a strong obligation to enhance accessibility of their data-holdings, also taking into account issues of disability, languages, regional disparities, how data are presented, and who is presumed to be the primary audience.

Utilization



Utilization underlines the importance of actually leveraging available quality data and understanding the obstacles that may justifiably or unjustifiably prevent someone from doing so in terms of regulation and rights such as privacy. The number of times a dataset has been downloaded, for instance, can provide one measure for this pillar. However, data are typically analysed along with other sources, not used in a vacuum. This requires both comparability (to what extent different data sources use the same definitions and collection methods) and interoperability (to what extent two or more different systems can exchange data). Both are challenging aims, given the varied techniques of sampling, data recording methods, and selection biases, among other differences.

²¹⁷ Persily, N., and Tucker, J.A. 2021. How to fix social media? Start with independent research. Brookings Institute, 1 December. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-to-fix-social-media-start-with-independent-research/>.

²¹⁸ See, for instance, Aspen Digital. 2021. *Commission on Information Disorder: Final Report 2021*. Aspen Institute. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Aspen-Institute_Commission-on-Information-Disorder_Final-Report.pdf; Transatlantic Working Group. 2020. *Freedom and accountability: A transatlantic framework for moderating speech online*. The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/feature/transatlantic-working-group-freedom-and-accountability/>.

The UN provides several classification standards for data collection purposes in broad statistical areas. These include the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), and International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, maintained by UNESCO). Such standards (regulating “data about data”) facilitate the production of comparable data to improve cross-national analysis. Quality control practices are crucial in ensuring that data are robust and usable.

The varying standards that internet companies use for publishing data through their transparency reports make meaningful comparisons difficult and hinders the use of such data for independent research and public understanding. Debates about the utilization of data by internet companies rose to the fore in 2021 with the publication of the “Facebook Files”, or “Facebook Papers”, disclosed by a whistle-blower.²¹⁹ These disclosures revealed that the company failed to act on research indicating harms, as well as gross inequalities in treatment of countries and users. Facebook representatives argued that the leaks were selective and skewed to highlight problems, but they did not counter the specific claims. Following these revelations, there is worry that the company, and others in the sector, may simply reduce or end their data collection and analysis in order to avoid similar situations.

Stability

For a variety of reasons—most often, loss of funding—some data-dependent projects become unable to continue supporting their own initiatives, forcing them to halt operations or produce data or analysis less frequently. Providing quality original datasets, databases, indices, and tools is a time-consuming and resource-intensive process, requiring significant financial and administrative support if these initiatives are to be sustainable in the long term. Partnerships can enhance data stability not only by promoting standardization, but also by setting up the structural conditions or systems for data initiatives to be fed and fuelled. Without a degree of stability, it is not possible to track past trends and to project future ones.

Similarly, the stability of data inevitably poses the question of ownership: who should hold and process data? Organizations from every sector can and do play a significant role in the data ecosystem. For instance, private sector organizations collect data on media audiences for profit. NGOs advocating for specific issues provide a lens for analysis and help to identify problems that demand attention. As the world continues to build, expand, and improve upon this data ecosystem, governments can leverage data to promote change through regulations, policymaking, incentives for companies, and more. International organizations like UNESCO also play a central role as conveners.

Gaps in data relevant to the global media landscape hinder stakeholders’ ability to fully understand current trends in the field and prevent researchers, policymakers, and organizations like UNESCO from having reliable access to quality data sources. These gaps must be addressed through both improving the quality and accessibility of current data and supporting the collection and analysis of new types of data. A diverse and robust data landscape is one better positioned to inform decisions that improve the media landscape, hold stakeholders accountable, and allow monitoring of progress and changes.

²¹⁹ *Wall Street Journal*. 2021. The Facebook Files. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-facebook-files-11631713039>.

A vision for the future data agenda

Leveraging the potential power of data for good can help stakeholders to achieve numerous objectives: protecting both journalists and journalistic standards, reforming media laws and regulations to promote media freedom and pluralism, bolstering the viability of news media in the digital age, and ensuring that communities have access to independent and trustworthy news. This requires articulating a bold, aspirational, and credible vision and building a data agenda to achieve it—one that is well integrated into broader initiatives for achieving such objectives. Because data figures into these efforts in multiple and complex ways, involving a variety of steps and stakeholders, such a data agenda must be multifaceted and based on a systems approach. It must provide actors with a roadmap of actions to address data challenges and help to accomplish the larger vision of those objectives.

Given the diversity of actors and stakeholders encompassed within freedom of expression and media development, continuing to identify specific weaknesses and strengths of data initiatives is fundamental for mainstreaming the relevance of data and data-related activities across the field.

A sustainable and healthy data ecosystem needs to be built upon cross-sector partnerships, as well as regional and global cooperation. Active and open lines of communication between policy-making actors and data initiatives can better enable evidence-based policies and laws that bolster the enabling environment for free, independent, and pluralistic media.

Based on the above analysis, a future data agenda may involve the following recommendations:

- 1. Amplify geographic scope of data production:** Greater allocation of international and local resources to finance data-driven initiatives emerging or operating in the Global South (and even more specifically, in countries where data tends to be more limited) can aid in this objective.
- 2. Increase the thematic scope of data production:** Public programmes and grants that provide long-term support to collect and analyse data covering issues and trends for which data are currently insufficient or non-existent. These currently include the working conditions of journalists and restrictions on internet access.
- 3. Mainstream intersectional and data disaggregation practices:** In order to reflect the lived experiences of minority and vulnerable groups within society, civil society and international organizations should advocate for the adoption of intersectional research approaches and the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by intersectional factors, including by gender/sex (where applicable).
- 4. Promote Open Data:** International actors with large reach and influence should be leading the discussion about the data revolution in the field and actively advocating for the importance of open data and for the role of data as a digital public good through dedicated events, reports (such as this one), and other diffusion methods.

5. **Amplify calls for transparency:** National regulatory institutions must create the right incentives for transparency, developing appropriate regimes for private companies and other actors to be public about the ways that data are collected, stored, and used, and to provide frameworks for differential access to private data as appropriate.
6. **Develop and adopt strong data standards:** It is important to pull from available data frameworks to create homogenous quality standards and ethical standards with regard to collecting, recording, and processing freedom of expression and media development data. These standards should be set by global organizations.
7. **Prioritize and promote data literacy:** The use of traditional and non-traditional data sources about free expression and media development can be mainstreamed through national education systems such as in courses on media and information literacy, with the aim of fostering a healthy and popular “data culture”, where quality, diverse data are collected through transparent means and citizens are equipped to critically analyse and understand it.
8. **Establish mechanisms that enhance data sustainability:** Ensure that particularly small-scale initiatives are given the necessary support (not least financially) to continue their work in the long-term.
9. **Foster cross-sector data partnerships:** Greater level of articulation and cooperation between organizations is needed to increase data availability, support better standardization practices, and ultimately achieve the creation of comprehensive data that illustrates the status of freedom of expression and media development.
10. **Include data collection in freedom of expression initiatives:** Funding and initiatives for freedom of expression issues more broadly should also take into account the need for more and higher quality data production and analysis. Increasing support for data efforts through ongoing work and wider initiatives both increases resources for those data efforts and brings attention to challenges and use of that data in the field.

