



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development

GLOBAL REPORT 2017/2018

## Media freedom

## Journalists' safety

## Gender equality

## Pluralism

## Technological change

## Independent media

## Political Polarization



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World Trends in  
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of **Expression**  
and **Media**  
**Development**

GLOBAL REPORT 2017/2018



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# Foreword

UNESCO is proud to present the third edition of its report on *“World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development”*. In this publication I see an embodiment of UNESCO’s role as a laboratory of ideas and international understanding. The report portrays a world whose meteoric changes deeply affect societies, especially in the areas of freedom of expression and media development.

Press freedom is examined here in four of its key dimensions: (i) media freedom, (ii) media pluralism, (iii) media independence and (iv) safety of journalists. As in our previous reports, special attention is paid to gender equality. The report is intended as a tool for implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes the importance of ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms among its goals.

Hence the importance of this document, which provides tools to examine the global situation of access to information and of freedom of expression as a fundamental freedom. In this context we highlight the interdependent objectives of the protection of freedom of expression and the development of an informed public.

The report covers the period 2012 to 2017. It is based on regional studies and a large amount of data showing the changes that have occurred since our first report. We have thus noted profound transformations in the field of **media freedom**, which is making progress in certain areas, but losing ground in others. Media freedom is limited in particular by many legal restrictions on the right to impart information and ideas, although progress is being made with regard to legal guarantees to seek and receive information.

With regard to **media pluralism**, the last five years have seen a considerable increase in the number of sources of information. Yet the concentration of ownership of media companies and Internet services raises major concerns. The filtering effects of social media, which create “bubbles” in which people do not access the truth or “points of view” they consider “irritating” or “inappropriate” is one example. Another is

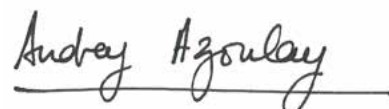
the manipulation and dissemination of false information by propaganda mouthpieces. There has also been a hiatus in the progress of gender equality in content and staffing.

Trends show that **media independence** is weakening and the professional standards of journalism are being eroded by economic forces on the one hand and lack of recognition by political actors on the other. Media and Internet companies are increasingly aware of the need for self-regulation.

Finally, with regard to the **physical, psychological and digital safety of journalists**, trends remain extremely alarming, although implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity offers hope. There is new momentum for mechanisms to monitor, prevent, protect and strengthen justice for crimes against journalists. This momentum must be encouraged.

I acknowledge all our partners involved in the preparation of this report, including academics, media professionals, Sweden for its funding and Norway for its support.

I strongly encourage Member States to use this report, to disseminate its lessons through translations and dedicated events, and to take ownership of its results in order to strengthen national frameworks conducive to freedom of expression, freedom of information and media independence. Everyone will find in this report a valuable guide to progress in this direction.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey Azoulay". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

**Audrey Azoulay**  
Director-General of UNESCO

# Executive Summary

This edition of the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report* addresses a key task put forth by UNESCO's 36th General Conference, for the Organization to monitor and report on contemporary developments in press freedom and the safety of journalists. It picks up where the first *World Trends Report*, published in 2014, concluded, to map key transformations in freedom of expression and media development globally between 2012 and 2017, a period marked by profound social, political and technological shifts.

This Report adheres to the framework set out by the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, which was also drawn on for previous *World Trends Reports* and emphasizes the key pillars of media freedom, pluralism, independence, and safety to realize press freedom. It adapts this framework to changing contexts by recognizing the changing roles that political actors, internet companies and audiences are playing in shaping information environments nationally, regionally and globally. It examines transformations in journalism and changes for different types of users and producers of information facilitated by new information and communications technologies, while at the same time demonstrating the continued relevance of the vision of press freedom put forward in the Windhoek Declaration.

The key trends in media freedom, media pluralism, media independence and the safety of journalists that emerged through this analysis are summarized here at the global and regional level.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the analysis of all four pillars, special consideration is given to digital media and gender equality dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

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...to realize press freedom, this study adapts to changing contexts by recognizing the changing roles that political actors, internet companies and audiences are playing in shaping information environments nationally, regionally and globally.

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<sup>1</sup>As this publication was prepared for a report to UNESCO's General Conference, the analysis was conducted according to the six regions that make up the voting groups within UNESCO.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars at the University of Oxford (UK), University of Witwatersrand (South Africa) and University of Pennsylvania (USA) led the research for this study, together with a global network of regional researchers and research assistants, and under the direction of UNESCO's Division of Freedom of Expression and Media Development. An editorial advisory board of 20 international media experts, selected for their regional and thematic expertise, provided input and peer review.

## Trends in Media Freedom

**R**apid political, technological and economic transformations during the period of this study have placed new strains on media freedom. The rise of new forms of political populism as well as what have been seen as authoritarian policies are important developments.

Citing a range of reasons, including national security, governments are increasingly monitoring and also requiring the take-down of information online, in many cases not only relating to hate speech and content seen to encourage violent extremism, but also what has been seen as legitimate political positioning. The growing centrality of the internet in communications, and the accompanying role and influence of powerful internet platforms operating across borders, have drawn the attention of courts and governments seeking to regulate these intermediaries, with risks to online expression.

While there has been much discussion of how new media expand freedoms and communications by actors beyond the media, there are also increasing incursions into privacy and an expansion of mass and arbitrary surveillance. These are seen to raise threats to journalistic source protection and to public confidence in privacy, which the UN has recognized is an enabler of freedom of expression. Furthermore, there has been significant increase in blocking and filtering of online content and a rising trend of large-scale shutdowns of entire social media websites, mobile networks or national internet access. The UN Human Rights Council (in A/HRC/32/L.20) ‘unequivocally

condemned’ such practices, as representing disproportionate restrictions of freedom of expression and the right to access information, and which have significant social, political and economic impacts.

In all this, the traditional limited legal liability for internet companies for content generated by their users, and which has generally been a positive factor for the free flow of information, is coming under strain. While still distinct from media companies that do produce most of their content, internet companies’ gatekeeping roles are coming under the spotlight. Questions of their standards related to privacy and to freedom of expression and their transparency policies, not least with algorithmic processing, are being put on the agenda by many actors and for various reasons. In some cases, the companies are criticized for how they are seen sometimes to limit journalistic content, and how, because of their logic of ‘attention economics,’ they may relegate such content to a level of prominence that presents it as equivalent to other information that does not meet professional standards of verifiability. In other cases, the companies are perceived as opportune targets for what may be seen as politically driven rhetoric that simplistically blames them—and the internet—for particular social ills, and calls for a more active role in terms of limiting content. The proportionality and necessity of such limits, and risks to legitimate expression, are sidelined.

Recent Gallup polls of residents in 131 countries across all regions have suggested that there is a general perception of declining media freedoms

## Executive Summary

across many countries. At the same time, however, media freedom remains recognized and valued by people around the world.

Another positive development is that the right to access information gained increased recognition through inclusion of Target 16.10 to 'ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements' in the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2015 UNESCO General Conference proclaimed 28 September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information (38 C/70). The number of Member States with freedom of information laws has risen to 112, with especially strong growth in the Africa and Asia-Pacific regions. At the same time, there is also much to be done globally to improve awareness of such laws and their implementation. Accessibility (covering affordability, linguistic diversity, gender-sensitivity, and media and information literacy) has also been recognized as a foundational component of 'Internet Universality', a UNESCO concept endorsed in 2015 that promotes an internet that is Human Rights-based, Open, Accessible and Multi-stakeholder (known as the 'ROAM' principles). In 2017, UNESCO embarked on a wide consultation to develop indicators for assessing these principles at the national level.

### Trends in Media Pluralism

Access to a plurality of media platforms has continued to expand in the period covered by this study. Nearly half the world's population now has access to the internet, in part due to rapidly rising mobile internet connectivity in

Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Satellite television and the digital switchover have multiplied the range of channels to which individuals have access. The availability of media content has also dramatically increased since 2012, largely through sharing and user-generated content. In January 2017, Wikipedia counted nearly twice as many articles as in January 2012, a trend accompanied by a progressive diversification of content and in increase in contributions in languages other than English.

These trends, however, have been accompanied by the rise of a new form of what some have called 'polarized pluralism': multiple kinds of information and programming are available, but each segmented group largely accesses only a limited piece.

In regions where internet penetration and the reliance on online sources for news is the highest, this trend has been made particularly severe by the increasing use of algorithms to sort through increasingly abundant information, and to rank search results and social media newsfeeds. These have contributed to the creation of what have been called 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles' that are seen to reinforce individuals' existing views and produce increasingly siloed debates—although this development may not be necessarily as strong as it is sometimes presented.

In electoral contests, the rapid proliferation of so-called 'fake news', fuelled in part by the tendency of social media platforms to privilege 'click-worthy' information, has become a powerful illustration for many of the disruptive effects

this phenomenon can have on public debates. In other regions, such as in the Arab States and Africa, broadcasting has represented a more central element of this trend towards polarization in and through media.

Mobile internet uptake and the practice of ‘zero-rating’—in which internet or mobile service providers allow users to access specific content or applications without counting towards the user’s data ‘cap’—have significantly expanded pluralism in terms of access to the internet, especially among the poorest. However, the type of access is often limited to specific mobile apps, introducing concerns that these services may possibly create private ‘walled gardens’ at odds with the principles of openness and net neutrality.

Pluralism continues to be limited by the ongoing fact that women remain heavily underrepresented in the media workforce, in decision-making roles, and in media content, both as sources and subjects. In response to the continuing marginalization of women, a range of civil society organizations, media outlets and individuals have developed initiatives to change the picture, including through the UNESCO-initiated Global Alliance for Media and Gender and by applying the Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional business models for the news media have continued to be disrupted, leading to increased vertical and horizontal concentration and the introduction of new types of cross-ownership. Cuts in staffing have affected content diversity, especially in international coverage. Newspaper circulation has fallen in all regions, except in Asia and the Pacific, where there

have been large increases in some emerging economies. Independent public service broadcasting is still absent or is under renewed political or financial threat in several regions. The rapid growth of digital advertising, in which revenues nearly doubled between 2012 and 2016, has primarily benefitted large internet platforms rather than traditional media. Faced with these disruptions, traditional news media have experimented with new economic models, including introducing pay-walls, requesting reader donations and seeking crowdfunding. Journalists have also used new technologies, such as virtual reality, to create immersive experiences of distant events.

## Trends in Media Independence

The polarization of public life, observed in parts of all regions covered by this study, highlights the need for independent and professional journalism that is able to provide verifiable information as a common content currency to serve effective and open public debates. Yet, in continuity with the trends highlighted in the first *World Trends Report*, published in 2014, media independence is under increased pressure, due to complex interconnections between political power and regulatory authorities, attempts to influence or de-legitimize media and journalists, and shrinking budgets in news organizations. This deterioration of media independence is reflected in a number of indicators.

There is declining public trust in news media reported across most regions. Disruptions in business models have been seen as contributing to increasing dependence on government and

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<sup>3</sup> The Global Alliance for Media and Gender is a global movement to promote gender equality in and through media, launched by UNESCO and partners at the Global Forum on Media and Gender in December 2013. The Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media form a framework of indicators to gauge gender equality and women’s empowerment in and through media.

## Executive Summary

corporate subsidies in some circumstances, and thereby raising concerns about potential impacts on editorial independence. In some cases, there has been an increase in highly antagonistic criticism, including from leaders, about media and the practice of journalism. These criticisms are seen to carry the danger of promoting intolerance of expression, and undermining the credibility of all journalism, irrespective of its authenticity.

Across all regions, the autonomy of independent regulators has faced pressure. Across large parts of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, licensing of broadcast operators lacks transparency and continues to be driven by political and commercial rather than public interest. Self-regulatory bodies, which can support the exercise of professional standards while maintaining editorial independence, have received increased interest in countries with growing media sectors. However, in addition to the difficulty of establishing and maintaining independence in a sustainable way, press councils have faced digital-era challenges, such as the moderation of user-generated comments.

At the same time, there are positive developments for the independence of journalists to make editorial decisions. In Africa, the Arab States and the Asia Pacific region, journalists have self-reported substantial increases of journalistic autonomy. Such changes have also encouraged alternative and often influential outlets for journalists, including on digital media, as well as international investigative journalism collaborations. With continuing growth of information abundance online, the distinctive value of independent journalism is being underlined.

Journalism education, which reinforces independent professional standards in the media, has seen a notable growth in the availability of online resources. However, donor support for independent NGOs doing media development has fluctuated, posing significant sustainability challenges, particularly in parts of Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. These groups are also impacted by growing legislation that restricts foreign funding.

In the context of increasing pressure to respond to content on social media that incites violence or hatred, internet companies have launched self-regulatory initiatives to counter hate speech, violent extremism, misogyny, racism and so-called 'fake news'. Tools have included media and information literacy campaigns; partnerships with fact-checking and research organizations; support to journalists; and removing advertising from sites that generate such content. In the face of fabricated and counterfeit news reports, many news media brands are using the opportunity to show their unique value-add as reliable sources of information and commentary.

### Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Between 2012 and 2016, 530 journalists were killed, an average of two deaths per week. Due to continued conflict and instability, killings in parts of the Arab region remain very high. After a peak in 2012, the African region witnessed a significant decline in killings of journalists. Killings of women journalists increased during the period, from five women journalists killed in 2012 to 10 in 2016. Although the killings of foreign correspondents tend to garner global publicity, 92 per cent of



journalists killed during this period were local reporters.

Impunity for crimes against journalists remains the norm, with justice in only one in 10 cases. However, Member States have shown increased responsiveness to the Director-General's request for information on the status of judicial inquiries into killings of journalists, with more than 70 per cent responding—in varying degrees of detail—in 2017.

In 2013, the UN General Assembly declared 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, which is increasingly observed across the world.

Continuing on earlier trends, there has also been a substantial rise in other forms of violence against journalists, including in kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture. The Arab region has seen a sharp rise in journalists taken hostage by violent extremist groups. Digital safety is an increasing concern for journalists across all regions, with threats posed by intimidation and harassment, disinformation and smear campaigns, website defacement and technical attacks, as well as arbitrary surveillance. Women journalists, in particular, have experienced increasing online abuse, stalking and harassment.

Despite the difficult circumstances under which many journalists work, significant steps have been taken to raise awareness of, and counter violence against, journalists through the UN

Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Since 2012, the UN General Assembly, UN Human Rights Council, UN Security Council and UNESCO have adopted 12 resolutions or decisions related to the safety of journalists. A multi-stakeholder consultation to review implementation of the UN Plan of Action took place in June 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland, leading to 30 forward-looking options for action to be considered by the UN, Member States, regional intergovernmental organizations, civil society, media actors, internet intermediaries and academia.

Continued monitoring of the situation of journalists' safety is needed in order to craft effective and informed strategies. This is all the more necessary to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, building on the contributions of information and knowledge from free, pluralistic and independent media, and drawing on the enhanced safety for journalists to generate the news all societies need.

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530 journalists were killed,  
an average of two deaths  
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# Introduction

# Rationale

**E**nhancing 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 fostering dialogue. Freedom of expression is both a fundamental human right in itself and an enabler of all other rights.

Freedom of expression and media development have an important role in maintaining the rule of law and enhancing good governance. This role is recognized within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, under Target 16.10 ('public access to information and fundamental freedoms in accordance with natural legislation and international agreements'), which supports Goal 16 of building just, inclusive and peaceful societies.

It is in this context that UNESCO publishes this study as its third Report on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*. In 2014, UNESCO published its first Report, and followed up with a second edition in 2015 that focused on selected digital trends. This flagship series responds to a key task assigned to UNESCO by the Organization's 195 Member States at the 36th session of the General Conference: to monitor and report on contemporary developments in press freedom and the safety of journalists.

The 2017/18 edition picks up where the first *World Trends Report* concluded, by mapping key transformations in freedom of expression and media development globally between 2012 and 2017. Like the first edition, the

focus is on press freedom as a central aspect of freedom of expression. Following on the structure of the first edition, this Report focuses on media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists as the key areas to assess in freedom of expression and media development. In doing so, it also takes note of specific contextual factors with implications for press freedom: changes in the technological and socio-political contexts, inequalities, violent conflict, and major movements of populations. Geopolitically, the period under review has also seen the intensification of a turn, in many parts of the world, towards populism, nationalism and identity with impact on press freedom and the safety of journalists.

## International norms on freedom of expression

The research in this Report is founded on the international norm that freedom of expression and opinion is a right for all citizens. As stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right includes the "freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". The universality of this has been reinforced in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as well as General Comment number 34 on this article by the Human Rights Committee. In 2012, the Human Rights Council

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affirmed the applicability of the two articles to the internet. In terms of international standards, a right (in this case, free expression) should be the norm, and any limitations should be exceptional in nature. The latter should be justifiable in terms of international standards, which require any such constraints to be law-based, necessary and proportional, and for legitimate purpose. Thus, the ICCPR sets out that restrictions are considered as legitimate only if provided for by law and demonstrably essential for the achievement of a legitimate purpose. Such purpose is spelled out as being: respect of the rights or reputations of others or the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, has written, 'Any restriction must be precise enough and publicly accessible in order to limit the authorities' discretion and provide individuals with adequate guidance.'

The Article 19 framework requires specific roles by duty-bearers. Foremost is the commitment of governments to the rule of law through a transparent and well-functioning legal framework and system in conformity with international norms. The promotion and protection of freedom of expression at the international level and regional levels further relies on the work of regional human rights courts, such as the European Court of Human Rights, African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights and Inter-American Court of Human Rights, and the mechanism of special rapporteurs for freedom of expression at the United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Organization of American States and African Commission on Human and People's Rights. Private sector actors,

which include many media and internet actors, are expected as duty-bearers under UN guiding principles to respect human rights.<sup>1</sup>

The effectiveness of a law often depends on the political will and practical capacity for its enforcement. These factors vary at national level. Meanwhile, the cross-border nature of satellite communications and the internet raises further challenges to national jurisdictions, states and other actors such as internet companies and transnational media. The issues of permissible and achievable enforcement of law also have to contend with cases where universal human rights are not respected. While the right to freedom of expression specifies the freedom to receive and impart information regardless of frontiers, this increasingly faces assertions of sovereignty in a connected world.

## Conceptualizing press freedom

For UNESCO, press freedom and the right of access to information are corollaries of the general right to freedom of expression and opinion. The status of press freedom designates the particular use of this right of expression on public media platforms, where its social visibility and significance means that press freedom serves as a barometer of the wider right to freedom of expression. Press freedom is not limited to media institutions, as important as these actors are as users and symbols of freedom of expression (and as a major research emphasis within this Report). More fundamentally, press freedom covers the freedom of all individuals or institutions to use

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<sup>1</sup> Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework. Office of the High Commission on Human Rights, New York and Geneva. 2011. [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf)

media platforms in order that their expression may reach the public.

'Media' in this context is wider than traditional mass media institutions and wider than the traditional news media in particular. This is why, in this Report, issues of media freedom, pluralism, independence, safety and gender apply to all intermediaries in public communication processes, content producers and audiences at large. The spectrum extends beyond "the media" as such, and encompasses additional participants such as a variety of other institutions, individuals and entities active on the public internet.

Press freedom necessitates media freedom, but the concept is also wider than this dimension, as elaborated in the Windhoek Declaration that was endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference in 1991. The Declaration underlined that effective press freedom needs to be underpinned by, and realized through, a media environment that is not only legally free, but which also provides for media pluralism and independence. Press freedom, therefore, includes the freedom from illegitimate restriction, as well as the freedom to choose from a plurality of media and the freedom to express oneself publicly without political or commercial interference. Over the years, it has become evident that another distinctive underlying component for press freedom is safety for public expression. It has also become evident that gender-sensitive considerations are required throughout all dimensions of press freedom.

This multi-dimensional conceptualization affords insight into the interdependence of press freedom's four components (freedom, pluralism,

independence and safety). It is apparent that the state of media freedom sets the context for media pluralism and independence, and it is not possible to envisage these where media freedom is absent. Media freedom highlights the view of press freedom from 'on high', and independence provides a vantage point that recognizes bottom-up roles, including advocacy to defend this dispensation as well as adherence to professional standards in journalism. A pluralistic media landscape requires an independence component if a society is to benefit from news that is shaped by professional standards and ethical decision-making.

In the same vein, it is evident that media pluralism impacts on the situation of media freedom and independence. Monopolization (whether by state-owned or private media) constrains media freedom by excluding would-be entrants, in addition to reducing the diversity of information available to the public. Even where there is media freedom, pluralism, and independence, these may be hollow provisions if participants are not safe.

Women have a right to be equally involved in all dimensions of press freedom, i.e. as actors in media freedom, pluralism, independence and safety. Self-evidently, press freedom is rendered substantially less meaningful by gender inequalities in any of its four pillars.

Press freedom in this holistic and gender-sensitive conceptualization is particularly relevant to the production of journalism, which is a public exercise of freedom of expression according to professional standards of verifiable information

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and informed comment in the public interest. This practice encompasses the diversity of journalistic practices and their support chain, including whether these are primarily online, offline or a hybrid between the two realms. Journalism can accommodate a range of narratives with various political or other leanings, up to the point where boundaries blur into different kinds of communications such as advertising, fiction or propaganda. Journalism is a special use of communications that is especially relevant to development and democracy. Not all users of press freedom produce journalism as such, although media freedom applies no less to them.

Journalism is central to news media institutions across all platforms (print; broadcasting – whether by cable, terrestrial signal or satellite; or the internet). However, it also encompasses a wider set of distributed participants. Not all producers of journalism are journalists in the occupational sense of the word. But because any journalism can attract hostility from elements who prefer darkness to light, all actors who contribute to this kind of communications merit particular attention in terms of needing protection for their specific use of expression.

This explains why UNESCO also has a special interest in those whom it describes as ‘journalists, media workers and social media producers who produce a significant amount of public-interest journalism.’ The same formulation is evident in the Implementation Strategy of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.<sup>2</sup> The UN Plan itself specifically states “the protection of journalists should not

be limited to those formally recognised as journalists, but should cover others, including community media workers and citizen journalists and others who may be using new media as a means of reaching their audiences”. It is this inclusive focus that underpins the meaning of the term ‘journalists’ in this study.

The existence of press freedom in its gender-sensitive dimensions of media freedom, pluralism, independence and safety strengthens peace as well as democratic and developmental processes. These social goods depend upon people being free to speak without fear and be freely informed about public affairs. Press freedom as such helps to ensure participation, transparency and accountability. This recognition explains the value to a society of having access to a free media, and of the importance of multiple information and communication choices enabled by pluralism. The perspective further highlights the significance of editorial independence from state or private owners or other external influences, and the role of journalistic accountability to professional ethics which shape the quality of information available.

## Conceptual elaboration

As unpacked in the first *World Trends Report*, the concepts of media freedom, independence, pluralism and journalists’ safety can each be elaborated in more detail as a prelude to assessing concrete trends in freedom of expression and media development.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/official\\_documents/Implementation\\_Strategy\\_2013-2014\\_01.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/official_documents/Implementation_Strategy_2013-2014_01.pdf)

The focus on the concept of **media freedom** emphasizes the importance of examining the role of the state, primarily the relevant legal and statutory environment. This requires the protection of media freedom both in law and in practice. Media freedom includes the existence and implementation of freedom of information and transparency laws, and the absence of disproportionate restrictions for speech, such as exist in the form of criminal (as distinct from civil) defamation laws. This concept of media freedom covers whether media are censored or banned and blocked; and whether other laws are used against media and people producing journalism in order to arbitrarily restrict freedom of expression—that is in ways or for purposes not sanctioned by international standards.

As noted earlier, legal limitations on expression are justifiable only when these are necessary and proportionate in terms of public interest objectives such as protection of the rights of others or of public safety. However, many restrictions constitute a form of censorship in that they exceed the threshold of limitations and fail to stand up to the test of being the least intrusive method for limiting freedom of expression.

Today, it is increasingly recognized that media freedom also requires respect for the right to privacy, which also links to the protection of confidentiality of sources of journalists. Over-broad security laws, over-reaching data retention laws and acts of arbitrary surveillance can undercut privacy and confidentiality.

The second major pillar for analysis of press freedom is **media pluralism**. This puts the focus

on the media economy and ownership, as well as on regulation that impacts on issues such as concentration, centralization and monopolization of communications-related institutions. The issues of corporate, political and oligarch-ownership as well as the rise of internet giants are all factors for examination here. Also relevant to pluralism are commercial dynamics of media institutions, especially inasmuch as these can affect which groups within society are represented by or participate in media, and which impact on the diversity of journalistic content. Pluralism further encompasses consideration of user-generated content and of media consumption in an algorithmic world. All this in turn requires assessment of public access to a variety of platform providers and communications tools, as well as access to a variety of content, including gender-sensitive news content.

**Media independence** designates the functioning of media institutions (including the significance of regulation and/or self-regulation) in terms of which editorial independence is (or, is not) the primary logic informing content production according to professional journalistic ethics and protocols. Independence is characterized as freedom from outside political or commercial interference. However, it highlights not just the absence of such pressures, but also the value to society of voluntary subscription to professional journalistic ethics, such as verification, source confidentiality where necessary, fairness and public interest. Of particular interest is the professional autonomy of those who produce journalism, and of the regulatory and/or self-regulatory bodies that affect this. Media-related NGOs and journalism training institutions are part

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of the wider ecology of independence. 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. Low levels of media literacy and trust, combined with efforts to de-legitimize media, can affect the very norm of independence.

The **safety of journalists**, the fourth pillar of analysis, is a crosscutting issue. There is no media freedom without safety, nor can there be independence or pluralism, when journalists work in fear. Yet the world seems increasingly unsafe for those performing journalistic functions. Safety issues point especially to the responsibility of the State in protecting media freedom and ensuring that there is not impunity for crimes against the people who do journalism. The involvement of stakeholder groups (eg. various branches of the states, media owners, media practitioners, civil society groups, academics, intergovernmental bodies) in the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, is part of a holistic assessment of safety. Arbitrary jailing for journalism work is recognized as an SDG indicator by the UN Statistics Commission, as are kidnappings and abductions. Psychological and digital dimensions of safety are also relevant.

In terms of the analysis in this Report, these elements—freedom, pluralism, independence and safety—interact to yield varying aspects of press freedom in various societies and contexts. Political configurations, historical contingencies and economic models amongst other factors affect each element in the equation as well as the overall situation—but assessment of any trends needs to be from the position that the diversity should nevertheless align to the universal

international standards of freedom of expression.

**Gender equality** is a key crosscutting issue that is addressed in each of the four pillars, impacting on freedom, pluralism, independence and safety. This is why each individual chapter covers the significance to the issue of the experience of women journalists and the representation of women more generally.

## Technological, social and political context

The past few years have been tumultuous times marked by profound political shifts and social changes that have altered the context for press freedom. Several stand out as crosscutting issues that have shaped and influenced trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists, as well as the gender dynamics in all these. Online and especially social media have continued to rise as major sources of information and opinion for many people around the world. Technological convergence has created unpredictability for traditional media as well as new potentialities for both expression and censorship.

Before social media, much content was filtered through traditional intermediaries—print, radio, and television enterprises. Media freedom existed with the assumption that these traditional institutions should function (or claim to function) as guardians of the public interest. These were ‘gatekeepers’. There are valid objections that



many such intermediaries have acted more as guard dogs of particular interests rather than watchdogs in the public interest. Although this is not a violation of freedom of expression, it falls below the standards of professional journalism and public service as such.

Into this already complicated mediascape, the internet has led to the rapid overshadowing of traditional news media as familiar intermediaries—and particularly as entities that can be subjected to governmental control and influence. Much of the debate over the role of Facebook and Google to filter or take down material (about extremist and hate speech, violence against women, ‘fake news’ and material deemed by governments to be undesirable) relates to the role of these newer intermediaries, and not to traditional news media. The past five years have seen a shift from widespread acceptance of a principle of limited liability for internet companies to increasing calls for intermediaries to be more active as mediating gatekeepers.

In this changing context, ideas of necessity and proportionality, so central to traditional Article 19 analysis, have very different applications where huge platforms, in occasional negotiation with governments, engage in private notice-and-take down decisions. Having private decision-making, often automated and with scant investment in human review, and decisions based on terms of service agreements rather than duly adopted laws aligned to international human rights standards, shifts the centre of traditional practices of norm formation and enforcement.

Technological developments, tied to the growth of key corporate players, are linked to what Ithiel de Sola Pool once called ‘technologies of freedom’<sup>3</sup> and which some observers now see as technologies of control. Whatever the ambiguity, it is evident that technologies have disruptive implications and thus give rise to the need for the adjustment of existing policies and the introduction of new ones. In reaction, States have sought new ways of asserting jurisdiction and power over communications that appear transnational, but which many States feel have domestic impact on both citizens and politics.

In this regard, trends are divergent. Most parts of the world have allowed the growth of global enterprises of scale which transcend the regulatory state and for which modes of self-regulation in consultation with governments is the trend. In fewer places, there is a reassertion of sovereignty and an effort to ‘domesticate’ the platforms in line with tight controls on local legacy media. As part of this latter trend, internet providers are government-owned or controlled, or are in the hands of businesses close to the government, and data localisation is mandated. In both trends, some governments have empowered strong regulators to remove websites as well as maintain the capability of closing down the entire internet.

Media freedom in these changing contexts links closely to pluralism and independence. This is evident in the new actors that have arisen on the supply side such as non-media communicating institutions, groups and individuals who do not aspire to professional journalistic standards, as

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<sup>3</sup> de Sola Pool 1983.

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well as deliberately malicious actors engaged in disinformation for commercial, political or social reasons. On the demand side, there is a differently configured public, often transformed to data points for algorithmic interactions, sometimes acting like media by generating and/or sharing content, and increasingly having a reciprocal relationship with suppliers who react instantaneously to prompts and clicks.

The accelerating shift to a data-based society has led to a profound reworking of the traditional relationship between the sender and the receiver of information. For many transactions in the data society, a key feature is gaining the unknowing or unwilling surrender of personal data. These data, in comprehensive and integrated abundance, allow strategic analysis and consequent action without the subject's formal consent. This is part of the same massive shift from a model of transmission and receipt to a context of studied surveillance and manipulated interaction.

Through the lenses of a changing political economy of communications, extending beyond the state are new trends of para-censorship and surveillance-like modalities. These data-driven dynamics reduce the ability of individuals to shape and take control of their information environments, and concentrate increasing power in the hands of governments and large internet and media corporation intermediaries, as well as governments.

As new media technologies are progressively embedded in everyday life, their inner workings are also becoming more complex and opaque. As a

consequence, understandings of media freedom, pluralism and independence are increasingly dependent on comprehension of the technical architectures underpinning the production and exchange of information. Artificial intelligence is also becoming increasingly salient. All this impacts the foundations of press freedom and the rights and limitations inherent in the concept, and on the analysis in this *World Trends Report*.

## Inequalities and audiences

The issues of underlying connectivity provision remain key in terms of people's access, and in terms of the extent of their rights to seek, receive and impart information, as well as their privacy. There is a significant push to expand the internet to those who remain unconnected, particularly in the global south. The UN Sustainable Development Goals have recognised that ICT connectivity is an important accelerator of development and have set the goal of universal connectivity by 2020. At present an estimated 35 per cent of people in developing countries have access to the internet and in the Least Developed Countries this drops to only 10 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Yet, connectivity is just one aspect of addressing digital inequalities. Accessibility in the form of language provision and advanced user competencies are also key. The optimism that characterized the initial global expansion of the internet, when new communication technologies were hailed for their ability to open new spaces of media freedom, as well as offer a greater opportunities for all by reducing pre-existing inequalities and allowing individuals to enjoy better, fuller, lives, has been replaced by more cautious tones and a need to

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/09/billions-of-people-in-developing-world-still-without-internet-access-new-un-report-finds/>

better understand the relationship between media use and their impact in the everyday.

As indicated throughout this Report, access to a plurality of media platforms and content has increased significantly between 2012 and 2017, and yet there seems to be little indication that this progress has dented pre-existing inequalities, which have continued to rise in most regions. While research on the causes and consequences of the widening gap between rich and poor has made progress, studies connecting inequalities and media use are still few and mostly explorative.

Research emerging from countries that are close to reaching 'digital saturation,' where almost the totality of the population has access to the internet, suggests that even in contexts where the fight against the digital divide seem to have been won, pre-existing inequalities based on wealth, education, income, gender and race are preventing many from turning the potential offered by new technologies into favourable offline outcomes. It also casts an important light on attempts to create two-tiered or multiple-tiered internets, as assessed in this Report.

## Conflict and violent extremism

Press freedom faces specific challenges in conflict zones and countries in transition. During the period since 2012, violent conflict worsened in several regions. This negatively affected media freedom, and saw much media being instrumentalised as a weapon in the conflict. In states where there were efforts to have negotiated stability, debates occurred over

whether media could transition from being a factor for polarization into a platform for peace. In some regions, the nuances of media freedom were affected by the threat of election or post-election violence and efforts to thwart or diminish such violence. Media freedom, pluralism, independence and safety are invariably casualties in context of conflict.

How to consider speech that incites violence, seeks to recruit for extremism, and contributes to protracted and ongoing conflict, has been a major debate over the period. Governments and large technology companies are increasingly interacting on the tracking and takedown of content that seeks to encourage terrorism. Attacks have triggered strong language from politicians that governments and technology companies must take greater action about the assumed potential for individuals to be radicalized online, although the academic evidence of a link is weak.<sup>5</sup> While publicly resisting the pressures to take on policing the web for such content, companies are increasingly investing in automated capacity to take down posts that might be implicated in terrorist acts. This has provoked debate over the challenges of identifying what constitutes such speech and the possible threat the company's growing involvement in this space might have on freedom of expression. An example is by collateral censorship of professional news reportage on terrorism, or collaboration in implementing censorship regimes that deliberately conflate journalism and terrorism. The extent to which self-regulation by Internet companies respects media independence and is itself founded on principles of professional journalism is the issue here.

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<sup>5</sup> Alava, Séraphin, Divina Frau-Meigs, and Ghayda Hassan. 2017. Youth and Violent Extremism on Social Media. UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom. Paris: UNESCO. Available at <<http://en.unesco.org/unesco-series-on-internet-freedom>>

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Less attention by both states and companies has been given to user empowerment such as Media and Information literacy in the face of 'hate speech' and 'cyberbullying', as well as 'fake news', but the need to advance such competencies to deal with media pluralism where such expression emerges is becoming more widely recognized.

In all regions, governments and leaders cite national security in order to enhance surveillance and restrict speech, posing challenges for both privacy and media freedom. Finding a balance that aligns to international standards is not widely evident. National security concerns are also cited in the growing use of internet blackouts or shutdowns where governments rule to close certain popular platforms or even block access to the internet entirely. This often coincides with major political events, such as elections or widespread unrest where media pluralism is presented as a threat to public order. In this context, UNESCO's Internet Universality concept urges that consideration be given to how the balancing of rights interlinks with the principles that are pillars of the Internet's openness, accessibility and multi-stakeholder participation.

## Forced migration and the refugee crisis

Since 2012, the movement and migration of humans, often fleeing from conflict, and associated violations of human rights, has accelerated. While migration to richer northern countries has been unprecedented and received significant media coverage, refugee and forced migration numbers are largest in the regions that are conflict affected and in proximate countries. This has also raised important issues about how migrant issues are portrayed in the media, including how marginalized voices are



represented, and how hate speech and extremist speech towards groups of people is handled by governments and companies. This development especially impacts on pluralism, independence and gender equality in and via media, as well as media development more broadly, and is assessed as such in this Report.

## Structure of the report

This *World Trends Report* is based on studies of individual UNESCO regions, which are published in separate volumes. An appendix includes a list of these regions and their state constituents. Teams of analysts were assembled to report on trends in their respective regions. To provide support and peer review, an advisory committee was established that had regional and subject matter expertise (see page 9).

From the resulting research, trends identified at the regional level could be synthesised into this overall study. At the same time, account was taken of global trends as well as trends not clearly evident at the regional level. Taking into account the reporting period, it was necessary to examine both published academic reports and studies, as well as to triangulate information from credible news and other reports. The network of international special rapporteurs, and institutions such as the European Court on Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights were further important sources of information.

The research had to surmount several challenges. Where there are secondary studies to draw from, they often had inconsistent bases (the countries

studied in one report differ from those in another). Some regions had more in the way of data than others. Comparing vast regions which include very disparate countries often yielded divergent results which demonstrated unevenness rather than shared trends. The process nevertheless was able to uncover some similarities as well as differences both at a macro or regional level.

In the nature of this kind of meta-research, the trends outlined in the Report are indicative, rather than definitive. Nevertheless, they do represent cumulative and possibly ongoing developments. Many may, and arguably should, change—especially if the evolving communications system is to serve the world’s interest in press freedom and safety of journalists as an integral component of sustainable development.

## Conclusion

The promotion of freedom of expression, press freedom and the safety of journalists fits squarely within the UN’s broader human rights agenda. This resonates with 2018 as the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedom of expression and media development are inextricably linked to the bigger agenda of human rights. Not only are the trends outlined in this Report conceptually part of a bigger picture, they are also partly shaped by the broader status of rights on the ground. The return influence of free expression and its correlatives on other rights, and a sustainable future for all the world’s peoples, is another reason why this study is important. What follows provides an overall mapping against which regional and national trends can be compared, and corrective measures taken in order to shape our communication for a better future.