Never before has there been such a diverse and voluminous amount of data to inform policymaking towards protecting and promoting international freedom of expression standards—but we are not there yet. Lack of transparency on how these data are generated and shared, imbalance of regional production of this information, and proprietary production of data that have an impact in the global public sphere are some of the challenges that must be overcome.

Each of these recommendations seeks to reshape the data ecosystem of freedom of expression and media development for the better and to move societies closer to the vision of a more inclusive, safe, thriving, independent, and trustworthy flow of news and information worldwide.

Conclusion

Conclusion

The picture outlined in this World Trends Report is a sobering one. Even as the global community has seen mounting evidence for the importance of a free, independent, pluralistic, and sustainable news media where the safety of journalists is secured, this public good is threatened on all fronts. There is, however, also some cause for optimism. While accounting for this grim tally of setbacks, this Report highlights a groundswell of efforts to preserve press freedom and protect the safety of journalists around the world.

The Windhoek+30 Declaration on Information as a Public Good, which draws attention to the importance of working for media viability, transparency, and media and information literacy, provides a framework for all actors of society to get involved. The Declaration serves as a beacon for concerted awareness-raising, advocacy, and capacity-building by all who value of journalism yet recognize that it is also an endangered public good.

As this Report has mapped out, the past five years have also seen the emergence of a wide range of initiatives in support of freedom of expression and media development. The 2019 Media Freedom Coalition, the 2020 Hague Commitment to Increase the Safety of Journalists, and the 2021 “New Deal” for journalism by the Forum on Information and Democracy are some examples. The fact that the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to two journalists and freedom of expression champions, Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov, provides evidence of momentum to protect our media landscapes and information ecosystems.

Yet there is still a long way to go to reinforce norms and ensure their implementation.

The impact at the national level of current international efforts often remains geographically skewed. They have not been sufficient to counter setbacks to media reform in numerous countries where hopes had once been high. Independent journalism has been suppressed and journalists are in exile in too many places.

Prospects appear more promising in countries with large advertising markets, genuine public service media, well-established traditions of press freedom, and democratic influence over internet platforms. Yet populist and authoritarian tendencies in many developed countries continue to mix co-optation and coercion as a means to curb the potential for news to protect human rights and to counter levels of mis- and disinformation and public cynicism.

And in poorer countries, and internationally at the local level, the news crisis will be more difficult to address without a new concerted push, requiring both national and international support.

The troubling trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, viability, gender equality, and safety of journalists highlighted in this Report should be a call to redouble efforts. Without urgent action by governments, civil society, and private companies, trustworthy journalism will remain under threat, and information as a public good severely undernourished. In addition, without media and information literacy and internet transparency, humanity may be diverted away from addressing the challenges facing sustainable development and securing human rights more broadly.

The measures required to ensure that journalism can continue to function as a necessary public good include: new regulations for social media transparency, independent state subsidies to trustworthy news outlets, greater support for genuine public service media, increased media development assistance, and ramped up philanthropic investments. All of these need guardrails and vigilance to protect standards of editorial independence and freedom of expression. For their part, journalists have to uphold the integrity of the profession in the face of pressure, and media outlets need to do better at digital innovation.

As a key part of the public movement to save journalism, UNESCO will continue to work with partners to raise awareness and implement the promise of information as a public good. The World Trends Report series is one such measure to fill the research gap and shed light on freedom of expression and media development as the world continues to evolve. It is a resource for reflection and action by Member States, international organizations, civil society, media, and academia. The findings outlined here can facilitate action towards positive trends for the future, and it is for stakeholders to make use of these as they shape the world going forward.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press

We the participants in the United Nations/ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Seminar on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, held in Windhoek, Namibia, from 29 April to 3 May 1991,

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

Recalling General Assembly resolution 59(I) of 14 December 1946 stating that freedom of information is a fundamental human right, and General Assembly resolution 45/76 A of 11 December 1990 on information in the service of humanity,

Recalling resolution 25C/104 of the General Conference of UNESCO of 1989 in which the main focus is the promotion of “the free flow of ideas by word and image at international as well as national levels”,

Noting with appreciation the statements made by the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Public Information and the Assistant Director-General for Communication, Information and Informatics of UNESCO at the opening of the Seminar,

Expressing our sincere appreciation to the United Nations and UNESCO for organizing the Seminar,

Expressing also our sincere appreciation to all the intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental bodies and organizations, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which contributed to the United Nations/UNESCO effort to organize the Seminar,

Expressing our gratitude to the Government and people of the Republic of Namibia for their kind hospitality which facilitated the success of the Seminar,

Declare that:

1. Consistent with article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.
2. By an independent press, we mean a press independent from governmental, political or economic control or from control of materials and infrastructure essential for the production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines and periodicals.
3. By a pluralistic press, we mean the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community.
4. The welcome changes that an increasing number of African States are now undergoing towards multi-party democracies provide the climate in which an independent and pluralistic press can emerge.
5. The world-wide trend towards democracy and freedom of information and expression is a fundamental contribution to the fulfilment of human aspirations.
6. In Africa today, despite the positive developments in some countries, in many countries journalists, editors and publishers are victims of repression—they are murdered, arrested, detained and censored, and are restricted by economic and political pressures such as restrictions on newsprint, licensing systems which restrict the opportunity to publish, visa restrictions which prevent the free movement of journalists, restrictions on the exchange of news and information, and limitations on the circulation of newspapers within countries and across national borders. In some countries, one-party States control the totality of information.