# Trends in Media freedom

**CONTINUED LEGAL RESTRICTIONS**, including **defamation, insult, blasphemy** and **lèse-majesté laws**



**Number of internet shutdowns\***

**INCREASE IN BLOCKING, filtering and shutdowns**



**DIGITAL MEDIA** have raised new challenges for **privacy** and **journalist source protection**

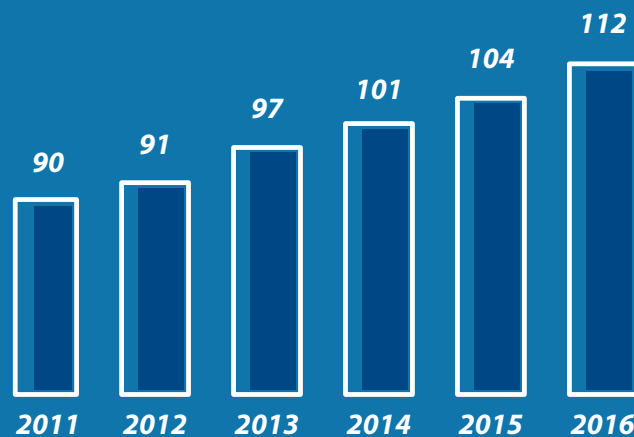


**NATIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS**, states of emergency and anti-terrorism laws **have curtailed freedom of expression**

## IMPARTING INFO: CURBED



### Countries with freedom of information laws\*\*



**INCREASED RECOGNITION** of the public's right to access information



**R.O.A.M**

**UNESCO MEMBER STATES HAVE GIVEN SUPPORT FOR INTERNET UNIVERSALITY**, for an internet that is Rights-based, Open, Accessible and Multi-Stakeholder (**R.O.A.M principles**)

# RECEIVING INFO: ENHANCED





# Trends in Media Freedom

## Overview

This chapter describes key legal and regulatory dimensions of media freedom and summarizes the main global and regional trends that have taken place since the first *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* Report which covered 2007-2012.

In the period covered in this study, 2012 to 2017, the media in many parts of the world have been in a state of considerable flux. Rapid transformations in media structures continue alongside the accelerating spread of new technologies and the increasing role of large internet companies. Within this rapidly changing terrain, traditional methods of media regulation have transformed. International bodies, governments, cross-national tribunals and civil society are playing a growing role in establishing the norms of media regulation. The trends in media freedom observed in this study reflect, to a large degree, an assertion of state power in media affairs and the transformative impact of powerful internet companies. These internet developments are obviously of great significance; however, they should not detract from the continuing salience of news media institutions irrespective of publishing platform.

The period under review for this study has been marked by disruptions related to political upheavals, radicalization and violent extremism. The fears and fearmongering that these engender have contributed to restrictions on media freedom. Much of this contraction in media freedom appears to be due to concerns about the dissemination of oppositional messages, as well as what state authorities deem to be anti-state or terrorist propaganda, and attempts to exert government control over online content. During this period, with the rapid expansion of diverse media content producers online, the very definition of journalism continued to be examined and enlarged, with state regulation being applied to a broader category of actors.

In many regions around the world, public perception of media freedom has declined. A 2015 Gallup poll covering 131 countries in every region of the world found that 'residents of many countries are becoming less not more likely to say their media have a lot of freedom'.<sup>1</sup> While in 2012, 67 per cent of residents in the surveyed countries said their country had a good level of media freedom, in 2015 the percentage had declined to 61 per cent,<sup>2</sup> remaining stable in the following year.<sup>3</sup> While press freedom is perceived to be under threat, it is highly valued by people around the world. According to a 2015 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 'majorities in nearly all 38 nations polled say it is at least somewhat important to live in a country with free speech, a free press and freedom on the internet.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Crabtree 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Crabtree 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Wike and Simmons 2015.

In this complex environment, several trends exist: A tightening, in some regions, of long-standing modes of limiting media freedom (censorship, legal measures); new limitations associated with national security and anti-terrorism measures; an increase in large-scale disruptions like internet shutdowns; an increase in patterns of surveillance; and an expanding attention to privacy and cybersecurity issues as they affect media freedom. At the same time, there is growing recognition of the right of public access to information and the right to privacy, as well as concerted efforts to consolidate internet arrangements that advance a system contributing to media freedom.

## Understanding media freedom

Media freedom can be conceptualized as the liberty to publish and distribute content on media platforms. This is a precondition for many organizations as well as any individual who wishes to reach a public—for example, through social media. It is also essential to news media institutions and others doing journalism because their publishing impacts on power. Any restrictions on media freedom, however, can impact all actors who use this public dimension of the right to freedom of expression. Safeguarding and advancing media freedom is central to achieving a more democratic society.

Never something that can be taken for granted, media freedom has become more fragile in intensified ways. How can the trends in this regard be evaluated? Media freedom is very much a

function of the political, judicial and regulatory environment in which journalists and institutions of the press operate. Key to assessing media freedom is therefore the legal status of freedom of expression, as well as how that status is translated into practice. Media freedom can thus be assessed in terms of limits that restrict public expression beyond accepted international standards; such as when journalists are required to be licensed, when media are arbitrarily banned, blocked or filtered, and when internet access is cut off. Another indicator of media freedom is the existence and application of criminal defamation law, which turns a civil matter into a criminal one and may therefore be considered disproportionate in terms of international standards. Similarly, laws such as *lèse majesté* are relevant to consider as they are generally seen as incompatible with media freedom. Other legal concerns are the adequacy of protection of whistle-blowers and likewise the protection of the confidentiality of journalists' sources (both of which are generally recognized as being a matter of public interest in surfacing information about corruption and abuse). Media freedom is also impacted by the definitions and applications of laws such as those related to national security or hate speech. Guarantees in law, and respect in practice, for the right to access information, are also significant to assess.

The concept of press freedom goes wider than media freedom because it designates an ecosystem where freedom is accompanied by conditions for media pluralism, independence, safety and gender equality (assessed in subsequent chapters of this Report). Without media freedom, it is hard for a society to have media independence or media pluralism, even

if freedom itself is not a sufficient condition for these other components of the ecosystem of press freedom. Relatedly, there is an interdependent relationship between media freedom and the safety of those practicing journalism, which will be addressed in Chapter 4. This perspective of evaluating press freedom comprehensively is what informs UNESCO's Media Development Indicators,<sup>5</sup> which have enabled assessments of the state of media in more than 20 countries to date.

In this wider context, media freedom is the core focus each year of World Press Freedom Day, which is led by UNESCO globally in order to promote the importance of related international norms that underpin the liberty of actors to exercise public expression on any media platform.<sup>6</sup>

The current global climate for media freedom is marked by continued technological advancements, increased political polarization, and contestation and threats by non-state actors to national security, which have introduced new issues for media freedom. Vastly increased state capacity to monitor citizens has altered the balance between surveillance and privacy, accompanied by increased recognition of the impact on media freedom in particular, and more broadly free expression and access to information. Large internet companies now serve as key actors in supporting an enabling environment for media freedom, but their massive data tracking roles and their ability to unilaterally develop and enforce terms of service not necessarily respectful of international standards can also weaken media freedom. While journalism remains a distinctive

communications practice of producing verifiable information and informed content in the public interest, the line separating producers and receivers of media content has become more porous. The consequence is that any limits to media freedom, even if designed to impact on journalism and news institutions, can also have far-reaching impacts on public expression more broadly—as well as on a society's access to information.

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**The current global climate for media freedom is marked by continued technological advancements, increased political polarization, and contestation and threats by non-state actors to national security...**

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO 2008.

<sup>6</sup> The following declarations were adopted by the participants of the annual World Press Freedom Day International Conference: San José Declaration (2013), Paris Declaration (2014), Riga Declaration (2015), Finlandia Declaration (2016) and Jakarta Declaration (2017).

### Box 1-1: UNESCO's work to promote media freedom

As the UN specialized agency with a specific mandate to promote freedom of expression, UNESCO works across the world to create an enabling legal and policy environment for freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information at the national, regional and international levels. This includes contributing to:

#### 1 Strengthened normative frameworks for freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information and increased institutional capacity

A target related to 'public access to information and fundamental freedoms' (16.10) is included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as a result of advocacy initiated by UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and a partnership with the Global Forum for Media Development.

The concept of 'Internet Universality' was endorsed by UNESCO's General Conference in 2015, as embodied by four principles summarized by the acronym R.O.A.M.: that the internet should be (i) Human Rights-based, (ii) Open, (iii) Accessible to All, and (iv) nurtured by Multi-stakeholder participation.

5,500 justice system workers in Latin America have been trained on international standards on freedom of expression through online courses and a guide for judicial workers; a similar programme has been launched in Africa.

#### 2 Enhanced awareness of the rights of freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information

Annual celebration of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, held in more than 120 countries in 2017. The annual themes from 2012 to 2017 have been:

- o New Voices: Media Freedom Helping to Transform Societies (2012)
- o Safe to Speak: Securing Freedom of Expression in All Media (2013)
- o Media Freedom for a Better Future: Shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2014)
- o Let Journalism Thrive! Towards Better Reporting, Gender Equality and Media Safety in the Digital Age (2015)
- o Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms: This Is Your Right! (2016)
- o Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media's role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies (2017)

Global commemoration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information led by UNESCO since 2016, with events using a format called IPDCTalks taking place in 13 countries in 2017.

#### 3 Policy research

Several volumes in the Series on Internet Freedom:

- o *Countering online hate speech*
- o *Fostering freedom online: the role of Internet intermediaries*
- o *Human rights and encryption*
- o *Principles for governing the Internet*
- o *Privacy, free expression and transparency*
- o *Protecting journalism sources in the digital age*
- o *Survey on privacy in Media and Information Literacy with youth perspectives*
- o *What if we all governed the Internet? Advancing multistakeholder participation in Internet governance*

A further significant publication was "*Keystones to foster inclusive Knowledge Societies: Access to information and knowledge, Freedom of Expression, Privacy, and ethics on a Global Internet*", based on a global multi-stakeholder consultation, including the international conference CONNECTing the Dots

## Box 1-2: Laureates of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize



# Laureates

Laureates of the Prize have made significant contributions to media freedom worldwide, often in the face of danger and in times of crisis. They are selected by an international and independent jury, consisting of six members who represent all types of media. Jury members are well-known for their work in the area of news gathering, journalism, press freedom, and freedom of expression.

The Prize has been awarded to journalists and activists, in some cases posthumously.

1997 - Gao Yu, China  
1998 - Christina Anyanwu, Nigeria  
1999 - Jesus Blancornelas, Mexico  
2000 - Nizar Nayyuf, Syria  
2001 - U Win Tin, Myanmar  
2002 - Geoffrey Nyarota, Zimbabwe  
2003 - Amira Hass, Israel  
2004 - Raúl Rivero, Cuba  
2005 - Cheng Yizhong, China  
2006 - May Chidiac, Lebanon  
2007 - Anna Politkovskaya, Russia

2008 - Lydia Cacho Ribeiro, Mexico  
2009 - Lasantha Wickrematunge, Sri Lanka  
2010 - Mónica González Mujica, Chile  
2011 - Ahmad Zeidabadi, Iran  
2012 - Eynulla Fatullayev, Azerbaijan  
2013 - Reeyot Alemu, Ethiopia  
2014 - Ahmet Şik, Turkey  
2015 - Mazen Darwish, Syria  
2016 - Khadija Ismayilova, Azerbaijan  
2017 - Dawit Isaak, Eritrea/Sweden

# Limitations on media freedom

## Defamation laws and other legal restrictions on journalists

The majority of legal reforms pertaining to the press have continued to be regressive. Although most countries have constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression, in practice, media are often unduly restricted in ways that do not meet international standards for legitimate limitations on freedom of expression. Criminal defamation, slander, insult, blasphemy and *lèse-majesté* laws have remained a significant impediment to achieving media freedom across the world, as was the case previously.<sup>7</sup> In addition, legal and policy measures to counter hate speech and so-called ‘fake news’ have raised the risk of disproportionate restrictions on media freedom and the possibility of abuse of legal restrictions as has often been the case with ‘false news’ provisions that pre-date the internet.

Criminalized defamation in particular remains a persistent restriction on media freedom in parts of all regions. The first *World Trends Report* recorded that in 2012, defamation was still criminalized in 174 countries, although there had been a slow move towards decriminalization in recent years.<sup>8</sup> Comprehensive data is no longer available; however, as of 2017, at least 130 Member States retain criminal defamation laws. In 2017, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media issued a report on criminal defamation and anti-blasphemy laws among its

Member States, which found that defamation is criminalized in nearly three-quarters (42) of the 57 OSCE participating States. Many of the laws pertaining to defamation include specific provisions for harsher punishment for speech or publications critical of heads of state, public officials, state bodies and the State itself. The OSCE report also noted that blasphemy and religious insult laws exist in around one third of OSCE participating States;<sup>9</sup> many of these combine blasphemy and/or religious insult with elements of hate speech legislation.

Following campaigns to decriminalize defamation and landmark judicial rulings, the gradual trend towards decriminalization of defamation has continued, particularly in Africa, where at least four Member States decriminalized defamation between 2012 and 2017. In addition, the ruling by the African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights in *Lohé Issa Konaté v. the Republic of Burkina Faso* set a precedent in the region against imprisonment as a legitimate penalty for defamation, characterising it as a violation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the treaty of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).<sup>10</sup>

Despite these improvements, however, the overall global trend is negative. Countries in every region have moved to advance the criminalization of defamation by extending legislation to online content. Cybercrime and anti-terrorism laws passed throughout the world have led to bloggers appearing before courts, with some serving time in prison. Technological advancements strengthening governments’ abilities to monitor

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO 2014.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Griffen 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Columbia Global Freedom of Expression 2014

online content have facilitated this trend. A number of countries also continue to include harsh punishments for blasphemy and religious insult.

Media freedom has also been impacted as recent years have seen a growing push to use legislative measures to combat hate speech, particularly in parts of Europe. In some regions, hate speech laws are administered without what has been seen as the requisite attention to such criteria as necessity or proportionality. Legislation has varied in focus, but a striking trend has been a move from within a number of States and intergovernmental bodies to pressure internet companies, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, to do more in this area. One recent example of this is the introduction of legislation in one country in Western Europe that requires internet platforms to remove potentially illegal content in less than 24 hours or risk steep fines.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the European Commission's Code of Conduct on countering illegal hate speech online, announced with four major internet companies in May 2016, calls on internet companies to remove or disable illegal hate speech in less than 24 hours upon notification.<sup>12</sup> The risks here are seen to be overly-broad notions of hate in company Terms of Service, ignorance of the Rabat Principles,<sup>13</sup> which urge consideration of the actual likelihood or occurrence of violence (see below), the opacity of decision-making involved and the by-passing of open court processes. In this context, legitimate news and political criticism could become a casualty of automated censorship processes.

The spread of 'fake news'—deliberate disinformation masquerading as news—and

internet companies' role in its proliferation, have led to concerns amongst many actors concerned with the quality of public discourse, particularly around election periods. However, several of the remedies, such as new legislative efforts and increased pressure on internet intermediaries, are seen to pose new risks to media freedom. The UN, OSCE, Organisation of American States (OAS) and African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression stated in a joint declaration in March 2017 that 'general prohibitions on the dissemination of information based on vague and ambiguous ideas, including "false news" or "non-objective information", are incompatible with international standards for restrictions on freedom of expression...and should be abolished.'<sup>14</sup>

In some regions, the right to practice journalism or be a journalist has historically required licensing, often expressed as a way of assuring a minimum level of professionalism or of education. At the same time, licensing has also been seen as a way for state authorities to constrain who can be a journalist and how free he or she can be. In several regions today, as the production and distribution of news are increasingly transferred to new media, licensing requirements have expanded in ways that have impinged on media freedom. For example, some States require online news outlets or bloggers with a certain number of readers to register with a government authority. Licensing requirements of online journalists have emerged in parts of Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe and the Arab region, but are less prevalent in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and North America.

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<sup>11</sup> Nossel 2017.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012. Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred.

<sup>14</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression et al. 2017.

### Internet curbs, cut-offs and content removal

A significant trend pertaining to media freedom throughout the world has been the increase in state disruption of access to media content online. There has been a noticeable increase in the use of blocking and filtering of online content since 2012, though it is difficult to find assessments as to how these relate to news media content, and whether they are justified in terms of international standards for legitimate limitations or not.

There is also an emerging trend in blanket slowdowns and shutdowns of whole platforms, applications and direct access to the internet itself. While global data on this trend can be difficult to obtain, available studies provide insights into such restrictions being placed on access to online media.

The Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI), for example, has used crowdsourcing and open software to collect data on website censorship and traffic manipulation (such as network throttling). By performing over 1 million HTTP requests between 2012 and 2016, OONI data provide a preliminary picture of targeted instances of censorship broken down by country.<sup>15</sup> Of the 91 countries that OONI researchers were able to test, they found what they called ‘network anomalies’—where internet traffic was disrupted—in 71 countries. While such anomalies do not necessarily indicate intentional censorship, OONI states that they were able to confirm cases of deliberate censorship in 12 countries from the Arab, Asia and Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, and Western Europe and North America regions.

OONI also discovered the presence of software designed to manipulate internet traffic in 12 other countries, predominantly in Western Europe and North America, but also in the Arab, Africa, and Asia and Pacific regions. It should be noted that not all forms of online censorship are detectable through this method.

Evidence of new methods in blocking or filtering online content comes from a 2017 study led by researchers at the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab. Through conducting empirical experiments, the researchers found image filtering as well as blocking of certain combinations of keywords and images on the platforms WeChat and Sina Weibo.<sup>16</sup>

Contributing to evidence of increased restrictions of online content, Access Now used crowdsourcing to gather data on instances when governments have shut down direct access to the internet within their borders. In 2015, 15 cases of internet shutdowns in 15 countries were documented across every UNESCO region except Central and Eastern Europe. This dramatically increased in 2016 to 56 documented cases of internet shutdowns in 18 countries, in the same regions.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the incompleteness of these datasets, the findings of OONI, Citizen Lab and Access Now would clearly indicate an increasing trend towards greater restrictions of online communications. In many instances, States have argued that such actions are necessary to combat perceived rising threats from within and beyond their borders. A 2017 report from Access Now details the justifications and methods by

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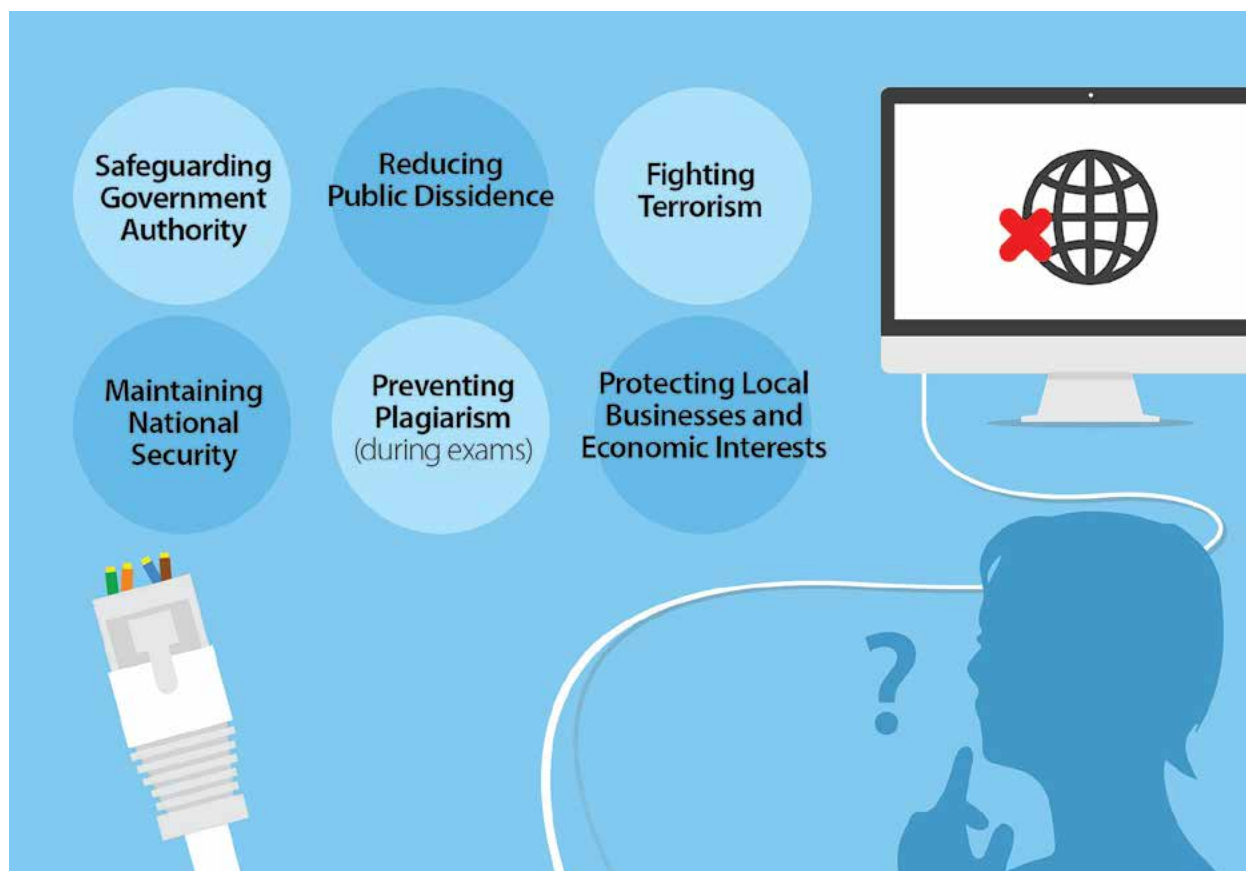
<sup>15</sup> The Tor Project 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Deibert 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Access Now 2017.



**Figure 1-1: Justifications for Internet Shutdown**



**Source:** Access Now. 2017. Primer on internet shutdowns and the law

which such shutdowns occur and the role of cooperation between governments and private providers. Official justifications ranged from safeguarding government authority, reducing public dissidence, fighting terrorism, maintaining national security, preventing plagiarism during exams and protecting local businesses and economic interests.<sup>18</sup> These rationales are questioned by various actors.

The risk of such disruptions of access to, or dissemination of, information extends beyond media organizations as censorship inhibits

political processes, limits peaceful protests, and prevents human rights defenders from documenting abuses by security forces. All this reduces civil society's vital role in ensuring public accountability. In 2016, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution that 'condemns unequivocally measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of information online in violation of international human rights law and calls upon states to refrain from and cease such measures.'<sup>19</sup> The same year, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights expressed concern by 'the emerging practice of

<sup>18</sup> OONI 2017; Access Now 2017.

<sup>19</sup> UN Human Rights Council 2016, vol. A/HRC/32/13.

State Parties of interrupting or limiting access to telecommunication services such as the Internet, social media and messaging services, increasingly during elections.<sup>20</sup> Notably, in 2017 the Freedom Online Coalition issued a Joint Statement on State Sponsored Network Disruptions that encouraged governments to adopt proposed good practices, including publicly committing to maintaining or developing human rights-respecting legislation and improving transparency in national government agencies.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Global Network Initiative and Telecommunications Industry Dialogue issued a joint statement expressing concern over shutdowns and calling for greater government transparency.<sup>22</sup> This pattern of internet shutdowns is mirrored in other large-scale efforts to affect media freedom in some regions where States have also closed radio and television stations and shut down newspapers.

As the measures to inhibit media freedom online become increasingly common, however, campaigns to raise awareness of the threats posed by digital censorship and shutdowns have increased. Access Now has led the #KeepItOn campaign, joined by more than 130 civil society organizations. A 2015 study from the Pew Research Center indicated that in 32 of the 38 countries surveyed, over 50 per cent of respondents said that it was important that people could use the internet without government censorship.<sup>23</sup>

Increasing transparency is one mode for resisting freedom-limiting state pressures on internet platforms and social media to take material down. In this trend of a rising awareness throughout the

world of the threats posed to media freedom, one important development has been the growing robustness in transparency reports made available by Google, Facebook, Twitter and other major internet companies. These transparency reports show the number of requests each entity receives from governments to take down content and access user data and (although less frequently), the category of the request and whether the company complies or not.

For example, as indicated in Figure 1-2, in the second half of 2016, Google received a record number of content removal requests (15,961) from court orders, law enforcement and executive branches of government worldwide, bringing the total number of official requests the company had received since 2012 to 48,809 from more than 100 countries across all regions.<sup>24</sup> As also indicated in Figure 1-2, the increase has been even more dramatic for Twitter, which went from six government removal requests received in the first half of 2012 to 5,925 received in the second half of 2016.<sup>25</sup>

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**As the measures to inhibit media freedom online become increasingly common, however, campaigns to raise awareness of the threats posed by digital censorship and shutdowns have increased.**

<sup>20</sup> African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Freedom Online Coalition 2017.

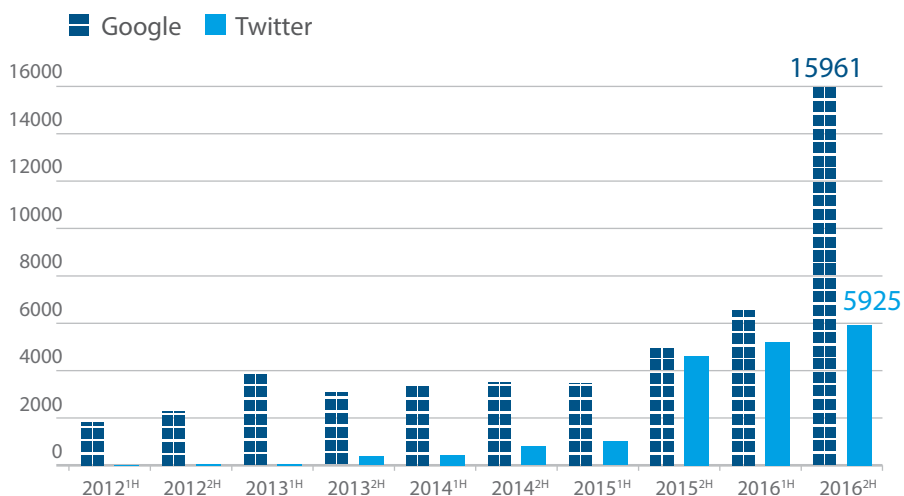
<sup>22</sup> Global Network Initiative and Telecommunications Industry Dialogue 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Wike and Simmons 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Google 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Twitter 2017.

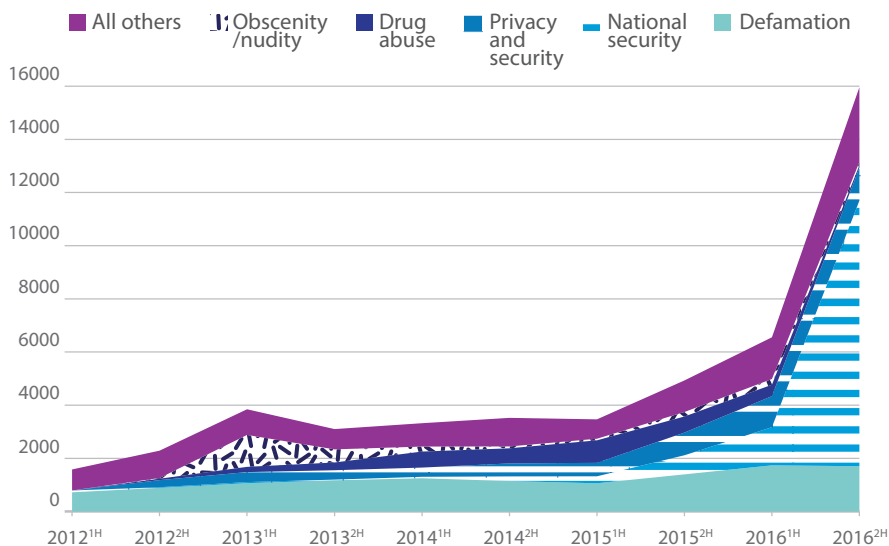
**Figure 1-2: Number of content removal requests made by governments received by Google and Twitter**



**Source:** Google. Transparency Report – Government requests to remove content; Twitter. Twitter transparency report – Removal requests.

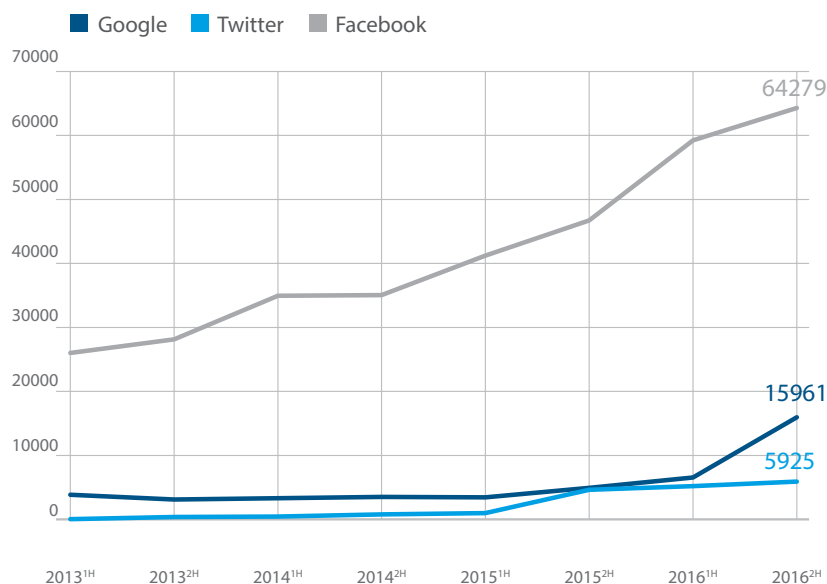
This increase in requests received by Google can be partially attributed to a large spike in the number of removal requests for reasons of national security, as seen in Figure 1-3.

**Figure 1-3: Reasons cited for content removal requests received by Google**



**Source:** Google. Transparency Report – Government requests to remove content; Twitter. Twitter transparency report – Removal requests.

**Figure 1-4: Number of content removal requests made by governments received by Google, Twitter and Facebook**



**Source:** Google. Transparency Report – Government requests to remove content; Twitter. Twitter transparency report – Removal requests.

Facebook, however, has received by far the highest number of requests, with 64,279 in the second half of 2016 (see Figure 1-4). When Facebook is added to the analysis, the number of requests it received dwarfed those received by Google and Twitter, also indicating a steady increase over the years.

Google has also released data about its compliance with these requests. Compliance rates vary according to whether the request is from a court order or a request from law enforcement or the executive branch, as well as varying widely between countries; Google complied with some countries' requests without fail and rejected all requests by other countries.

What remains opaque, however, is the number of takedowns conducted outside of government

requests, either by the company itself acting in accordance with its own Terms of Service or in response to user requests.<sup>26</sup> An analysis of the terms of service of 50 online platforms, conducted by researchers at the Center for Technology and Society at FGV Law School, found that such contractual arrangements typically offer only limited protection for users' rights to freedom of expression, privacy and due process.<sup>27</sup> In addition, beyond the large international companies, data on the practices of local ISPs and telecommunications companies are difficult to obtain as transparency reporting is less common.<sup>28</sup>

Empirical studies have found evidence that internet companies tend towards 'over-removal' in responding to takedown requests to avoid liability.<sup>29</sup> In the period under review for this study,

<sup>26</sup> MacKinnon et al. 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Belli and Venturini 2016.

<sup>28</sup> CIPESA 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Keller 2015.

there has been pressure on ‘notice and takedown’ mechanisms that had previously shielded many such companies as not liable for content hosted on their platforms. For example, in the 2015 case of *Delfi AS v. Estonia*, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights affirmed that a portal, under the circumstances of the case, did not have immunity, as an intermediary, from liability for intemperate or threatening comments by those who responded to a news story. It was a commercial portal, and that was a factor. However, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in a subsequent decision in 2016 that the Hungarian self-regulatory body MTE and online news portal Index.hu not be held liable for offensive comments posted by their readers. On a different issue, the decision of the European Court of Justice in the ‘right to be forgotten’ case (*Google Spain v AEPD and Mario Costeja González*) raised questions of new limitations on a right to publish and the responsibility of internet companies to moderate content hosted on their platforms (see more below).

### **National security and countering violent extremism**

National security concerns have been cited by many States to enact measures that present a clear challenge to media freedom, raising issues of necessity and proportionality. Across all regions, declarations of states of emergency have been a frequently cited reason for suspending or significantly curtailing free expression. At times, states of emergency, ostensibly introduced to handle a particular moment of crisis, have become protracted, and journalists covering terrorism have been charged under laws that equate them with terrorists themselves. In parts of the Arab

region, heightened threat from violent extremist groups and conflicts have been used to effect an increase in large-scale arrests and detentions, forced closures of media houses and dismissals of critical journalists, raids on journalists’ unions and expulsions of foreign journalists.

In addition to issues around mass surveillance and privacy discussed further below, anti-terrorism legislation has also led to the declaring of certain kinds of speech illegal, such as that which allegedly glorifies terrorism. In regions across the globe, governments are moving to introduce such anti-terrorism laws or have increased the use of national security laws to combat the threat posed by pro-terrorist propaganda. However, terrorism is often an ill-defined concept in these laws, which can be interpreted overly broadly to restrict critical speech. The courts are pushing back on the breadth of these repressive laws, though, and in a few African countries where new anti-terrorism laws were created following the increased threat faced from regional violent extremist groups, independent judicial branches have struck down a number of the most egregious clauses, expressly citing violations of media freedom.

At the global level, in 2016, several Special Rapporteurs in the area of free expression prepared a Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Countering Violent Extremism.<sup>30</sup> The Declaration recommends that ‘violent extremism’ and ‘extremism’ should not be used as the basis for restricting freedom of expression unless they are defined clearly and appropriately narrowly. It also recommends that States should not restrict reporting on acts, threats or promotion of terrorism and other violent activities unless the reporting itself is intended to incite imminent

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<sup>30</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, et al, 2016.

violence or is likely to incite such violence. In other words, in line with the principles of the 2012 'Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence', there must be a direct and immediate connection between the speech and actual violence.

The Joint Declaration followed the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism in 2015, which includes aspects relevant to media freedom. Stating that 'the manipulative messages of violent extremists on social media have achieved considerable success in luring people, especially young women and men, into their ranks', the Plan of Action urges Member States to consider developing and implementing national communications strategies. Such strategies should be organized in close cooperation with social media companies and 'tailored to local contexts...to challenge the narratives associated with violent extremism'.<sup>31</sup> In calling for a proactive response to violent extremists, the Plan of Action also calls on States to 'ensure that national legal frameworks protect freedom of opinion and expression, pluralism, and diversity of the media'.

The trend towards increasingly restrictive regulation of internet companies discussed above has been justified by the concern that online platforms facilitate the mobilization of political opposition and/or act as recruiting posts for violent extremism. However, a recent UNESCO study signals the lack of definitive evidence thus far in research of a clear and direct link between social media and violent radicalization processes for young people, highlighting the need to avoid

policy based on assumptions that can lead to disproportionate limits on media freedom.<sup>32</sup>

## Access to information and privacy protections

### Access to information

Access to information is a key element of media freedom and a defining prerequisite for journalists to perform their functions. It is a key for transparency and development (see Box 1-3). The last five years have brought increased recognition of the public's right to access information. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, includes Goal 16.10 to 'ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements' (UN General Assembly, 2015b). UNESCO has been assigned as 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'.<sup>33</sup>

This responsibility aligns with UNESCO's commitment to promote universal access to information, grounded in its constitutional mandate to 'promote the free flow of ideas by word and image'. In 2015, UNESCO's General Conference proclaimed 28 September as

<sup>31</sup> UN Secretary General 20

<sup>32</sup> Alava, Frau-Meigs, and Hassan 2017.

<sup>33</sup> UNESCO 2016c.

the International Day for Universal Access to Information.<sup>34</sup> The following year, participants of UNESCO's annual celebration of World Press Freedom Day adopted the Finlandia Declaration

on access to information and fundamental freedoms, 250 years after the first freedom of information law was adopted in what is modern day Finland and Sweden.<sup>35</sup>

### Box 1-3: Focus on Lamii Kpargoi, advocate for access to information in Africa



***“Key to having an open society is having an informed society.”***

*– Lamii Kpargoi,  
Officer-in-Charge,  
Liberia Media Center*

Lamii Kpargoi was a young boy when his father lost his civil service job, for reasons he viewed as solely politically motivated. As Kpargoi grew older, the memory of this perceived injustice became career defining, framing his understanding of the importance of access to information for ensuring government transparency and fostering democratic processes.

Over the ensuing years, working as a lawyer, journalist and civil society activist, Kpargoi became a steadfast advocate for change in his nation's legislation governing freedom of expression and access to information. Thanks to his efforts, and those of many others, Liberia passed its first Freedom of Information Law in 2010, the first country in West Africa to do so and the sixth in the broader African region, representing a tangible expression of progress on the road to greater transparency as a foundation for stable democracy. For Kpargoi, although significant challenges remain in its implementation, the adoption of the law was a milestone that has led to the establishment of the Office for Freedom of Information and structures within government that are designed to support its implementation.

For Kpargoi, transparency and access to information are fundamental pillars for sustainable development, acting as the first defense against corruption. The reasons for his advocacy are simple: ‘When people know more about what is happening with their government, they become more interested in how their government is being run and this makes government more transparent. I think access to information is the common thread that ensures good governance.’

Kpargoi sees freedom of information as a catalyst for Liberia's democratic growth and he continues to push actively to strengthen and ensure consistency in the application of the law. His work serving as the Officer-in-Charge at the Liberia Media Center, where he publishes reports that analyze the state of freedom of expression in the country, shines a light on the role that access to information plays in paving the way forward for sustainable development.

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO 2015.

<sup>35</sup> UNESCO 2016a.