7. Today, at least 17 journalists, editors or publishers are in African prisons, and 48 African journalists were killed in the exercise of their profession between 1969 and 1990.
8. The General Assembly of the United Nations should include in the agenda of its next session an item on the declaration of censorship as a grave violation of human rights falling within the purview of the Commission on Human Rights.
9. African States should be encouraged to provide constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and freedom of association.
10. To encourage and consolidate the positive changes taking place in Africa, and to counter the negative ones, the international community-specifically, international organizations (governmental as well as non-governmental), development agencies and professional associations-should as a matter of priority direct funding support towards the development and establishment of non-governmental newspapers, magazines and periodicals that reflect the society as a whole and the different points of view within the communities they serve.
11. All funding should aim to encourage pluralism as well as independence. As a consequence, the public media should be funded only where authorities guarantee a constitutional and effective freedom of information and expression and the independence of the press.
12. To assist in the preservation of the freedoms enumerated above, the establishment of truly independent, representative associations, syndicates or trade unions of journalists, and associations of editors and publishers, is a matter of priority in all the countries of Africa where such bodies do not now exist.
13. The national media and labour relations laws of African countries should be drafted in such a way as to ensure that such representative associations can exist and fulfil their important tasks in defence of press freedom.
14. As a sign of good faith, African Governments that have jailed journalists for their professional activities should free them immediately. Journalists who have had to leave their countries should be free to return to resume their professional activities.
15. Cooperation between publishers within Africa, and between publishers of the North and South (for example through the principle of twinning), should be encouraged and supported.
16. As a matter of urgency, the United Nations and UNESCO, and particularly the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), should initiate detailed research, in cooperation with governmental (especially UNDP) and non-governmental donor agencies, relevant non-governmental organizations and professional associations, into the following specific areas:
 - i. identification of economic barriers to the establishment of news media outlets, including restrictive import duties, tariffs and quotas for such things as newsprint, printing equipment, and typesetting and word processing machinery, and taxes on the sale of newspapers, as a prelude to their removal;
 - ii. training of journalists and managers and the availability of professional training institutions and courses;
 - iii. legal barriers to the recognition and effective operation of trade unions or associations of journalists, editors and publishers;
 - iv. a register of available funding from development and other agencies, the conditions attaching to the release of such funds, and the methods of applying for them;
 - v. the state of press freedom, country by country, in Africa.

17. In view of the importance of radio and television in the field of news and information, the United Nations and UNESCO are invited to recommend to the General Assembly and the General Conference the convening of a similar seminar of journalists and managers of radio and television services in Africa to explore the possibility of applying similar concepts of independence and pluralism to those media.
18. The international community should contribute to the achievement and implementation of the initiatives and projects set out in the annex to this Declaration.
19. This Declaration should be presented by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the United Nations General Assembly, and by the Director-General of UNESCO to the General Conference of UNESCO.

ANNEX

Initiatives and Projects Identified in the Seminar

- I. Development of co-operation between private African newspapers:
 - to aid them in the mutual exchange of their publications;
 - to aid them in the exchange of information;
 - to aid them in sharing their experience by the exchange of journalists;
 - to organize on their behalf training courses and study trips for their journalists, managers and technical personnel.
- II. Creation of separate, independent national unions for publishers, news editors and journalists.
- III. Creation of regional unions for publishers, editors and independent journalists
- IV. Development and promotion of non-governmental regulations and codes of ethics in each country in order to defend more effectively the profession and ensure its credibility.
- V. Financing of a study on the readership of independent newspapers in order to set up groups of advertising agents.
- VI. Financing of a feasibility study for the establishment of an independent press aid foundation and research into identifying capital funds for the foundation.
- VII. Financing of a feasibility study for the creation of a central board for the purchase of newsprint and the establishment of such a board.
- VIII. Support and creation of regional African press enterprises
- IX. Aid with a view to establishing structures to monitor attacks on freedom of the press and the independence of journalists following the example of the West African Journalists' Association.
- X. Creation of a data bank for the independent African press for the documentation of news items essential to newspapers.

APPENDIX B

Windhoek+30 Declaration

We, the participants at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day International Conference, held in Windhoek, Namibia, 29 April – 3 May 2021,

1. **RECALLING** Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”;
2. **COMMEMORATING** the continuing relevance, legacy and role of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration as a catalyst for the proclamation of World Press Freedom Day, and as an inspiration for ongoing action to promote and protect freedom of expression, free, independent and pluralistic media, and access to information around the world;
3. **APPRECIATING** the impact and legacy of the regional declarations adopted in the wake of the Windhoek Declaration, namely the Alma Ata, Santiago, Sana’a and Sofia Declarations;
4. **RECALLING** the 2001 African Charter on Broadcasting adopted on the 10th anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration in 2001, and the Pan-African Declaration on Access to Information adopted on the 20th anniversary in 2011;
5. **REAFFIRMING** paragraph 5 of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, which states: “The world-wide trend towards democracy and freedom of information and expression is a fundamental contribution to the fulfilment of human aspirations.”;
6. **EMPHASISING** that information is a public good to which everyone is entitled and, as such, is both a means and an end for the fulfilment of collective human aspirations, including the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union’s Agenda 2063;
7. **CONVINCED** that, as a public good, information empowers citizens to exercise their fundamental rights, supports gender equality, and allows for participation and trust in democratic governance and sustainable development, leaving no one behind; and that information as a public good is also a key underpinning of effective measures to address global emergencies, such as climate and health crises, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic;
8. **RECOGNISING** the role of journalism in producing and disseminating public interest information, especially in times of crisis, and emphasising the overriding importance of this role remaining free from capture or distorting influence;
9. **ACKNOWLEDGING** the far-reaching transformations of the information ecosystem since the adoption of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, in particular the digital transformation and the enormous role played by the Internet and digital platforms in facilitating the sharing of knowledge and information, including for vulnerable, marginalised groups, independent journalists and human rights organisations;

1. **RECALLING** the UN Secretary General's Roadmap for Digital Co-operation and UNESCO's Internet principles of human rights, openness, accessibility and multi-stakeholder governance (ROAM);
2. **CONCERNED** at the increasing proliferation, amplification and promotion, through human and automated systems, of potentially harmful content digitally, including disinformation and hate speech, which undermines people's rights and the quality of collective public debate;
3. **COGNISANT** of the fact that there are no easy solutions to modern digital challenges which are both effective in addressing potential harms and yet maintain respect for freedom of expression as guaranteed under international law;
4. **ALARMED** by both enduring and new threats to the safety of journalists and the free exercise of journalism, including killings, harassment of women, offline and online attacks, intimidation and the promotion of fear, and arbitrary detentions, as well as the adoption of laws which unduly restrict freedom of expression and access to information in the name, among other things, of prohibiting false information, protecting national security and combating violent extremism; and also deeply concerned at the increasing numbers of Internet disruptions, including Internet shutdowns, particularly during elections and protests;
5. **TROUBLED** by the severe economic crisis which is posing an existential threat to independent news media worldwide, and recalling that economic sustainability of free media is a key prerequisite for its independence, as enshrined in paragraph 2 of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, which states: "By an independent press, we mean a press independent from governmental, political and economic control or from control of materials and infrastructure essential for the production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines and periodicals.";
6. **HIGHLIGHTING** the urgency of equipping citizens worldwide, including youth and marginalised groups, with media and information literacy competences, developed through a gender sensitive approach, to enable them to navigate the evolving information landscape, and to promote freedom of expression and access to information as a public good.