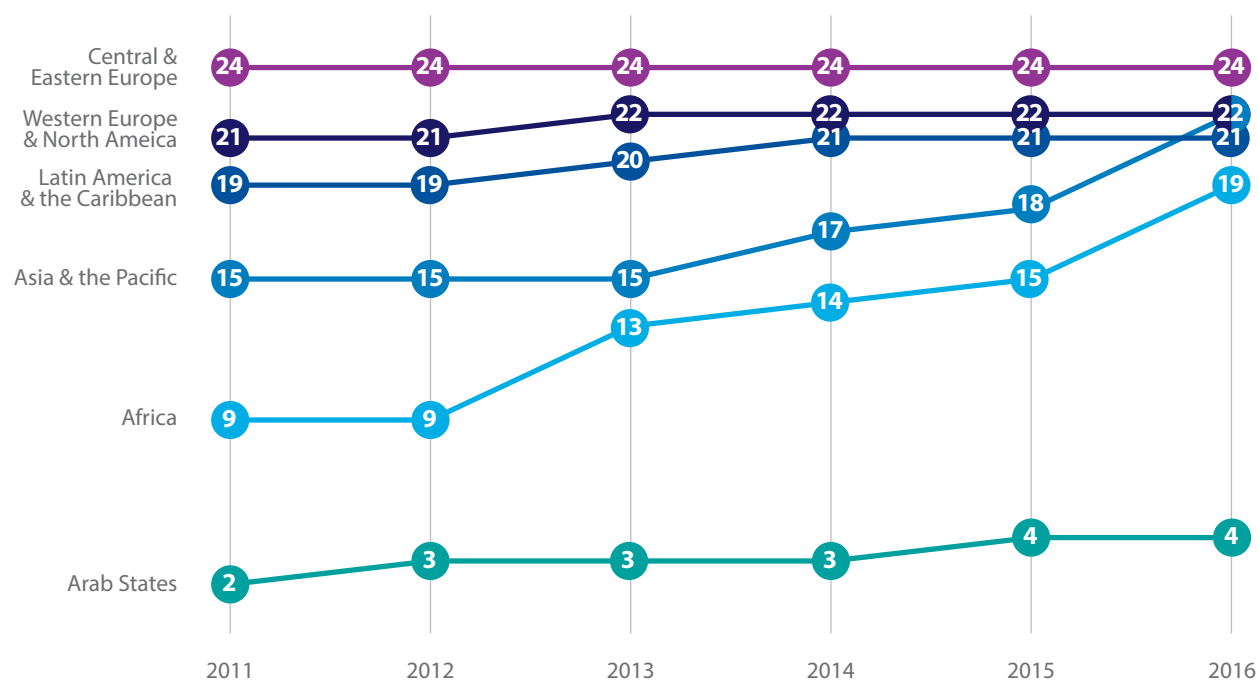
## Trends in Media Freedom

Monitoring Sustainable Development Goal 16.10.2 can be divided into three main areas: 1) Does a country have constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information?; 2) Do those constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees reflect known international agreements?; 3) What implementation mechanisms are in place to ensure that such guarantees work optimally?

UNESCO monitoring, using these three questions, draws inter alia on work by freedominfo.org, a network that collates global data on freedom of information. The results show that 112 countries have now adopted freedom of information (FOI)

legislation or similar administrative regulations.<sup>36</sup> Of these, 22 adopted new legislation since 2012 (see Figure 1-5). At the regional level, Africa has seen the highest growth, with 10 countries adopting FOI legislation in the last five years, more than doubling the number of countries in the region to have such legislation from nine to 19. A similarly high growth rate has occurred in the Asia-Pacific region, where seven countries adopted FOI laws in the last five years, bringing the total to 22. In addition, during the reporting period, two countries in the Arab region, two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one country in Western Europe and North America adopted FOI legislation. The vast majority of the

**Figure 1-5: Member States by region with a freedom of information law or policy**



**Source:** freedominfo.org, 2016, Consensus list of 115 countries with freedom of information laws or the equivalent.

<sup>36</sup> freedominfo.org 2016.



world's population now lives in a country with an FOI law, and several countries currently have FOI bills under consideration.

While there has been an increase in countries with FOI laws, their implementation and effectiveness vary considerably across the world. In measuring the strength and legal framework of each country's FOI law using the Right to Information Rating, one notable trend appears.<sup>37</sup> Largely regardless of geographic location, top scoring countries tend to have younger laws. This development may in part reflect the progress made over the past two decades by civil society groups and States in the Open Government Partnership (OGP)—see below—in setting and insisting upon more demanding international standards. While it is too early to know how some of these FOI laws will be implemented, a few early markers already support the premise that strong protections result from strong laws.<sup>38</sup>

It is also apparent that quantity of laws does not equal quality. It is not enough for a country to simply to enact an FOI law; it must also ensure the law's successful implementation, which is far more difficult to measure on a global scale than the adoption of laws. In many parts of the world, a widespread lack of awareness about the right to information may be seen to compromise the existence of any legal safeguards. According to the UN Secretary General's 2017 report on the Sustainable Development Goals, to which UNESCO contributed FOI-related information, of the 109 countries with available data on implementation of FOI laws, 43 per cent do not sufficiently provide for public outreach and 43 per cent have overly-wide definitions of exceptions to disclosure, which

run counter to the aim of increased transparency and accountability.<sup>39</sup>

All this is compounded by a culture of secrecy that continues to enshroud many governments despite the adoption of FOI laws; officials in such environments are often unfamiliar with the norms of transparency at the core of freedom of information or are unwilling to recognize them in practice. Additionally, journalists often do not make effective use of FOI laws for a multitude of reasons: official failure to respond to information requests, extensive delays, receipt of heavily redacted documents, arbitrarily steep fees for certain types of requests, and a lack of professional training.<sup>40</sup>

Debates around public access to information have also focussed on further developments in encouraging open data approaches to government transparency. In 2009, the data.gov portal was launched in the USA, collecting in one place most of the government open data; in the years following, there was a wave of government data opening around the world. Similarly, as part of the OGP, a multilateral network established in 2011, some 70 countries have now issued National Action Plans, the majority of which contain strong open data commitments designed to foster greater transparency, generate economic growth, empower citizens, fight corruption and more generally enhance governance. More recently, in 2015 the Open Data Charter was founded in a multistakeholder process in order to establish principles for 'how governments should be publishing information'.<sup>41</sup> However, to date this charter has been adopted by only 17 national governments, of which more than half were

<sup>37</sup> Centre for Law and Democracy & Access Info 2017b.

<sup>38</sup> Centre for Law and Democracy & Access Info 2017a.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Trapnell 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Open Data Charter 2017b.

## Trends in Media Freedom

in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>42</sup> As open data initiatives have expanded, societies have benefited through greater and more immediate access to data.<sup>43</sup> Despite the variability in evidence, scholars have documented that open data's (intended or realized) impact on society goes beyond transparency in ways that also supplement the function of traditional media. These include helping to solve complex public problems by improving situational awareness, bringing a wider range of expertise and knowledge to bear on public problems, and by allowing policymakers, civil society groups and citizens to better target interventions and track impact. Open data efforts can also empower citizens by improving their capacity to make decisions and widen their choices, and by acting as a catalyst for social mobilization.

Transparent and convenient access to government data is a crucial component of an enabling environment for freedom of information. However, as with the implementation of FOI laws themselves, the implementation of open data policies is frequently deficient. For example, recent findings from the 2017 Open Data Barometer, conducted by the World Wide Web Foundation, show that while 79 out of the 115 countries surveyed have open government data portals, in most cases 'the right policies are not in place, nor is the breadth and quality of the datasets released sufficient' (World Wide Web Foundation, 2017). In general, the Open Data Barometer found that government data is usually 'incomplete, out of date, of low quality, and fragmented', and that despite the wave of enthusiasm for open data beginning in 2009/2010, by 2016 governments were largely 'slowing and stalling in their commitment to open data'.

Political momentum has thus emerged as a crucial factor in ensuring the effectiveness of open data platforms. The Open Data Barometer found that such momentum led to recent improvements in a few countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific and Africa. Without political will, however, open data portals typically lapse into redundancy. This can be due to a range of factors, including a lack of content development capacity, a reluctance to broaden access to information in particular government agencies, a lack of financial resources, and the pervasiveness of a culture of government secrecy.

### Privacy, surveillance and encryption

A universal right in itself, the right to privacy is also 'an essential requirement for the realization of the right to freedom of expression'.<sup>44</sup> The increasing access to and reliance on digital media to receive and produce information have increased the possibilities for States and private sector companies to track individuals' behaviours, opinions and networks. The collection and trade of personal information has become a key component of the internet, especially when key services—from search to communication among peers—are offered for free in exchange for the right to make use of the valuable traces users leave online. States, on their part, have increasingly adopted laws and policies to legalize monitoring of communication, justifying these practices with the need to defend their own citizens and national interests. For example, in parts of Europe, new anti-terrorism laws have enabled a greater degree of government surveillance and an increase in the ability of intelligence authorities to access citizens' data. While legality is a precondition for legitimate limitations of human rights, the issue is

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<sup>42</sup> Open Data Charter 2017a.

<sup>43</sup> Young and Verhulst 2016.

<sup>44</sup> La Rue 2013.



also whether a given law is aligned to other criteria for justification such as necessity, proportionality and legitimate purpose.

Against this background, a shift has occurred in the balance of power between public and private entities that have become increasingly opaque with regard to what they collect and how they make use of it, and users, who have become increasingly transparent to those entities, often in ways in which users themselves have limited control or awareness. This balance is only partially redressed by the move detailed above towards greater transparency created through the adoption of FOI laws and company transparency reports across the globe.

In the years covered by this study, some governments have reaffirmed their rights to protect and enforce their sovereignty over their national information space, sometimes protecting their citizens from the interference of foreign entities, but not necessarily offering greater protections from their own surveillance and related actions. In this environment, the UN Human Rights Council has taken a number of steps to highlight the importance of the universal right to privacy online. In 2015, in a resolution on the right to privacy in the digital age, it established a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy.<sup>45</sup>

In his second annual report, the UN Special Rapporteur for Privacy, Joseph Cannataci, pointed out the importance of global cooperation for the protection and promotion of human rights due to 'the nature of trans-border data flows.'<sup>46</sup> The Special Rapporteur noted that: 'If the flow of information is to remain a global affair, there needs to be a consistent and trustworthy environment

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<sup>45</sup> UN Human Rights Council 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Cannataci 2017, 9.

## Trends in Media Freedom

in which this happens' and 'a core of rights and values which is consistently respected, protected and promoted throughout the international community'.<sup>47</sup>

In 2017, the Human Rights Council emphasized that the 'unlawful or arbitrary surveillance and/or interception of communications, as well as the unlawful or arbitrary collection of personal data, as highly intrusive acts, violate the right to privacy, can interfere with other human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and to hold opinions without interference'.<sup>48</sup>

In recent years there have been a number of regional efforts, particularly through the courts, to establish regulations that deal with data protection, privacy and surveillance, and which affect their relationship to journalistic uses. For example, the Council of Europe's Convention 108, the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data, has undergone a modernization process to address new challenges to privacy. Countries have increasingly paid it heed as more and more of their citizens are directly participating in the exchange of data online. Since 2012, four new countries belonging to the Council of Europe have signed or ratified the Convention, as well as three countries that do not belong to the Council, from Africa and Latin America.<sup>49</sup>

The number of countries around the world with data protection laws has also continued to grow. Between 2012 and 2016, 20 UNESCO Member States adopted data protection laws for first time, bringing the global total to 101.<sup>50</sup> Of these new adoptions, nine were in Africa, four in Asia and the

Pacific, three in Latin America and the Caribbean, two in the Arab region and one in Western Europe and North America. During the same period, 23 countries revised their data protection laws, reflecting the new challenges to data protection in the digital era. The majority of these revisions occurred in Central and Eastern Europe and in Western Europe and North America (see Figure 1-6). Many more countries will revise their laws to comply with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, which was adopted in 2016 and will go into force in 2018.

Regional courts are also playing a noteworthy role in the development of online privacy regulations. For example, in 2015 the European Court of Justice found that the so-called 'Safe Harbour Agreement', which allowed private companies to 'legally transmit personal data from their European subscribers to the US';<sup>51</sup> was not valid under European law in that it did not offer sufficient protections for the data of European citizens or protect them from arbitrary surveillance. This has set an important precedent for protecting individuals' online privacy from foreign third party actors. In 2016, the European Commission and United States Government reached an agreement to replace Safe Harbour, the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield, which includes data protection obligations on companies receiving personal data from the EU, safeguards on U.S. government access to data, protection and redress for individuals, and an annual joint review to monitor implementation.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, the European Court of Justice has found that existing national level legislations requiring indiscriminate retention of electronic data

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> UN Human Rights Council 2017.

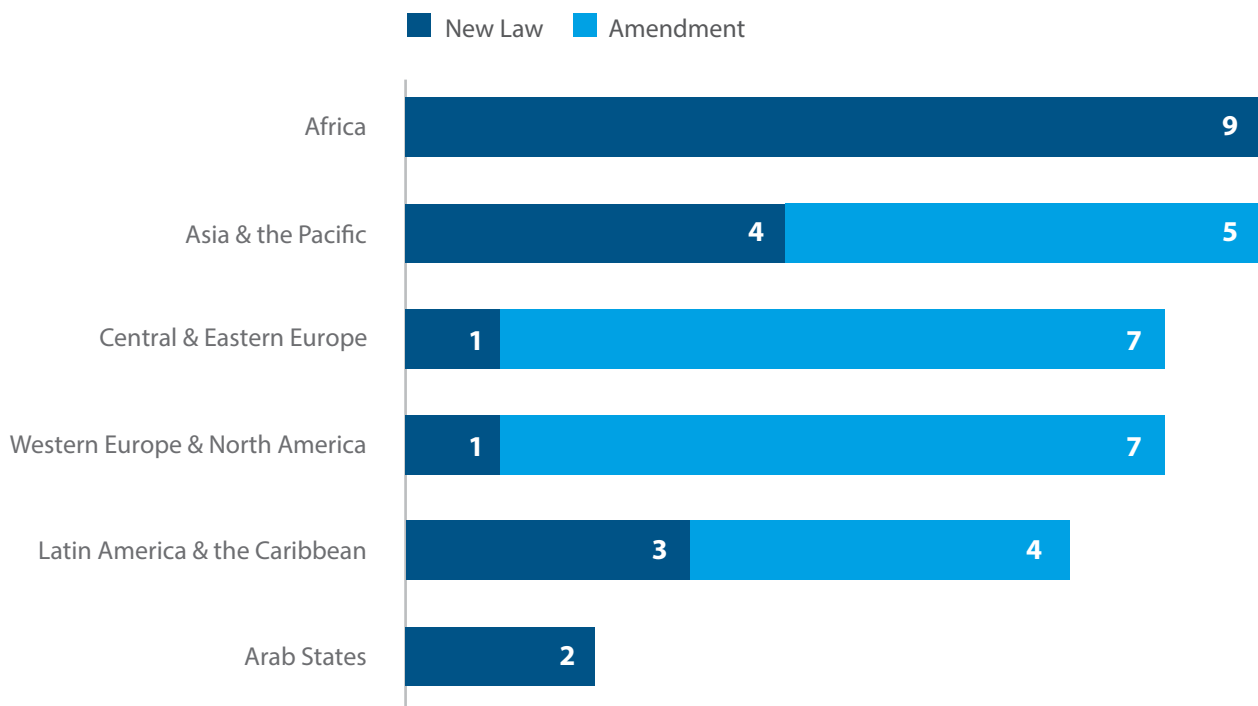
<sup>49</sup> Council of Europe 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Greenleaf 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Glenster 2016.

<sup>52</sup> European Commission n.d.

**Figure 1-6: Number of countries with data protection or privacy laws adopted or amended by region, 2012-2016**



Source: Greenleaf, G. 2017. Global Table of Data Privacy Laws and Bills (5th Ed.)

violated the ‘fundamental rights to respect for private life and the protection of personal data’ enshrined in European law. The court came to this decision in part because of the negative potential consequences that constant surveillance can have for freedom of expression online. In addition, the European Court of Justice’s 2014 decision in the Google Spain case, referenced above, allowed people to claim a ‘right to be forgotten’ or ‘right to be de-listed’ in a much-debated approach to the balance between privacy, free expression and transparency.<sup>53</sup>

These European cases have carried influence

beyond the region. For example, following the Google Spain decision, the ‘right to be forgotten’ or ‘right to be de-listed’ has been recognized in a number of countries across the world, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>54</sup> In recent years, there has also been a push towards stricter privacy regulations in the Asia and Pacific region; a number of new regulations have followed the so-called ‘European model’ that erects a ‘data wall’ around the region but not between member countries.<sup>55</sup> Regulations pertaining to online privacy in Asia are being furthered predominantly by sub-regional initiatives through bodies like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

<sup>53</sup> Cannataci et al. 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Keller 2017; Santos 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Parsons and Colegate 2015.

and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).<sup>56</sup>

Journalists and journalistic enterprises have been necessarily caught up in many of these efforts to ensure that an overwhelmingly data-driven world, with huge reservoirs of personal information online, does not trespass individual rights to privacy. Journalistic entities often and effectively fall within a data protection regime designed to apply when an organization, including a newspaper, collects users or keeps information about a living person. Some statutes offering broad protections for the right to privacy contain provisions exempting data collected 'solely' for journalistic purposes from such restrictions. How journalists and journalistic enterprises navigate the world of big data—including the increasingly important question of what constitutes a journalistic purpose—is likely to be a significant question in the years to come.

Recital 153 of the EU General Data Protection Regulation,<sup>57</sup> which will take effect in May 2018, is an example of regional authorities attempting to work out this relationship between journalism and data protection. Recital 153 endeavours to walk this line with the following statement: 'Member States law should reconcile the rules governing freedom of expression and information, including journalistic...with the right to the protection of personal data pursuant to this Regulation. The processing of personal data solely for journalistic purposes...should be subject to derogations or exemptions from certain provisions of this

Regulation if necessary to reconcile the right to the protection of personal data with the right to freedom of expression and information, as enshrined in Article 11 of the Charter.'<sup>58</sup>

Civil society has also significantly contributed to these discussions of privacy, data regulation, and journalism broadly defined. The International Principles on the Application of Human Rights to Communications Surveillance (the 'Necessary and Proportionate Principles'), developed by privacy organizations and advocates led by Privacy International and launched in September 2013, have been signed by more than 270,000 people and hundreds of organizations based in every region.<sup>59</sup> The increased interest in data privacy can also be observed at the annual Internet Governance Forum, where in 2016 Internet Governance Forum over 20 workshops and three main sessions dealt with issues relating to data protection, data regulation and privacy.

Alongside the regulatory advancements witnessed in the right to privacy online has come an increased recognition of the important role that data encryption plays in ensuring online privacy and media freedom. The 2016 UNESCO study *Human Rights and Encryption* found that data encryption can be crucial to supporting 'free expression, anonymity, access to information, private communication and privacy'.<sup>60</sup> The report noted that there has been a rise in the use of encryption software on the part of third party operators and end-users themselves. While end-users are turning to open

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<sup>56</sup> Greenleaf 2014.

<sup>57</sup> EU GDPR 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Necessary & Proportionate n.d.