We therefore:

Call on all governments to:

16. **COMMIT** to creating a positive enabling environment for freedom of expression and access to information, online and offline, in line with international guarantees of these rights, including a free, independent and pluralistic media, through adopting appropriate legal measures in a transparent manner and following adequate public consultation, guaranteeing the exercise of journalism free of governmental interference, whether formal or informal, promoting universal access to the Internet, and taking measures to reinforce the safety of journalists, including with a specific focus on women journalists;
17. **TAKE** effective steps to nurture a diversity of viable public, private and community media, and implement specific policies, along with relevant safeguards, to promote the production of independent, quality journalism, with the aim of ensuring people's access to relevant, diverse and reliable information;

1. **ENSURE** that flows of funding from public sources to the media, including subsidies and advertising, are allocated fairly and overseen in an independent and transparent manner; and guarantee investment in journalism and jobs, while respecting gender equality and promoting decent working conditions;
2. **MAINSTREAM** media and information literacy into strategies and action plans in order to build the resilience of citizens to misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, and promote civic participation in democratic life;
3. **ALLOCATE** adequate human, financial and technical resources, including as part of development assistance support, to ensure the proper implementation of the steps and measures outlined in this Declaration.

Call on UNESCO and other intergovernmental organisations to:

21. **REINFORCE** cooperation with governments and civil society organisations in order to safeguard and enhance guarantees for the full exercise of the right to information and freedom of expression, both online and offline, with a particular focus on strengthening media freedom, pluralism and independence as well as media viability, transparency of digital platforms, and media and information literacy;
22. **ENCOURAGE** the development of joint funding instruments supported by a combination of States, multilateral institutions, private foundations and philanthropists to promote information as a public good.

Call on technology companies to:

23. **WORK** to ensure transparency in relation to their human and automated systems which could impact user interaction with content, as well as their terms and conditions of service;
24. **PROVIDE** robust notice and appeals opportunities to users, process complaints and redress requests from users in a fair manner, and take action whenever their terms and conditions of service are breached;
25. **CONDUCT** transparent human rights risk assessments, including to identify threats to freedom of expression, access to information and privacy, take appropriate action to eliminate or mitigate those threats, and disclose the impact of those actions;
26. **SUPPORT** information as a public good in various ways, for example through fair and inclusive partnership arrangements, which may include donations or other financial measures, and the protection of journalists who are the victims or at risk of online attacks.

Call on journalists, media outlets, civil society and academia to:

27. **ADVOCATE** with States and digital platforms, as part of their wider protection of freedom of expression and information as a public good, to recognise media viability as a development priority;
28. **UNDERTAKE** monitoring, advocacy, research, policy development, awareness raising, including among official actors, and the provision of expertise and support to address problems caused by measures taken by governments and digital platforms, including due to their lack of transparency, and to increase their engagement in media and information literacy actions;
29. **PROMOTE** a more inclusive, pluralistic and sustainable media sector, including through measures that promote the involvement of young people, women and marginalised groups in the media.

Call to collective action:

30. **WORK TOGETHER** to ensure the effective realisation of the steps and measures outlined in this Declaration;
31. **AGREE AND ADOPT** new and innovative measures and mechanisms, including of a multilateral and multi-stakeholder nature, following broad consultative processes, to ensure respect by States for freedom of expression and access to information, and that digital platforms' practices and systems which affect user interaction with information are appropriately transparent;
32. **COLLABORATE** through multilateral fora to promote respect by governments, intergovernmental organisations and digital platforms for human rights, including freedom of expression, access to information and the safety of journalists.

The world today faces critical new and historic challenges to freedom of expression which require concerted global action by all stakeholders. The 1991 Windhoek Declaration was a bold and forward-looking statement that has helped to change the world for the better over the last 30 years.

It is now time for the generation of 2021 to make our contribution.

Press freedom, independence and pluralism remain major goals to guarantee information as a public good that serves as a shared resource for the whole of humanity. To these goals we now add those of media viability, transparency of digital platforms, and citizens empowered with media and information literacy.

This Windhoek+30 Declaration pays tribute to those who opened up this path. Now, let each of us resolve to do our part to help secure information as a public good as an urgent need today, and as a legacy for those who come after us.

In closing, we express appreciation to the government and people of Namibia for hosting the historic World Press Freedom Conference. Their generosity has opened the road to take forward information as a public good.

APPENDIX C

Methodology

The findings presented in this Report are grounded in data-based analysis, conducted by UNESCO in partnership with Data-Pop Alliance, of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists. The analysis is further supplemented by original research by Economist Impact commissioned for this Report and secondary research from recognized observatories. Below is an outline of the methodology used by UNESCO and partners in developing this edition of the World Trends Report.

Data-Pop Alliance

In order to systematically map out the diverse sources of data that are now globally available on the topic of freedom of expression and media development, UNESCO partnered with Data-Pop Alliance, a collaborative laboratory of researchers, experts, practitioners, policymakers, and activists created in 2013 out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, and the Overseas Development Institute.

Data-Pop produced a data catalogue of data sources pertaining to four of the dimensions covered in the Report: media freedom, media pluralism, media independence and safety of journalists, with gender as a cross-cutting topic. Over 150 credible and relevant data sources (open, with restricted access, or behind a paywall) were identified, mapped, and included in the data catalogue. In the case of many such sources, this involved requesting access to data not otherwise publicly available.

The purpose for the data catalogue was twofold: 1) to produce a comprehensive data repository to facilitate data-driven analysis across world regions for this Report, and 2) to serve as the foundation for an online databank developed by UNESCO, where any online user can freely access the data.

Data-Pop identified data sources through previous WTR publications (including the In Focus series and Issue Briefs), a comprehensive literature review, and a systematic mapping exercise for new sources. Data sources covering regions, several countries, or all countries were prioritized. Organizations of all sectors were considered, including public, intergovernmental organizations (IOs), private, academic, NGOs and INGOs. These were also identified with input from UNESCO. Additionally, Data-Pop aimed at identifying both traditional (e.g., surveys) and non-traditional data sources—the latter referring to large volumes of data produced passively usually, though not exclusively, by social media and internet companies.

Once over 150 data sources had been mapped, the team conducted a focalized exercise to identify data produced in and/or covering regions in the Global South, particularly in Africa, Asia, the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean. Approximately 20 more data sources from these regions were thus identified. Ultimately, Data-Pop produced over 150 charts covering all data sources.

To ensure accuracy and relevance, two quality checks were also carried out. For the purposes of correctly characterizing each data source and dataset, facilitating the analysis process and enabling the creation of the databank, Data-Pop also conducted a concurrent metadata collection process.

Economist Impact

As part of the research behind this Report, Economist Impact contributed original data analysis specifically to assess the economic viability of the news media industry from 2016–2021. With support from UNESCO, Economist Impact also produced a separate specialized report on media viability based on this research project.

The research process of the Economist Impact team was divided into three phases:

- The first phase focused on setting out a framework and a set of indicators for media viability and consisted of a literature review and data audit. The framework was structured around three pillars (economics, politics and society, and technology) and over 60 indicators. These drew on the IPDC media viability indicators²²⁰ as well as similar initiatives from other organizations.
- The second phase consisted of an expert panel, organized in April 2021 with 14 external experts representing 12 countries. The goal of this panel was to validate the framework and indicators as well as discuss potential data sources.
- The third phase was dedicated to data collection and analysis. Economist Impact collected and analysed data from qualitative and quantitative indicators in the framework, at the global level wherever possible. The research process also included ten “deep dive” countries, which were chosen in collaboration with UNESCO. The team drew especially on PwC’s Global Media Outlook 2019-2025. In addition to desk research, Economist Impact analysts contacted over 50 experts from civil society, the private sector, and government to help identify datasets for inclusion in the study.

UNESCO data and other sources

The Report also covers data identified from UNESCO’s monitoring activities as well as other sources identified by the World Trends Report editorial team. This includes UNESCO data focused on the safety of journalists. As a contributing UN agency for SDG indicator 16.10.1 on the safety of journalists, UNESCO collects data on impunity for killings of journalists, positive measures taken by relevant stakeholders in the framework of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and situation analyses and recommendations to Member States through UNESCO’s contribution to the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review. The Report also analyses data from key partners in this realm, including data on imprisoned journalists from the Committee to Protect Journalists. UNESCO also commissioned statistical correlation analysis of factors related to the safety of journalists specifically for this Report. The Report also draws on data collected from more than 100 countries in UNESCO’s capacity as custodian UN agency for monitoring SDG indicator 16.10.2 on guarantees for access to information and their implementation.

More than 100 qualitative sources were also considered by the World Trends Report research team as part of a literature review. The Report was also informed by In Focus reports and Issue Briefs developed and published as part of the World Trends Report series on topics such as the impact of COVID-19, the safety of journalists covering protests, and the transparency of internet companies.

In addition, UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector responsible for this Report has been working with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) to explore the issue of statistics for the Report. Following a series of consultations and preliminary research, UIS commissioned a 2019 expert study by Simon Ellis (former Head of Science, Culture and Communications at UIS) on the feasibility of collecting statistics for the World Trends Report and the Internet Universality Indicators. This study identified a set of primary and secondary data sources, as well as some key gaps and challenges for data collection in this field, which served as background for this edition. The approach to statistics for the Report was also informed by the outcomes of an expert consultation that was held in February 2020, which mapped current challenges and gaps in data collection on the topics covered in the World Trends Report.

Data Analysis

Both Data-Pop Alliance and Economist Impact carried out exploratory and descriptive data analysis of their respective datasets before the World Trends Report editorial team continued this process. The selection of the final datasets to be included was an iterative process with regular discussions held between UNESCO and partners throughout the development of the Report.

²²⁰ UNESCO. 2015. Draft indicators for media viability. Paris, IPDC-UNESCO. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/IPDC/ipdc59_Media_viability_indicators.pdf.

APPENDIX D

UNESCO Member States by Regional Grouping

Group I: Western Europe and North America (25)

Andorra	Iceland	Spain
Austria	Ireland	Sweden
Belgium	Italy	Switzerland
Canada	Luxembourg	Turkey
Cyprus	Malta	United Kingdom of
Denmark	Monaco	Great Britain and
Finland	Netherlands	Northern Ireland
France	Norway	
Germany	Portugal	
Greece	San Marino	

Group II: Central and Eastern Europe (25)

Albania	Georgia	Russian Federation
Armenia	Hungary	Serbia
Azerbaijan	Latvia	Slovakia
Belarus	Lithuania	Slovenia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Tajikistan
Bulgaria	North Macedonia	Ukraine
Croatia	Poland	Uzbekistan
Czechia	Republic of Moldova	
Estonia	Romania	

Group III: Latin America and the Caribbean (33)

Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Bahamas
Barbados
Belize
Bolivia (Plurinational
State of)
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba

Dominica
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Grenada
Guatemala
Guyana
Haiti
Honduras
Jamaica
Mexico
Nicaragua

Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the
Grenadines
Suriname
Trinidad and Tobago
Uruguay
Venezuela (Bolivarian
Republic of)

Group IV: Asia and the Pacific (46)

Afghanistan
Australia
Bangladesh
Bhutan
Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
China
Cook Islands
Democratic People's
Republic of Korea
Fiji
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Japan
Kazakhstan
Kiribati

Kyrgyzstan
Lao People's
Democratic Republic
Malaysia
Maldives
Marshall Islands
Micronesia
(Federated States of)
Mongolia
Myanmar
Nauru
Nepal
New Zealand
Niue
Pakistan
Palau
Papua New Guinea

Philippines
Republic of Korea
Samoa
Singapore
Solomon Islands
Sri Lanka
Tajikistan
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Tonga
Turkmenistan
Tuvalu
Uzbekistan
Vanuatu
Viet Nam

Group Va: Africa (47)

Angola
Benin
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cabo Verde
Cameroon
Central African Republic
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Côte d'Ivoire
Democratic Republic of
the Congo
Djibouti
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea

Eswatini
Ethiopia
Gabon
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Niger

Nigeria
Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
South Africa
South Sudan
Togo
Uganda
United Republic of
Tanzania
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Group Vb: Arab Region (19)

Algeria
Bahrain
Egypt
Iraq
Jordan
Kuwait
Lebanon
Libya
Mauritania
Morocco
Oman

Palestine
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Sudan
Syrian
Arab Republic
Tunisia
United Arab Emirates
Yemen

APPENDIX E

Timeline of Key Resolutions and Decisions regarding Safety of Journalists since 2016

2016

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 33/2 on the Safety of Journalists (A/HRC/RES/33/2)

This Resolution calls upon States to ensure that measures to combat terrorism and preserve national security or public order do not arbitrarily or unduly hinder the work and safety of journalists. It also calls upon States to protect in law and in practice the confidentiality of journalists' sources. The Resolution emphasizes that in the digital age, encryption and anonymity tools have become vital for many journalists to exercise freely their work and calls upon States not to interfere with the use of such technologies.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC Decision on the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (CI-16/COUNCIL-30/4)

In this Decision, the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's IPDC underlines the increase of acts of violence against media workers and urges Member States to actively provide information to UNESCO's monitoring mechanism on judicial-follow up to killings of journalists as well as to increase their efforts in mobilizing funds to support UNESCO's work in the area of safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

2017

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (201 EX/Decision 5.I.I)

In this Decision, UNESCO's Executive Board expresses its commitment to the safety of journalists and media workers. It acknowledges the specific risks faced by women journalists and encourages Member States to develop national prevention, protection, and prosecution initiatives. It strongly urges Member States to continue to provide voluntary responses concerning the judicial investigations of the killing of journalists and to develop effective monitoring mechanisms for this purpose.