<sup>60</sup> Schulz and Hoboken 2016a, 7. This study in the UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom addresses the relevance of encryption to human rights in the media and communications field and offers policy recommendations for state practice and other stakeholders.

source software encryption services, third party operators have stepped up ‘their deployment of cryptographic techniques...in the last years to increase the protection of the information and communications of their users and to promote trust in their services.’<sup>61</sup> High profile examples of this have been WhatsApp’s implementation of full end-to-end encryption in its messenger service,<sup>62</sup> and Apple’s contestation of a law enforcement request to unlock an iPhone used by the perpetrators of a terror attack.<sup>63</sup>

A dichotomous framing of ‘security versus privacy’ in recent years has often been presented, with a number of States in recent years restricting the right to personal encryption in the name of national security.<sup>64</sup> This binary representation of the issues has been much challenged, on the grounds that privacy protection, such as that enabled by encryption, serves to protect individuals’ data from hacking and data breaches, and thus enhances their security. However, the critique of the either/or perspective has not prevented the introduction of measures seen to be at the expense of privacy. The use of end-to-end encryption in personal messaging services, such as WhatsApp, has been banned in a number of Member States, generally as part of wider efforts to hamper criminal activity and aid law-enforcement agencies; yet as with the cases of States’ demanding ‘back-door’ keys to encryption, this is criticized for making citizens more vulnerable to malicious actors.<sup>65</sup> The introduction of sweeping legislation without safeguards for individual privacy has occurred in Member States

with formally robust privacy protections, while in other states encryption remains illegal, thus endangering individuals who may be victims of prejudice or unfair persecution.<sup>66</sup> According to Global Partners Digital, only four States have secured in national legislation a general right to encryption, and 31 have enacted national legislation that grants law enforcement agencies the power to intercept or decrypt encrypted communications.<sup>67</sup>

Although anonymous communication can create impediments for law enforcement and counter-terrorism officials, emerging human rights norms recognize the importance of encryption for safety—whether that be commercial, government, individual or otherwise—and as an essential component of a free and open internet. This is highlighted in a 2015 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the freedom of opinion and expression, which also expresses concern about the lack of rationales that States give for impeding private encryption efforts. ‘The trend lines regarding security and privacy online,’ he wrote, ‘are deeply worrying.’<sup>68</sup> This is so because ‘States often fail to provide public justification to support restrictions. Encrypted and anonymous communications may frustrate law enforcement and counter-terrorism officials, and they complicate surveillance, but state authorities have not generally identified situations—even in general terms, given the potential need for confidentiality—where a restriction has been necessary to achieve a legitimate goal.’<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Schulz and Hoboken 2016b, 10.

<sup>62</sup> WhatsApp 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Lichtblau and Benner 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Cardozo 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Blum-Dumontet 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Privacy International 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Global Partners Digital n.d.

<sup>68</sup> Kaye 2015b.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

### Protection of confidential sources and whistle-blowing

The UNESCO study *Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age* shows that throughout the globe, journalism-related source protection laws have been increasingly at risk of erosion, restriction and compromise in the digital era.<sup>70</sup> Restrictions on encryption can make journalistic communications with sources vulnerable to confidentially breaches. Questions as to who is entitled to the privilege of source protection and in what circumstances have become more open to debate as the category of information gatherer and diffuser of news has expanded. As the UNESCO study indicated, the trend towards erosion represents a 'direct challenge to the established universal human rights to freedom of expression and privacy, and one that especially may constitute a threat to the sustainability of investigative journalism.'<sup>71</sup>

Rapid changes in the digital environment, coupled with contemporary journalist practice that increasingly relies on digital communication technologies, pose new risks for the protection of journalism sources. Leading contemporary threats include mass surveillance technologies, mandatory data retention policies, and disclosure of personal digital activities by third party intermediaries. Without a thorough understanding of how to shield their digital communications and traces, journalists and sources can unwittingly reveal identifying information.<sup>72</sup>

Another global and longstanding trend that has strengthened in recent years has been the employment of national security legislation, such as counterterrorism laws, to override existing legal protections for source protection.<sup>73</sup> Further, in many regions, persistent secrecy laws or new cybersecurity laws threaten the protection of sources, such as when they give governments the right to intercept online communications in the interest of overly broad definitions of national security. Both of these trends can have the adverse effect of undermining confidence in the law to uphold the right to protect sources, which in turn, can produce a chilling effect on public interest journalism that relies on confidential sources.<sup>74</sup>

How to navigate both digital security and legal concerns has posed a challenge for journalists around the world. In his former capacity as UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue (subsequently UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information) wrote: 'Journalists must be able to rely on the privacy, security and anonymity of their communications. An environment where surveillance is widespread, and unlimited by due process or judicial oversight, cannot sustain the presumption of protection of sources.'<sup>75</sup>

Amid significant challenges, shifts are beginning to occur in the national frameworks that govern source protection. The UNESCO study cited above found that developments in regards to source protection laws have occurred between

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<sup>70</sup> Posetti 2017a. This study in the UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom examines changes that impact on legal frameworks that support protection of journalistic sources in the digital age.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>72</sup> Open Society Justice Initiative 2013.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Posetti 2017a.

<sup>75</sup> La Rue 2013.

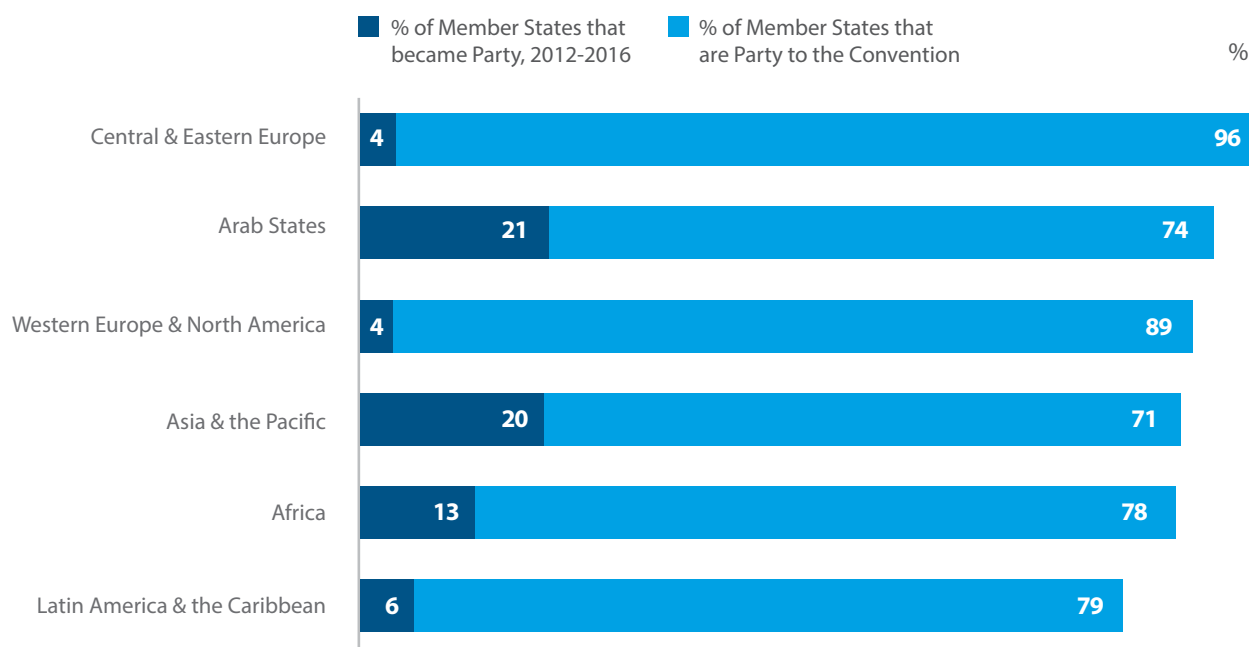


2007 and mid-2015 in 84 (69 per cent) of the 121 countries surveyed.<sup>76</sup> Yet, these developments have been unevenly demonstrated around the world. The Arab region had the most notable developments, where 86 per cent of States had demonstrated shifts, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (85 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (75 per cent), Western Europe and North America (66 per cent) and finally Africa, where 56 per cent of States examined had revised their source protection laws.<sup>77</sup> More adjustments may follow as a result of a 2015 East African Court of Justice ruling that reaffirmed the importance of authorities respecting journalistic

source protection and the requirement that any exceptions need a court order to be justifiable.<sup>78</sup>

Protection for public sector whistle-blowers has been slow in developing across the globe, but has strengthened substantially in recent years. As of 2015, at least 60 States had adopted some form of whistle-blower protection.<sup>79</sup> At the international level, the UN Convention against Corruption entered into force in 2005.<sup>80</sup> By July 2017, the majority of countries around the globe, 179 in total, had ratified the Convention, which includes provisions for the protection of whistle-blowers. This figure includes, since 2012, the

**Figure 1-7: Member States that are Party to the UN Convention against Corruption**



**Source:** UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017. Convention against Corruption: Signature and Ratification Status.

<sup>76</sup> Posetti 2017a.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Burundi Journalists Union v. Attorney General of Burundi 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Kaye 2015a.

<sup>80</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2005.

addition of 23 UNESCO Member States that have ratified, accepted or acceded to the convention, nine from Asia and the Pacific, six from Africa, four from the Arab region, two from Latin America and the Caribbean, one from Western Europe and North America, and one from Central and Eastern Europe (see Figure 1-7).<sup>81</sup> Regional conventions against corruption that contain protection for whistle-blowers have also been widely ratified. These include the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, which has been ratified by 33 Member States, and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which was ratified by four more UNESCO Member States during the reporting period, bringing the total number to 36.<sup>82</sup>

In a similar development, in 2009, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Council adopted the Recommendation for Further Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, which required all OECD countries party to the UN Convention against Corruption to implement national level whistle-blower protection. According to a 2016 report from the OECD, *Committing to Effective Whistle-blower Protection*, which surveyed all OECD member countries, legal protections for whistle-blowers have greatly improved in member countries in recent years: 'More OECD countries have put in place dedicated whistleblower protection laws in the past five years than in the previous quarter century.'<sup>83</sup> On the African continent, only seven countries have whistle-blower protection laws, according to the Platform for the Protection of Whistleblowers in Africa.<sup>84</sup>

Nonetheless, where they exist, these legal protections have not necessarily worked to increase the ability of journalists to uncover corruption and for sources to come forward without repercussions. The OECD report also found that 59 per cent of OECD countries 'guarantee anonymity to public sector whistleblowers', but only 30 per cent 'provide incentives for whistleblowers to disclose wrongdoing'.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, the general trend observed in recent years is of greater legal recognition of the importance of whistle-blower protections, and although there is ample room for further development, this is positive from a media freedom point of view.

## Internet governance and media freedom

Understanding the context in which media freedom operates in the digital age requires stepping back to examine larger developments in the internet governance ecosystem. Media, freedom of expression and freedom of information have been long recognized as principles of internet governance, included in the 2003 Geneva Declaration and 2005 Tunis Commitment of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Given the cross-border, decentralized nature of the internet, an enabling environment for media freedom in the digital age requires global multi-stakeholder

<sup>81</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2017.

<sup>82</sup> African Union 2017; Organization of American States n.d.

<sup>83</sup> OECD 2016, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Fröhlich 2017.

<sup>85</sup> OECD 2016, 6–7.

cooperation and shared respect for human rights. In broad terms, two different visions have been seen to shape global internet governance debates in recent years.<sup>86</sup> On the one hand, some national governments, particularly in the Central and Eastern European and Asia-Pacific regions, have emphasized state sovereignty as an organizing premise of national and global internet governance. In some regions, data localization laws—requiring that data be stored, processed and circulated within a given jurisdiction—have been introduced to keep citizens’ personal data in the country, both to retain regulatory authority over such data and to strengthen the case for greater jurisdiction. Countries in the Central and Eastern European, Asia-Pacific, and African regions all have legislation requiring some localization. There has been a rise in reported data localization proposals and policies globally,<sup>87</sup> but the trend has been particularly pronounced in the Asian and European regions, often based on arguments of enhancing national security, protecting personal privacy, aiding law enforcement, and preventing foreign surveillance.<sup>88</sup> However, data localization requirements increase the likelihood of multiple standards and the fragmentation of the internet, limiting the free flow of information, and in some cases increasing the potential for surveillance, which in turn impacts on freedom of expression.

On the other hand, the dominant practice has been towards a unified, universal internet with broadly shared norms and principles. The NETmundial meeting, held in Brazil in 2014, produced a multistakeholder statement the ‘internet should continue to be a globally

coherent, interconnected, stable, unfragmented, scalable and accessible network-of-networks.’<sup>89</sup> In 2015, UNESCO’s General Conference endorsed the concept of Internet Universality and the ‘ROAM Principles’, which state that the internet should be ‘(i) Human Rights-based (ii) Open, (iii) Accessible to all, and (iv) Nurtured by Multi-stakeholder participation’ (see Figure 1-8). The ROAM Principles combine standards for process (multi-stakeholderism to avoid potential capture of the internet by a single power centre with corresponding risks), with recommendations about substance (what those principles should be). The fundamental position is for a global internet where ROAM principles frame regional, national and local diversities. In this context, significant objectives are media freedom, network interoperability, net neutrality and the free flow of information (minimal barriers to the rights to receive and impart information across borders, and any limitations to accord with international standards).<sup>90</sup> In addition, the model advocates that decisions on how rights are balanced (e.g. security, expression and privacy) should be assessed with regard to the other three pillars. For instance, a particular balance can have adverse impact on the essential openness of the internet or on accessibility, which illustrates why internet decision-making here is best done through a multistakeholder modality.<sup>91</sup>

Alongside UNESCO’s effort to advance the ROAM principles (and to develop indicators for assessment at the country level), have been a number of national, regional and international efforts to promote rights-based norms in the

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<sup>86</sup> Drake, Cerf, and Kleinwachter 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Daskal 2015.

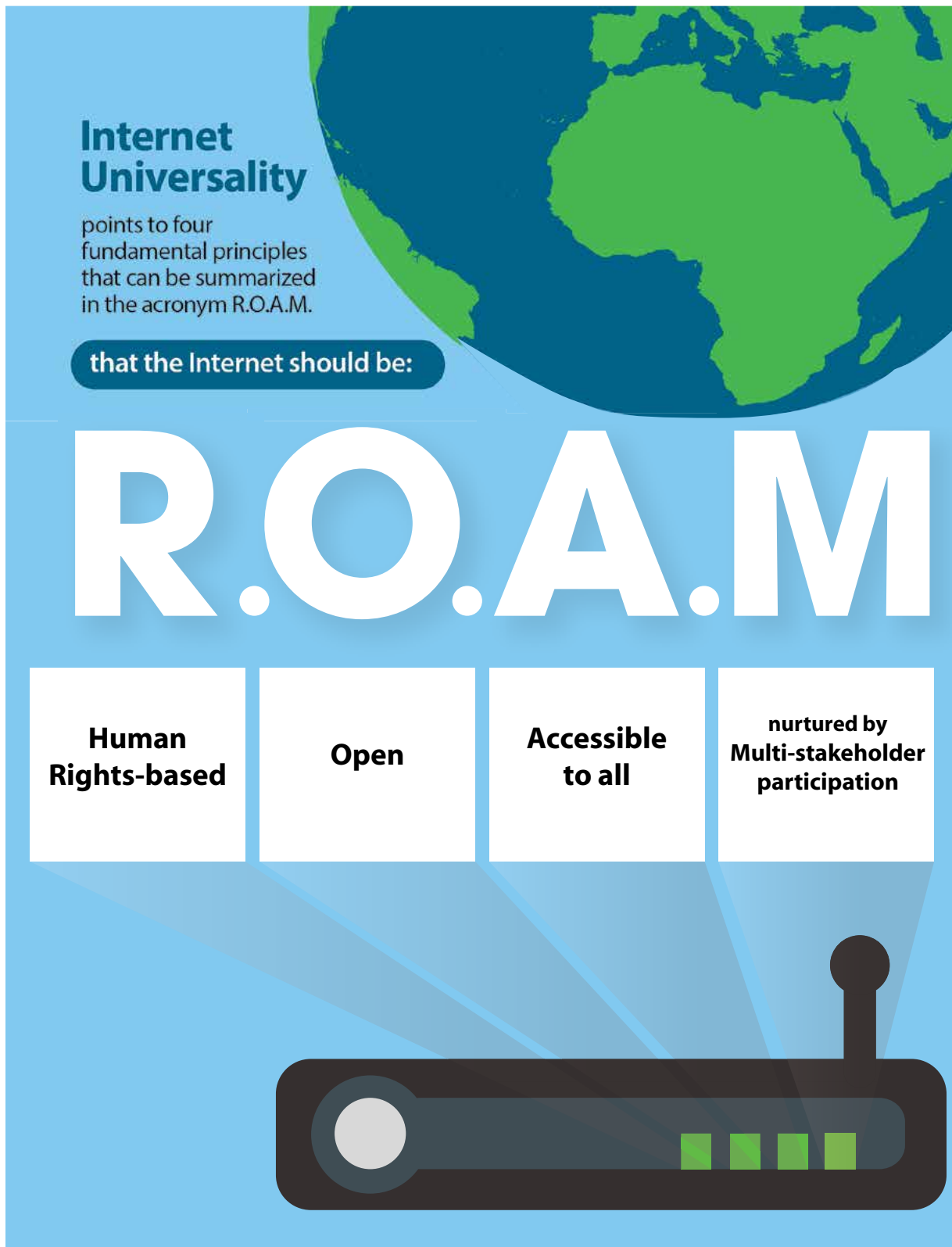
<sup>88</sup> FTI Consulting 2017.

<sup>89</sup> NETmundial 2014.

<sup>90</sup> UNESCO 2016b.

<sup>91</sup> Van der Spuy 2017. This study in the UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom analyses evolutions in the multi-stakeholder model of internet governance.

Figure 1-8: Internet Universality and the ROAM principles



digital world. In a study of 30 key initiatives aimed at establishing a bill of rights online during the period between 1999 and 2015, researchers at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center found that the right to freedom of expression online was protected in more documents (26) than any other right.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, UNESCO's study on *Principles for governing the Internet* found that freedom of expression was mentioned in 41 of the 52 documents studied.<sup>93</sup> These initiatives have been central to global efforts to establish consensus around rights, including media rights, online.

UNESCO's ROAM principles and other principles for internet governance have been debated globally through, among other forums, WSIS follow-up and the annual Internet Governance Forum (IGF). A major characteristic of the global efforts to realize internet universality has been the emphasis on multistakeholderism, broadening involvement in decision-making from States to include participation from civil society, the technical community and the private sector, as well as recognizing the role of the media.<sup>94</sup> The UN General Assembly committed itself to multistakeholderism in December 2015 through a resolution extending the WSIS process and IGF mandate for an additional decade.<sup>95</sup> It further underlined the importance of human rights and media-related issues such as the safety of journalists.

Growing support for the multistakeholder model was also observed in the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) stewardship

transition, in which oversight of the internet's addressing system shifted from a contract with the US Department of Commerce to a new private sector entity with new multi-stakeholder accountability mechanisms. Another result of the multistakeholder approach has been the *Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations*,<sup>96</sup> the updated and considerably expanded second edition of the 2013 *Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare*.<sup>97</sup> The annual conferences linked to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and meetings of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, mandated by the UN General Assembly, have deliberated on norms such as protection of critical infrastructure and the application of international law to cyberspace. All this provides important context, as developments in cybersecurity laws increasingly affect media freedom.