UN General Assembly Resolution 72/175 on the Safety of journalists and the Issue of Impunity (A/RES/72/175)

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers. It also condemns specific attacks on women journalists in the exercise of their work, including sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation, and harassment, online and offline. The Resolution calls upon States to implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and media workers in order to combat impunity. It also recognizes the decision of the Secretary-General to mobilize a network of focal points throughout the United Nations system to intensify efforts to enhance the safety of journalists and media workers.

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on the progress report on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (202 EX/Decision 5.I.K)

Through this Decision, UNESCO's Executive Board took note with interest of a progress report by UNESCO's Secretariat on work on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity and the Multistakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action. It requests the Director-General to continue work towards the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16.10 and monitoring of indicators 16.10.1 and 16.10.2. The Decision encourages Member States to reinforce their efforts in ensuring the voluntary implementation of the UN Plan of Action at national level and strongly urges Member States to provide information on judicial investigations into the killings of journalists. It also calls on Director-General to reinforce activities addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists.

UNESCO General Conference Resolution on strengthening UNESCO's leadership in the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (39 C/Resolution 39)

This Resolution welcomes UNESCO's efforts towards the formalisation of a system of focal points for the safety of journalists within the relevant United Nations entities. It also encourages Member States to strengthen the voluntary implementation of the UN Plan of Action at country level and invites the UNESCO Director-General to reinforce actions addressing threats to the safety of women journalists online and offline.

Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly Resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights (AG/RES. 2908 (XLVII-O/17))

This Resolution emphasizes the contribution of investigative journalists who report on human rights violations, organized crime, corruption and other wrongdoings, and resolves to condemn murders, acts of aggression and other violence against journalists and media workers, underlining that these constitute an assault of the right of everyone to receive information of public interest. It reaffirms the duty of Member States to implement comprehensive measures for prevention, protection, investigation, and punishment of those responsible, as well as to implement strategies to end impunity and share good practices, such as the creation of independent prosecution units, the adoption of specific investigation and prosecution protocols, and the provision of continuous capacity-building for judicial actors.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1/17 on Human Rights and the Fight against Impunity and Corruption

In this Resolution, the IACHR stresses the important citizen oversight role played by journalists and the media in investigating and reporting on corruption. It calls on Member States to fulfil their obligations to protect human right defenders, including journalists and media outlets, who are particularly at risk due to their investigations and dissemination of information on corruption.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC Decision on the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (CI/2018/COUNCIL.31/H/1)

This Decision encourages Member States to provide information to UNESCO on judicial investigations of killings of journalists and to appoint a focal point on the issue of safety of journalists to coordinate monitoring on the safety of journalists. Additionally, it invites the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC to continue supporting projects that further the objectives of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 39/6 on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/RES/39/6)

This Resolution urges States to do their utmost to prevent violence, intimidation, threats and attacks against journalists and media workers, including by creating a safe environment for journalists to perform their work; raising public awareness; publicly condemning violence against journalists and media workers; establishing mechanisms, to permit the collecting, analysis and reporting of concrete disaggregated data on violence against journalists; establishing an early warning and rapid response mechanism; supporting capacity building; putting in place safe gender-sensitive preventive measures and investigative procedures, ratifying human rights instruments and implementing applicable legal framework.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 38/7 on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/RES/38/7)

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all human rights violations and abuses committed against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet, and calls upon all States to ensure accountability in this regard. It also condemns unequivocally online attacks against women, in particular where women journalist are targeted for their expression. It calls upon States to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling online environment for the enjoyment of human rights so that journalists may perform their work independently and without undue or unlawful interference.

2018

Council of the European Union Conclusions on the Strengthening of European Content in the Digital Economy (2018/C 457/02)

In these Conclusions, the Council of the European Union encourages Member States of the European Union and the European Commission to ensure the effective protection of journalists and other media actors, such as their sources. It also invites the European Commission to support projects which provide legal and practical help to journalists and media workers under threat.

European Parliament Resolution on Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union (P8_TA(2018)0204)

In this Resolution, the Parliament of the European Union urges the Member States of the European Union to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability, avoid impunity, and guarantee that victims and their families have access to the appropriate legal remedies. It also calls on Member States to set up independent and impartial regulatory bodies in cooperation with journalists' organizations for monitoring and reporting on violence and threats against journalists.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Decision on the Safety of Journalists (MC.DEC/3/18)

This Decision by the Ministerial Council of the OSCE condemns all attacks and violence against journalists such as killings, torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detention, arbitrary expulsions, intimidation, harassment, and threats of all forms, such as physical, legal, political, technological, or economic. It also condemns attacks on women journalists, such as sexual harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats, and violence, including online. It further urges participating States to take effective measures to end impunity for crimes against journalists, and calls on political leaders to refrain from intimidating, threatening or condoning violence against journalists.

2019

UN General Assembly Resolution 74/157 on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (A/RES/74/157)

This Resolution condemns the prevailing impunity for attacks and violence against journalists as well as the specific attacks on women journalists and media workers in relation to their work. It urges Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence and ensure accountability. It further urges political leaders, public officials and/or authorities to refrain from denigrating, intimidating or threatening the media, including individual journalists and media workers, specifically women. Finally, it calls upon States to put in place safe gender-sensitive preventive measures and investigative procedures, in order to encourage women journalists to and provide adequate support, including psychosocial support, to victims and survivors.

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (206 EX/Decision 5.I.B)

This Decision encourages Member States to continue to ensure the voluntary implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and invites the Director-General to continue strengthening the implementation of the Plan. It also invites the Director-General to prioritize activities addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists, both online and offline, as well as new and emerging threats to the safety of journalists.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1/18 on Corruption and Human Rights

This Resolution builds on IACHR Resolution 1/17 on Human Rights and the Fight Against Impunity and Corruption and reiterates that the safety of journalists is essential for ensuring the eradication of corruption. It recommends to States to foster a climate of guarantees for the freedom to report acts of corruption, which includes guaranteeing the safety of journalists and other human right defenders, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of journalistic sources.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 45/18 on the Safety of Journalists (A/HRC/RES/45/18)

This Resolution calls upon States to take action on a number of barriers to ensuring a safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers. These include developing strategies to combat impunity; ensuring accountability through the conduct of impartial, prompt, and effective investigations; establishing prevention mechanisms; ensuring that defamation and libel laws are not misused, in particular to illegitimately censor journalists; refraining from interference with the use of technologies such as encryption and anonymity tools; and to address sexual and gender-based violence. It also calls upon States to cooperate the media and civil society organizations to assess the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic is inflicting on the provision of vital information to the public and the sustainability of media environments.

UN General Assembly Resolution 75/101-A on Information in the service of humanity (A/RES/75/101 A)

This Resolution urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned to ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC Decision (CI-20/Council.32/9) on the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (CI-20/Council.32/9)

This Decision encourages Member States to enhance the capacities of national judicial training institutes, prosecution services and law enforcement agencies to make use of UNESCO resources in addressing impunity and the safety of journalists, and to appoint a focal point on the issue of safety of journalists and impunity to coordinate monitoring on these issues.

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Resolution 449 on Human and Peoples' Rights as Central Pillar of Successful Response to COVID-19 and Recovery from its Socio-Political Impacts (ACHRPR/Res. 449 (LXVI))

This Resolution underlines incidents of violations of human rights (such as disproportionate use of force, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and physical assaults) resulting from measures adopted by States to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, which have disproportionately affected journalists and human rights activists, among other groups. It calls on States to release from detention those imprisoned for their work or political views such as human right defenders and journalists, and urges States to guarantee the unrestricted operations of journalists and media.

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2317 on Threats to Media Freedom and Journalists' Security in Europe

This Resolution calls on Member States to the Council of Europe to carry out effective, independent, and prompt investigations into any crimes committed against journalists, including murders, attacks and ill-treatment, and to bring authors, instigators, perpetrators and accomplices to the crime to justice. It also calls on Member States to set up national mechanisms consistent with the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, to fight online harassment of journalists and particularly of women journalists, as well as to establish rapid-response mechanisms like hotlines or emergency contact points to ensure immediate access to protection.

African Commission on Human and People's Rights Resolution 468 on the Safety of Journalists and Media Practitioners in Africa (ACHPR/Res.468 (LXVII))

In this Resolution, the ACHPR expresses its deep concern regarding the deteriorating situation facing media workers in Africa, and in particular physical attacks and violations of the right to life, kidnappings, death threats and intimidation, arbitrary arrests and prolonged pre-trial detention, along with attacks on media houses resulting in the loss of equipment. The African Commission then calls on States Parties to ensure the safety of journalists and take specific measures for the safety of women media workers. It stresses the risks faced by journalists covering protests and mass rallies and underlines that security officials should receive training to avoid abuses in such contexts. It also prompts States to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against journalists and media practitioners, and to make certain victims have access to appropriate remedies.

European Parliament Resolution on Strengthening Media Freedom: The Protection of Journalists in Europe, Hate Speech, Disinformation and the Role of Platforms (P9_TA(2020)0320)

In this Resolution, the European Parliament underlines the role played by journalists reporting on protests, and prompts Member States and the European Commission to ensure the effective protection of journalists and media workers as well as of their sources in law and practice, including in a cross-border context. It further asks Member States to provide specific training programmes for law enforcement authorities responsible for the protection of journalists, and urges the European Commission to set up an EU-wide rapid response mechanism for journalists requesting protection in the form of a hotline.

Organization of American States (OAS) Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (AG/RES. 2961 (L-O/20))

This Resolution urges Member States to develop and implement comprehensive policies and measures on protection and prevention of violence against human right defenders, including journalists. These measures should incorporate a gender perspective and be consistent with the new reality brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

European Commission Recommendation on Ensuring the Protection, Safety and Empowerment of Journalists and other Media Professionals in the European Union (C (2021) 6650)

In this Recommendation, the Commission of the European Union calls on Member States to investigate and prosecute all crimes against journalists, including crimes committed online, in a timely, effective, and impartial way. It further urges Member States to set up coordination centers and protocols of cooperation between security forces, the judiciary, local public authorities, and media bodies. The Recommendation also encourages Member States to provide rapid and effective personal protection to journalists under threat as well as to establish rapid response mechanism to support them. In addition, specific recommendations are formulated regarding the safety of journalists during protests.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/47/L.22)

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all human rights violations and abuses committed against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet, and calls upon all States to ensure accountability and effective remedies in this regard. It also condemns measures in violation of international human rights law that prevent or disrupt an individual's ability to seek, receive or impart information online, including Internet shutdowns and online censorship, calls upon all States to refrain from and to cease such measures. Furthermore, it requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to study the trend in Internet shutdowns, analysing their causes, their legal implications, and their impact on a range of human rights.

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (211 EX/5.I.G)

Through this Decision, the Executive Board of UNESCO strongly urges Member States to provide, or continue to provide, on a voluntary basis, information on judicial investigations into the killings of journalists, to develop effective safety mechanisms, and to share good practices of measures taken to strengthen the safety of journalists and monitor and tackle gender-specific risks, including online. It invites the Director-General to continue prioritizing activities addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists and to reinforce activities aimed at tackling emerging threats to the safety of journalists, in particular the digital threats to which journalists can be exposed, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

Declarations and Commitments

2016

Finlandia Declaration “Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms – This is your Right!”

Adopted on the occasion of the global World Press Freedom Day celebration in Helsinki, Finland, the Finlandia Declaration reaffirms the essential role of access to information and calls on concerned stakeholders to promote this right as well as to create a conducive environment for people to receive public information.

2017

Jakarta Declaration “Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media’s role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies”

Participants of the main conference celebrating World Press Freedom Day in Indonesia, Jakarta, stress through this declaration the importance of free, independent investigative journalism for democratic civil and political life. It further calls for free media to be recognized as a public good and for the reinforcement of safety mechanisms.

Nairobi Declaration on National Mechanisms for Safety of Journalists

Participants of the Eastern African conference commemorating the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists adopted this Declaration, which contains an agreement for the establishment of national safety mechanisms in East African countries and defines roles for national and regional cooperation.

2018

Accra Declaration “Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and the Rule of Law”

This Declaration, adopted during World Press Freedom Day celebrations, expresses concern at the proliferation of restrictions to the free exercise of journalism, and urges States to enhance judicial independence and the capacities of judicial actors to respect freedom of expression and prosecute attacks against journalists.