The extensive debate on these governance issues at the international level has also occurred at the regional level, though unevenly. In the period 2012-2016, the African Union passed the Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection<sup>98</sup> and the Commonwealth Secretariat adopted the Report of the Working Group of Experts on Cybercrime.<sup>99</sup> The passage of a convention by the African Union opened the way for a number of countries in the region to pass or to discuss their own data protection, cybercrime, and cyber security bills.

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<sup>92</sup> Gill, Redeker, and Gasser 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Weber 2015. This study in the UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom encompasses both quantitative and qualitative assessments of more than 50 declarations, guidelines, and frameworks.

<sup>94</sup> van der Spuy 2017.

<sup>95</sup> UN General Assembly 2015a.

<sup>96</sup> Schmitt 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Schmitt 2013.

<sup>98</sup> African Union 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat 2014.

Some of these are well crafted and include the introduction of data protection authorities, user notification requirements and reasonable data retention periods. However, many contain vague restrictions that could be used to curtail media freedom. By contrast, other countries, particularly in Latin America, have pushed forward rights-respecting internet-related legislation, including provisions on such things as the amount of data a company can retain on its users, judicial review of takedown requests for illegal content and a commitment to the principles of net neutrality.

## Gender equality and media freedom

The freedom to participate in media, the rights of expression, and access to and production of media content are all issues that can be fully understood only by considering their gender equality dimensions. These issues often overlap, and they have been compounded by the growing complexity of the digital sphere. Across all these issues, women do not enjoy full equality with men, nor do they have their work valued to the same extent as men. In many newsrooms around the world, there continues to be a culture that makes it difficult for women to progress. In such workplaces, harassment is common, and a lack of monitoring means that even with gender equality policies in place, they are often ineffective in challenging gender discrimination [see TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM].

A related challenge has been the absence of women's voices as an issue in media freedom, including in internet governance policymaking more generally. This ongoing issue appears to have stagnated in recent years. The IGF Dynamic Coalition on Gender and Internet Governance, which pushes for recognition of the gendered issues relating to internet governance, reports that although women's participation at the 2015 IGF reached close to parity, women were still underrepresented in discussion and debates: only 37 per cent of panellists were women, a decline from 40 per cent the previous year.<sup>100</sup> In other organizations, such as the Internet Association for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), senior leadership positions remain largely dominated by men. As of 2017, ICANN's Board of Directors consisted of four women and 16 men. Minimizing the divide between the number of women and men in senior decision-making roles in relation to internet governance is an important step to ensuring that gender-based issues relating to access, privacy and security are prioritized.<sup>101</sup> In the face of prevailing inequality, civil society continues to be a positive force for progress. Other organizations are working to push for greater representation and key standard-setting bodies, such as the Gender and Internet Governance eXchange, initiated by the Association for Progressive Communications, which aims to redress the gap in participation by women's and sexual rights' activists in internet governance policy processes. Challenges remain to ensure that gender-based issues are both recognized and incorporated into future policies relating to media freedom (for information on UNESCO's

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<sup>100</sup> Gender Dynamic Coalition and APC 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Kovacs et al. 2012.

work to enhance gender equality in media, [see TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM: GENDER EQUALITY AND MEDIA PLURALISM].

Although there has been increased recognition of the importance of freedom of information, little emphasis has been placed on ensuring women have equal access to it. Social barriers such as illiteracy and lack of digital empowerment have created stark inequalities in navigating the tools used for access to information, often exacerbating lack of awareness of issues that directly relate to women and gender, such as sexual health. There have also been examples of other more extreme measures, such as local community authorities banning or restricting mobile phone use for girls and unmarried women in their communities.<sup>102</sup>

A number of States, including some that have introduced new laws in the last five years, notably censor voices from and content related to the LGBTQI community, posing serious consequences to access to information about sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>103</sup> Digital platforms, too, can play a powerful role in limiting access to certain content, such as YouTube's 2017 decision to classify non-explicit videos with LGBTQ themes as 'restricted', a classification designed to filter out 'potentially inappropriate content'.<sup>104</sup>

Gendered aspects of media freedom intersect heavily with journalists' safety. Women journalists face unique concerns, such as personal safety when dealing with confidential sources, which can restrict their freedom of expression and add challenges that can hamper their ability to carry

out their work effectively [see TRENDS IN THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS]. Another dimension is the manifestation of physical violence as virtual violence through the increased incidence of hate speech and abuse directed towards women and the LGBTQI community. Such abuse has had a chilling effect and disrupted the online participation of these communities. How to counter the proliferation of such abuse has proved a serious challenge for policy-makers wanting to minimize the harm directed towards vulnerable groups. To mark International Women's Day in 2017, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression noted the challenges for governments, corporate bodies and civil society organizations to address such abuses while remaining attentive to international human rights law. He counselled against censorship and undue restrictions on freedom of expression as a means of curbing online abuse, warning that such restrictions could 'end up undermining the rights of the very women for whom governments and corporate actors may seek to provide redress'.<sup>105</sup>

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Although there has been increased recognition of the importance of freedom of information, little emphasis has been placed on ensuring women have equal access to it.

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<sup>102</sup> Kovacs 2017.

<sup>103</sup> York 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Hunt 2017.

<sup>105</sup> OHCHR 2017.

# Conclusion

Since 2012, there have been a number of clear shifts in media freedom, many of which are a result of political and social trends and the vast changes associated with new technologies. However, technological advancements do not progress uniformly; such advancements often spread unevenly across regions, across gender, and across digital and other divides. New technologies can become technologies of freedom as well as potential instruments of surveillance and even coercion. In the period covered by this Report, the right to seek and receive information has

improved, but the right to impart has faced new curbs. Freedom of information and open data activities have expanded, but conditions for journalists, including protection of sources and protection against various forms of harassment, intimidation and exclusion have declined. Wholesale disruptions (like internet shutdowns) have become much more common. 'Fake news' has emerged as a phenomenon in some regions undermining media legitimacy with a consequent challenge for appropriate and proportionate government responses that do not weaken media freedom [see TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM]. Gender gaps in journalism and law continue to affect the implementation of full media freedom.





A number of economic, political, and environmental trends over the last five years have also significantly, if unevenly, affected media freedom. Since the publication of the first Report on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, the power of private internet platforms and social media companies to influence media freedom has increased dramatically. Violent conflict across the globe as well as terrorism cause threats that many States believe justify the curtailment of media freedom. In this context, emphases on sovereignty and calls for the defence of national security have proven powerful. National security has been invoked to weaken the protection of journalists, increase surveillance efforts and shut down newspapers and radio stations. In many countries around the world, this has led to an often substantial narrowing of the freedom that new technologies can permit. This comes on top of pre-existing defamation and blasphemy laws.

Media freedom, as designating the liberty for all actors to use media platforms for public expression, is intertwined with capacity to enrich and deepen the multiplicity of cultures. The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the 2011 Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression each recognized the need of different societies to protect and promote their constitutive values while encouraging open debates and free expression, and on the basis of respect for human rights.<sup>106</sup> The challenge of achieving this harmony—finding and keeping constitutive values in a dynamic global exchange of information and ideas—was omnipresent during the period of this study.

As with other considerations, in a multicultural world, any limitations on media freedom should be framed within the wider norms of universal human rights and the principle of non-discrimination.

In 2017, the International Publishers Association adopted a manifesto on freedom to publish. The manifesto proclaimed that, ‘Publishing is a powerful mechanism by which humanity has for centuries circulated works of the mind, information, ideas, beliefs and opinions.’<sup>107</sup> Publishing has been greatly democratized, and now individuals across the world are able to generate content, often without gatekeepers to filter or edit their work.<sup>108</sup> As barriers to entry into publishing have fallen, the structure of diffusion of information has transformed beyond recognition, and with it, there is a challenge to the way societies approach media and media freedom. Advances in media freedom depend on the continued vitality of a long-standing public and institutional commitment to international norms such as those embodied in Article 19 of the ICCPR and similar documents. As changes in technology continue to broaden and internet companies gain increasing influence, the commitment to this norm will require continued attention.

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<sup>106</sup> UNESCO 2005, vol. CLT-2005; La Rue 2011.

<sup>107</sup> International Publishers Association (IPA) 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Ayish and Mellor 2015.

# Trends in Media pluralism

Percentage of individuals with access to the internet\*



NEARLY HALF THE WORLD'S POPULATION now has access to the internet



THE AVAILABILITY OF MEDIA CONTENT has dramatically increased, largely through sharing and user-generated content on social media



RATING

THE PRACTICE OF 'ZERO-RATING' has increased pluralism in terms of access, but it has raised concerns about limiting net neutrality



新闻业在世界各地受到抨击，虽然如今比以往任何时候都有更多的人能够获取新闻资讯，但在政治分化和技术变革这两股潮流的冲击之下，仇恨言论、仇视女性和未经证实的“假新闻”得以快速传播，而这往往导致表达自由受到过度压制。在越来越多的国家，记者面临着人身攻击和语言攻击，他们向公众报道新闻和传递消息的能力由

## EXPANDED ACCESS

**NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION\*\*\***  
has fallen in all regions,  
except in Asia and the Pacific



**WOMEN REMAIN UNDERREPRESENTED  
IN MEDIA\*\***, making up only:



**1 IN 4 MEDIA DECISION-MAKERS**



**1 IN 3 REPORTERS**



**1 IN 5 EXPERTS INTERVIEWED**



**ALGORITHM-RANKED** search results  
and social media news feeds have  
contributed to the creation of **'echo  
chambers'** and **'filter bubbles'**, where  
people reinforce their beliefs rather than  
dialogue across differences

**NARROWED CHOICE**





# Trends in Media Pluralism

## Overview

Since the first *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* Report, transformations related to media pluralism have been dramatic, highlighting a series of contradictory trends that are affecting media systems and the experience of media users worldwide. Trends here cover pluralism at the level of access, economic models, content diversity and gender in media.

Access to a plurality of media has continued to grow, thanks to greatly expanded access to the internet and the digital switchover. This has enabled an increased availability of media content, largely through sharing and user-generated content on social media, in addition to the multiplied number of digital channels to which individuals have access across television and radio. Yet this greater diversity of content has been accompanied by a prominent trend, prevalent across the globe, but differently articulated in each region, of a new form of polarized pluralism.<sup>1</sup> The interaction between consumption habits, changing economic models and technical systems is leading to sharper divisions in terms of use of media. Multiple kinds of information and programming are available, but each segmented group may only ingest one branch of the whole.

In regions where internet penetration and the reliance on online sources for news is the highest, filters and algorithms based on users' past choices risk producing increasingly siloed debates. In other regions, such as the Arab States and Africa, broadcasting has represented a more central element of this trend towards polarization, especially in countries where liberalization has led to increased sectarianism and capture of the media by competing political actors.

Some elements of this fragmentation have also occurred at the infrastructural level. The trend of expanded mobile uptake has often taken place through 'zero rating'—in which internet or mobile service providers allow users to access specific content or applications without counting towards the user's data 'cap'—particularly in emerging economies.

Traditional business models for the news media continue to be disrupted, leading to vertical and horizontal concentration and introduction of new types of cross ownership. The ongoing challenges to media funding have led many news media outlets to experiment with new economic models, such as the introduction of pay-walls and crowd-funding initiatives, with mixed results.

Pluralism continues to be diluted by the ongoing underrepresentation of women in both the media workforce, particularly in decision-making roles, and in media content. Women still face significant barriers in terms of career progression. In response, civil society has intensified its efforts to diversify the media and counteract the endemic marginalization of women, notably through the UNESCO-initiated Global Alliance for Media and Gender and by applying the Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media.

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<sup>1</sup> The term was first applied to media systems in Hallin and Mancini 2004.

# Understanding media pluralism

A critical element of freedom of expression and media development, pluralism means choice for media consumption and production, as distinct from monopolization of offerings and opportunities. Pluralism requires sensitivity to a variety of economic ownership models and a technical architecture of delivery in which multichannel and multi-platform distribution is available. Pluralism often requires strong commitments on behalf of governments to public service and community media to provide for diversity.

To date, most debates on media pluralism have focused on ‘provision’ or ‘supply’ of media content and the impact of information that is available in a society.<sup>2</sup> Evaluations of media pluralism have commonly explored the number of media outlets available; how comprehensively media outlets represent different groups and interests in society; and who owns or is able to influence the media. This study examines these important dimensions. In addition, the explosion of access to media through the internet, the increasingly common practice for users to consume information across a variety of platforms, and the rise of algorithmic profiling bring to the fore questions about users and how they access—or are shielded from accessing—a plurality of sources. The chapter thus analyses continuing trends that have affected and continue to affect pluralism—such as concentration of ownership and the balance between state-led and private-led provision of information—and emerging trends, which require

new conceptual tools to understand whether the abundance of information and presence of new media platforms in fact reflects and serves the principles of media pluralism.

The following sections assess trends in media pluralism in terms of access to a range of media, the production and availability of diversity of content on each media platform and across platforms, and in terms of plurality of economic models and multiplicity of owners and media types, all of which structure the consumption and production of information. The chapter concludes with an examination of gender equality in the media workforce, decision-making roles and representation, all critical components of a pluralistic media environment.

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**Pluralism often requires strong commitments on behalf of governments to public service and community media to provide for diversity.**

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<sup>2</sup> Jakubowicz 2015.

## Box 2-1: UNESCO's work to promote media pluralism

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:

### 1 Empowerment of key institutions and fostering capacity building

State and private broadcasters have been trained throughout the Arab region and French-speaking Africa on Gender Sensitive Indicators for the Media (GSIM) and the development of follow-up action plans.

Local radio stations in seven African countries have received capacity building on the use of ICTs, gender focus, journalistic standards and investigative journalism.

A gender-responsive film sector is being enhanced in the South Mediterranean region.

37 youth organizations have been trained to integrate Media Information Literacy (MIL) in their organizational policies and operations.

Over 1,000 young people are engaged in MIL through social media innovation—MIL-CLICKS (Critical-thinking, Creativity, Literacy, Intercultural, Citizenship, Knowledge and Sustainability), Massively Open Online MIL Courses, and related face-to-face training workshops.

### 2 Policy Frameworks and Guidelines

UNESCO hosted a global conference on Community Media Sustainability Policy (2015) and has adopted recommendations into a concrete set of policy briefs (2016).

Media regulatory bodies are supported in implementing policies that support the community media sector, with consultative processes ongoing in a number of countries.

A code of ethics and constitution were supported for both the Global Alliance on Media & Gender (GAMAG) and International University Network (UNITWIN) Network on Gender, Media & ICTs.

MIL Policy & Strategy Guidelines have been developed for adaptation by Member States at the national level, and six countries implemented the MIL Assessment Framework.

Five national consultations have been held on the articulation of MIL policies and strategies, and the MIL Curriculum was piloted in training institutions and in education modules for teachers.

### 3 Enhanced awareness raising of media, citizens and other stakeholders

World Radio Day (13 February) continues to serve as an annual occasion for advocacy of media pluralism, diversity and sustainability of community media.

Global MIL Week was organized annually, including with the theme 'Media and Information Literacy in Critical Times: Re-imagining Ways of Learning and Information Environments' in 2017.

The annual celebration of Women Make The News campaign promotes gender equality in media

### 4 Academic research and practical guides are produced to reinforce quality information within media pluralism

*Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists*

*Climate Change in Africa: A Guidebook for Journalists*

*Media and Information Literacy: Reinforcing Human Rights, Countering Radicalization and Extremism*

# Access

Access to a variety of media increased between 2012 and 2016. Despite notable differences across regions, this growth has corresponded to significant changes in how users combine old and new media for accessing news and entertainment. The internet has registered the highest growth in users, especially in those regions that have historically lagged behind, supported by massive investments in infrastructure and significant uptake in mobile usage. Television, however, continues to be the most popular medium, even if online media platforms have significantly eroded its prominence. Consumption of radio and newspapers has been the most significantly adversely affected platform by these trends.

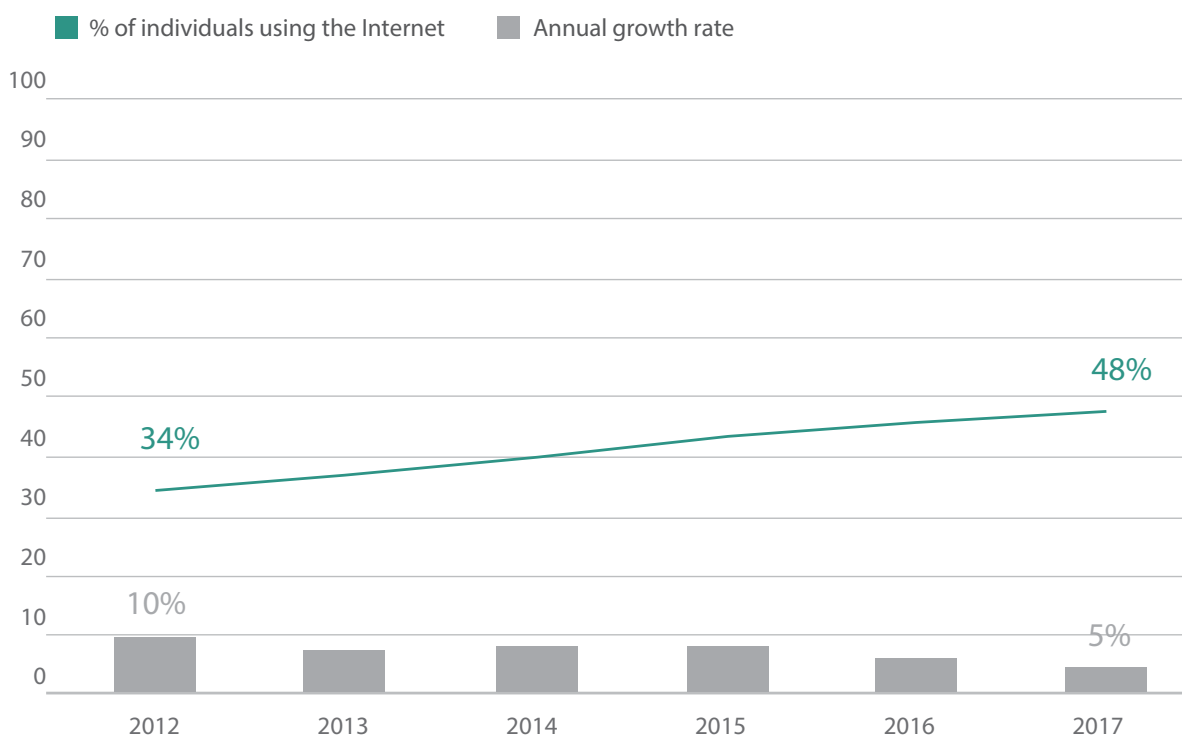
Consumption of journalism—whether the form is audio, audio-visual, text or image—is increasingly taking place through internet platforms.

## Internet and mobile

The past five years have seen increased international commitments towards providing internet access for all. Most prominently are the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the work of the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, co-chaired by UNESCO, and the Internet Governance Forum’s inter-sessional work on ‘Connecting the Next Billion’.