Addis Ababa Declaration for the Recognition of Cartooning as a Fundamental Human Right

Although not directly linked to UNESCO, this Declaration by Cartooning for Peace was adopted at the margins of World Press Freedom Day celebrations. It recalls the role played by cartoonists in providing political commentary and scrutinizing public affairs, while also underlining that cartooning is especially threatened. It recalls that the freedom to draw is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights along with the intangible right to the physical integrity of cartoonists, and calls on States to discuss and reflect on “the right to satire and irreverence”.

2019

Addis Ababa Declaration “Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation”

Adopted during the main event celebrating World Press Freedom Day, this Declaration underlines the rise of disinformation and hate speech and how these can undermine electoral processes. It notably calls on States to encourage the development of electoral assistance strategies that build trust between all electoral stakeholders, including the media, and to discourage over-regulation of digital electoral communications that can limit freedom of expression and privacy.

Arusha Declaration on Strengthening National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists and Media Workers in Eastern Africa

In line with the 2017 Nairobi Declaration, participants from Eastern Africa to commemorations of the International Day to End Impunity held in Arusha, Tanzania, agree through this Declaration to strengthen national mechanisms across the sub-region, create monitoring and reporting systems, and pursue judicial accountability for crimes against journalists.

2020

The Hague Commitment to increase the Safety of Journalists

At the initiative of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Conference (a hybrid joint commemoration of WPDF and IDEI) in 2020, government representatives of 53 countries gathered to address the importance of safety of journalists and of fighting impunity for crimes committed against them. This commitment has since been endorsed by almost 60 countries. It pledges to investigate and prosecute all forms of online and offline attacks on journalists and other media personnel, both in their own country and internationally. It also pledges immediate action when female journalists are exposed to specific risks and threats.

2021

The Windhoek+30 Declaration “Information as a Public Good”

This Declaration marks the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration for the Development of a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press. It takes forward the spirit of the original Declaration, while taking into account new developments within the media and digital ecosystem over the past three decades. It stresses new challenges such as the disruption of traditional business models, the proliferation of disinformation and hate speech, and the severe economic crisis faced by the media. It includes recommendations on supporting media viability, mainstreaming media and information literacy, and ensuring the transparency of technology companies.

APPENDIX G

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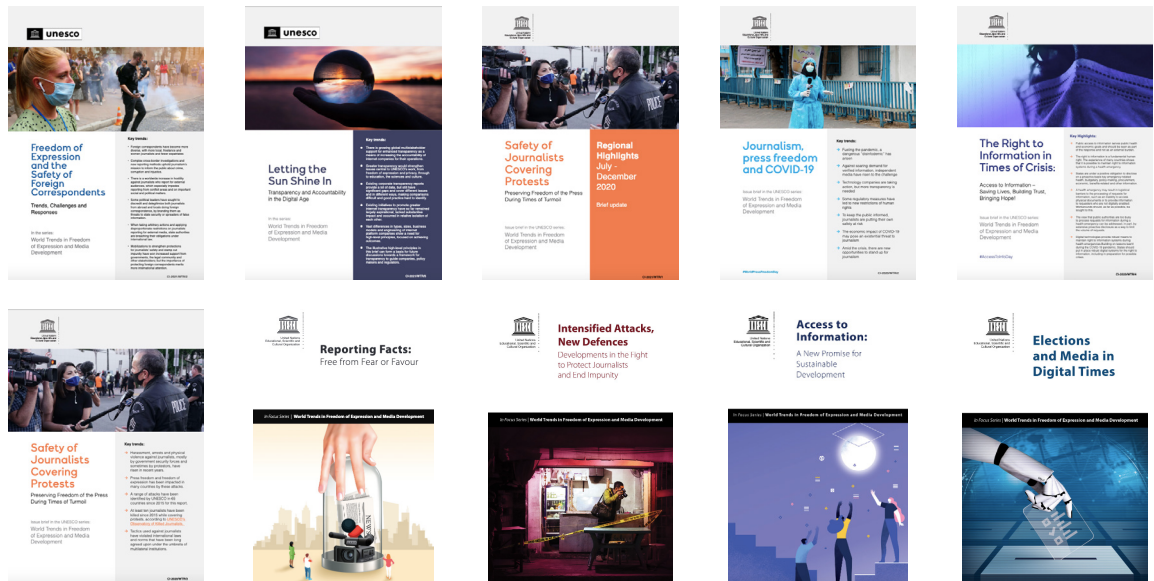
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World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development series

Every four years since 2014, UNESCO has published global editions of its flagship series of reports on World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development (World Trends Report). The World Trends Report responds to a key task assigned to UNESCO by its Members States in 2011 at the 36th session of the General Conference, which requested that the Organization “monitor, in close cooperation with other United Nations bodies and other relevant organizations active in this field, the status of press freedom and safety of journalists...and to report on the developments in these fields to the General Conference.”

The World Trends Report series also encompasses regular issue briefs and InFocus publications, analysing emerging issues in freedom of expression and media development. The findings from these specialized reports are included and built upon in the Global Reports.

Since the publication of the 2017/2018 Global Report, UNESCO has released six issue briefs and four In Focus reports under the series. These publications and previous editions of the series can be downloaded at <https://www.unesco.org/en/world-media-trends>.



- *Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Foreign Correspondents: Trends, Challenges and Responses* (2021) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378300>
- *Letting the Sun Shine In: Transparency and Accountability in the Digital Age* (2021) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377231>
- *Safety of Journalists Covering Protests: Preserving Freedom of the Press during Times of Turmoil; Regional Highlights, July-December 2020* (2021) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377346>
- *Journalism, Press Freedom and COVID-19* (2020) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373573>
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- *Elections and Media in Digital Times* (2019) <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371486>

WORLD TRENDS IN

Freedom of Expression and Media Development

GLOBAL REPORT 2021/2022

Journalism
is a public good



Independent journalism—the kind that favours public interest over political, commercial, or factional agendas—is in peril. The rapid erosion of the business models underpinning media sustainability has deepened a crisis in the freedom and safety of journalists around the world. The global response to these challenges in the coming decade will be decisive for the survival of a democratic public sphere.

Over the past five years, approximately 85 percent of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country. Even in countries with long traditions of safeguarding free and independent journalism, financial and technological transformations have forced news outlets, especially those serving local communities, to close. With readership and advertising markets moving online, advertising revenue for newspapers plummeted by nearly half in the ten-year period ending in 2019. The subsequent COVID-19 pandemic and its global economic impact have exacerbated this trend, now threatening to create an “extinction level” event for independent journalism outlets.

The 2021/2022 global edition of the flagship series of reports on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* examines these questions with a special focus on “journalism as a public good”. The findings are grounded in data-based analysis, conducted by UNESCO in partnership with Data-Pop Alliance, of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists, and supplemented by original research by Economist Impact conducted for this Report.



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