Access to the internet has steadily increased in the period covered by the study (see Figure 2-1), particularly in those areas that have historically

**Figure 2-1: Percentage of individuals using the internet, 2012-2017**



**Source:** International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2017. ‘Key ICT indicators for developed and developing countries and the world (totals and penetration rates): World Telecommunication/ICT Indicators Database. [www.itu.int:80/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/publications/wtid.aspx](http://www.itu.int:80/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/publications/wtid.aspx)



lacked access. The docking of six undersea cables in East and West Africa (Seacom, Teams, Eassy, Main One, ACE, and WACS) between 2009 and 2012, for example, has had dramatic effects on the availability and affordability of internet connections in the years covered by this study. Africa has been the continent with the highest growth of internet users.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), by the end of 2017, an estimated 48 per cent of individuals regularly connect to the internet, up from 34 per cent in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Despite the significant increase in absolute numbers, however, in the same period the annual growth rate of internet users has slowed down, with five per cent annual growth in 2017, dropping from a 10 per cent growth rate in 2012 (see Figure 2-1).

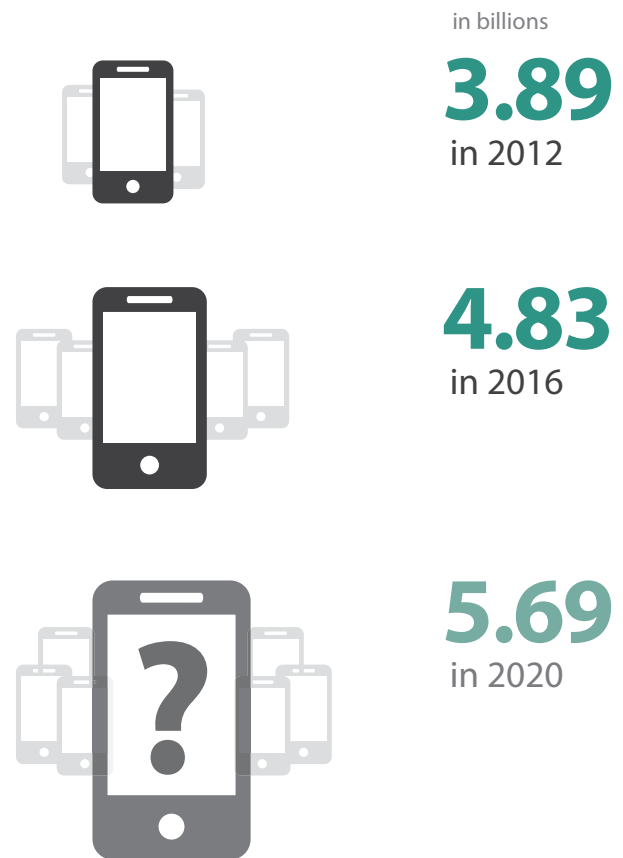
This decline in growth can be traced back to the very limited increase registered in Western Europe and North America, and a less dramatic, but relatively widespread decline in all other regions.

Mobile internet connectivity has played an important role in expanding access in recent years (see Figure 2-2), especially in Asia and the Pacific and in Africa. The number of unique mobile cellular subscriptions increased from 3.89 billion in 2012 to 4.83 billion in 2016, two-thirds of the world's population, with more than half of subscriptions located in Asia and the Pacific. The number of subscriptions is predicted to rise to 5.69 billion users in 2020.<sup>4</sup> As of 2016, almost 60 per cent of the world's population had access to a 4G broadband cellular network, up from almost 50 per cent in 2015 and 11 per cent in 2012.<sup>5</sup>

Increased access enhances media pluralism, but mobile connectivity also presents some unique challenges. Access to information mediated by

mobile applications tends to offer a significantly different experience when compared to the access via computers and open browsers. While the open web affords explorations beyond a user's immediate range of interests, mobile applications tend to create siloed information spaces, predisposing mobile users to access only a limited portion of the available information.

**Figure 2-2: Number of mobile cellular subscriptions, 2012-2016**



**Source:** GSMA, 2017. The Mobile Economy 2017.

<sup>3</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 2017a.

<sup>4</sup> GSMA 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

The limits that users face on accessing information via mobile applications coincide with a broader process of fragmentation of the internet, which has accelerated in the years covered by this study, led both by commercial and political forces. Fragmentation restricts access to media content and tends to affect poorest users the most. While the popular conception of the internet has traditionally corresponded to one network able to connect individuals and facilitating the circulation of content irrespective of national boundaries or the devices used to connect, so-called ‘walled gardens’ have emerged across the globe.

Zero-rating, the practice of internet providers allowing users free connectivity to access specific content or applications for free, has offered some opportunities for individuals to surmount economic hurdles, but has also been accused by its critics as creating a ‘two-tiered’ internet. Zero-rated data is not counted towards users’ data ‘cap’, creating incentives for them to access certain news and entertainment. However, it is not the users but the content providers (e.g. Facebook) and mobile carriers (e.g. Vodafone) that decide which type of information is free of connectivity charge. Zero-rating illustrates the complexity of measuring media pluralism today; zero-rating can expand pluralism in terms of access while also reducing pluralism in terms of choice, although selected destinations such as Facebook and Wikipedia are not per se closed-off environments.

To address the issues with zero-rating, an alternative model has emerged in the concept of ‘equal rating’ and is being tested in experiments by Mozilla and Orange in Africa. Equal rating prevents prioritisation of one type of content and

zero-rates all content up to a specified data cap. However, these are not commercial offerings yet and have only nominal presence in the region. Comprehensive data on zero-rating is lacking, but in the years covered by this study, the service has become available in most countries where internet penetration has been historically limited as internet companies seek to enter emerging markets. In a study published by Chatham House, 15 out of 19 countries researched in Latin America had some kind of hybrid or zero-rated product offered. Some countries in the region had a handful of plans to choose from (across all mobile network operators) while others, such as Colombia, offered as many as 30 pre-paid and 34 post-paid plans.<sup>6</sup>

A study of eight countries in the Global South found that zero-rated data plans exist in every country, although there is a great range in the frequency with which they are offered and actually used in each.<sup>7</sup> Across the 181 plans examined, 13 per cent were offering zero-rated services. Another study, covering Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, found Facebook’s Free Basics and Wikipedia Zero to be the most commonly zero-rated content.<sup>8</sup>

If zero-rating illustrates the commercial trends at play in restricting and expanding access to online media, it continues to be the case that political factors, including censorship and surveillance, remain significant in understanding pluralism in many parts of the globe. Political interventions have caused dramatically different experiences for users accessing the internet in different States. The range of state intervention in this area is vast, including much that exceeds international

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<sup>6</sup> Galpaya 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) 2015. The study looked at the top three to five carriers by market share in Bangladesh, Colombia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Peru and Philippines.

<sup>8</sup> Gillwald et al. 2016.

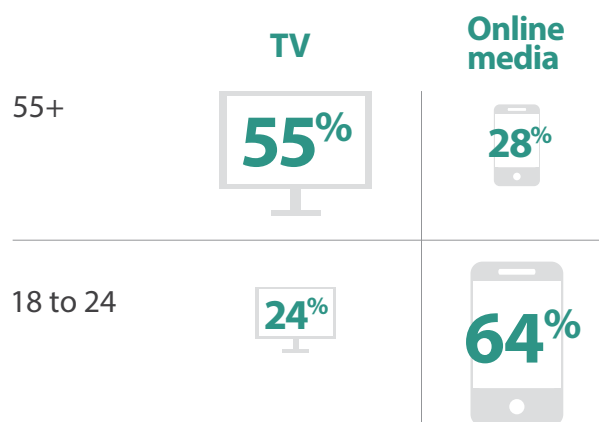
standards on legitimate limitations on expression. Measures include censorship of content that is considered destabilizing by governments and company interventions linked to their terms of service and legal obligations, such as content removals aimed at protecting individuals' dignity through the so-called 'right to be forgotten' [see TRENDS IN MEDIA FREEDOM].

### Broadcast media

In Western Europe and North America, the primacy of television as a main source of information is being challenged by the internet, while in other regions, such as Africa, television is gaining greater audience share than radio, which has historically been the most widely accessed media platform.

Along with geographical variations, age plays a profound role in determining the balance between radio, television and the internet as the leading source of news. According to the 2017 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, in 36 countries and territories surveyed, 51 per cent of adults 55 years and older consider television as their main news source, compared to only 24 per cent of respondents between 18 and 24 (see Figure 2-3).<sup>9</sup> The pattern is reversed when it comes to online media, chosen by 64 per cent of users between 18 and 24 as their primary source, but only by 28 per cent of users 55 and older. In the same 34 countries covered by the study, variations seem much smaller for radio, which is the primary medium for only four per cent of the youngest group of respondents, and for seven per cent among the oldest. This age differentiation may have significance for media going ahead,

**Figure 2-3: Main source of news by age**



**Source:** Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D.A.L., Nielsen, R.K., 2017. Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Oxford.

with potential correlations to aging societies and those with predominantly young populations. The shift towards online media as a leading source of information beyond those countries in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report is also occurring in other areas of the globe. According to the Arab Youth Survey, in 2016, 45 per cent of the young people interviewed considered social media as a major source of news.<sup>10</sup> Television, however, continued to be the most important channel for receiving news, including among younger audiences, regularly accessed by 63 per cent of respondents.

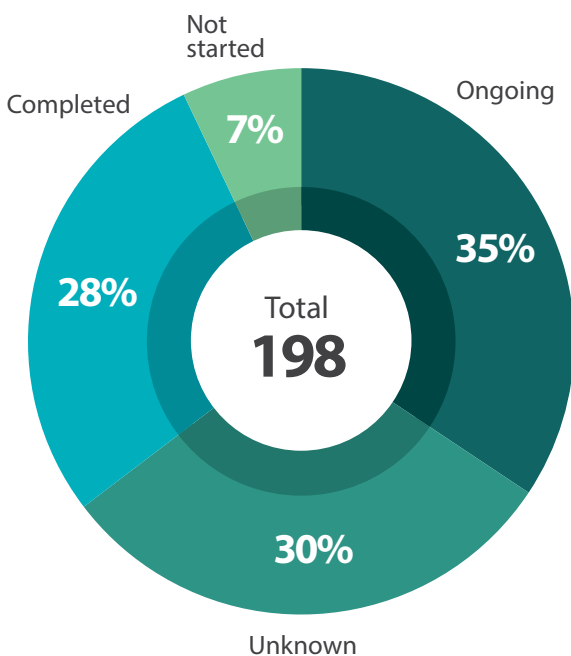
The switch from analogue to digital television has been uneven across the globe, but it is steadily increasing the range of channels to which individuals have access. According to the ITU, which has been mapping progress in digital

<sup>9</sup> Newman et al. 2017. The report covers 34 UNESCO Member States, principally located in Western Europe and North America, but also in Central and Eastern Europe, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean.

<sup>10</sup> ASDA/A Burson-Marsteller 2016.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

**Figure 2-4: Status of the transition to Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting**



**Source:** International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2017. Status of the transition to Digital Terrestrial Television Broadcasting: Figures. ITU Telecommunication Development Sector. [itu.int/en/ITU-D/Spectrum-Broadcasting/Pages/DSO/figures.aspx](http://itu.int/en/ITU-D/Spectrum-Broadcasting/Pages/DSO/figures.aspx)

switchover across the globe, in 2017 the process had been completed in 56 countries, and was ongoing in 68 (see Figure 2-4).<sup>11</sup>

Also expanding access to content are changes in usage patterns with non-linear viewing, as online streaming is becoming an important component of users' experience. Since expanding its global service to 130 new countries in January 2016, Netflix experienced a surge in subscribers, surpassing 100 million subscribers in the second quarter of 2017, up from 40 million in 2012. The audience has also become more diverse with 47 per cent of users based outside of the USA, where the company began in 1997.<sup>12</sup>

Satellite television has continued to add global or transnational alternatives to national viewing options for many audiences. Global news providers such as the BBC, Al Jazeera, Agence France-Presse, RT (formerly Russia Today) and the Spanish-language Agencia EFE, have used the internet and satellite television to better reach audiences across borders and have added specialist broadcasts to target specific foreign audiences. Reflecting a more outward looking orientation, China Global Television Network (CGTN), the multi-language and multi-channel grouping owned and operated by China Central Television, changed its name from CCTV-NEWS in January 2017. After years of budget cuts and shrinking global operations, in 2016 BBC announced the launch of 12 new language services (in Afaan Oromo, Amharic, Gujarati, Igbo, Korean, Marathi, Pidgin, Punjabi, Telugu, Tigrinya, and Yoruba), branded as a component of its biggest expansion 'since the 1940s'.<sup>13</sup>

Some international and foreign broadcasting companies have tended to reflect the interests of their respective governments or national interests and perspectives, while others have maintained a greater degree of independence.

The growing reach of state-owned global news broadcasters has also been influenced by unique regional dynamics. Overall, the greater attention given to the broadcast audiences in the Gulf has outpaced the rest of the Arabic-speaking world. Geopolitical interests are seen to have largely determined the launching of Arabic-language channels, although commercial considerations are not wholly absent.

<sup>11</sup> International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 2017b.

<sup>12</sup> Huddleston 2017.

<sup>13</sup> BBC 2016.

## Newspaper industry

The press has continued to be the sector most radically disrupted by digital media. The internet has challenged the press as an alternative source of information and opinion but has also provided a new platform for newspaper organizations to reach new audiences. Between 2012 and 2016, print newspaper circulation continued to fall in almost all regions, with the exception of Asia and the Pacific, where the dramatic increase in sales in a few select countries has offset falls in historically strong Asian markets such as Japan and the Republic of Korea. Most notably, between 2012 and 2016, India's print circulation grew by 89 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

Print media have also continued to be affected by changing trends in advertising, with its share of total news media revenues globally dropping below 50 per cent for the first time in 2012, and continuing to fall to 38 per cent in 2016. As many newspapers make the transition to online platforms, revenues from digital subscriptions and digital advertising have been growing significantly. However, how to capture more of this growth remains a pressing challenge for newspapers.<sup>15</sup> The challenges that print media face in attracting advertising have also led to the massive decline in circulation of 'free dailies', which were a fast-growing segment in the early 2000s, but have been the most affected by the competition with other media. The number of free dailies has dramatically fallen in all regions.

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<sup>14</sup> Campbell 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Economic models

Media systems are built from a variety of economic models including mixes of market, public service, community and state entities. A plurality of media owners and economic models serves as an essential element of external pluralism, guaranteed by competition in the market. Non-profit public service and community media can help achieve internal pluralism by incorporating social and cultural diversity in the content they produce. Community media, drawing especially on volunteers, can be a unique source of local dialogue and information exchange. Where state-owned and government-controlled media predominate, the media pluralism available is correspondingly curtailed.

Some central components of traditional models of ownership and revenue, however, have been disrupted in the past five years. The opening up to private ownership in Africa, the Arab region and elsewhere, for example, has positively reduced state monopoly control over information, but leading also in some cases to what has been seen as increased sectarianism and a proliferation of media that are privately owned, yet which maintain close ties with politics. In Western Europe and North America, print media, while seeking to extend their digital footprint, have been unable to reap the benefits of digital advertising, which has become increasingly concentrated in media outlets in the hands of few market leaders.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

This disruption has happened in parallel with the emergence of new economic models, based frequently on the streaming of information and entertainment over the internet, but also on financial contributions from 'backers'. While these opportunities are resulting in the diversification of economic models, the erosion of the sources of revenue for public service broadcasting and for quality newspapers may have negative repercussions for media independence [See TRENDS IN MEDIA INDEPENDENCE]. The political will to fund genuine public service media seems on the decline.

### Pluralism in media ownership

The trend towards media privatization and the lessening of state dominance over media content has continued since 2012. In the Arab region, the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) counted 1,230 television stations broadcasting via Arab and international satellites, of which 133 were state-owned and 1,097 private.<sup>16</sup> According to the ASBU Report, these numbers serve as evidence of a decline in the percentage of state channels and a rise in national private and foreign public stations targeting the Arab region. The reduction of direct government ownership over the whole media sector is commonly registered as a positive trend, but this has paralleled by a growth in outlets with a sectarian agenda. In Africa, some private media outlets have maintained close ties to governments or individual politicians, while media houses owned by politically non-aligned individuals have struggled to survive, often in the face of advertising boycotts by state agencies.

In almost all regions, models of public service broadcasting have been struggling for funding. In Western, Central and Eastern Europe, funds directed to public service broadcasting have been stagnating or declining since 2012.<sup>17</sup>

In the Asia Pacific region, the process of controlled liberalization of the press has continued, with strong incentives towards establishing profitable models of state-owned but relatively independent papers. Cases of state-owned papers being the top-selling publications continue to be found in numerous countries in Africa and in the Arab regions, but their contents are generally seen to fall short of reflecting their society's plurality. In Central and Eastern Europe, vertical integration and concentration in mature markets has been accelerating. This trend is accompanied by a lack of transparency on ownership and a lack of institutional safeguards with regard to pluralism (e.g. monitoring of concentration and regulatory intervention). In Western Europe, limits to concentration have generally been set out in clearer terms, with exceptions in a few countries where media actors have been able to lobby governments to loosen norms and enforcement of the law.

New types of cross-ownership have emerged in the past five years that have spurred new questions about where to draw the line between media and other industries. A notable case has been the acquisition of the *Washington Post* by the founder of online retailer Amazon. While the move initially raised concerns about the newspaper's independence, the newspaper has significantly increased its standing in the online

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<sup>16</sup> Arab States Broadcasting Union 2015.

<sup>17</sup> European Broadcasting Union (EBU) 2015.

media—and print—and introduced significant innovations. Questions remain about the possible advantages Amazon can provide in terms of user profiling and data collection and whether this may require new measures to guarantee fair competition in the media market.

An alternative, the community-centred media ownership model continues to survive in some areas, especially in isolated, rural or disadvantaged areas, and mostly pertaining to radio. Through this model, not-for-profit media outlets are run and managed by the communities they serve, although few currently have community ownership in the literal sense of the word.

This type of model represents a ‘third way’ that improves upon some of the concerns pertaining to the economic and political interests behind other broadcasters, as outlined in a recent UNESCO policy series on Community Media Sustainability.<sup>18</sup> It also promotes greater diversity of on-air voices and strengthens coverage of local issues at a time when ‘one size fits all’ syndicated media content

is seemingly more prevalent. However, many community radio stations struggle with financial viability without the reliable sources of funding upon which other types of media can rely. Further support and improved national policies are critical in ensuring the future sustainability of these types of broadcasters.

### **Advertising, between old and new models**

Sources of media revenue have been changing significantly, posing challenges especially to traditional media. In the case of press subscriptions and sales, revenues have been relatively stable globally (as a result of growth in regions such as Asia Pacific and Africa offsetting declines in Western and Eastern Europe); however, revenues from advertisements in print have decreased dramatically by 27 per cent between 2012 and 2016.<sup>19</sup> In 2012, print advertising’s share of total news advertising revenue was 48 per cent, falling to 38 per cent by 2016.<sup>20</sup> Circulation of digital versions of traditional newspapers and digital

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO 2017d.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



## Trends in Media Pluralism

advertisements have grown significantly, but have not been sufficient to offset losses in print.

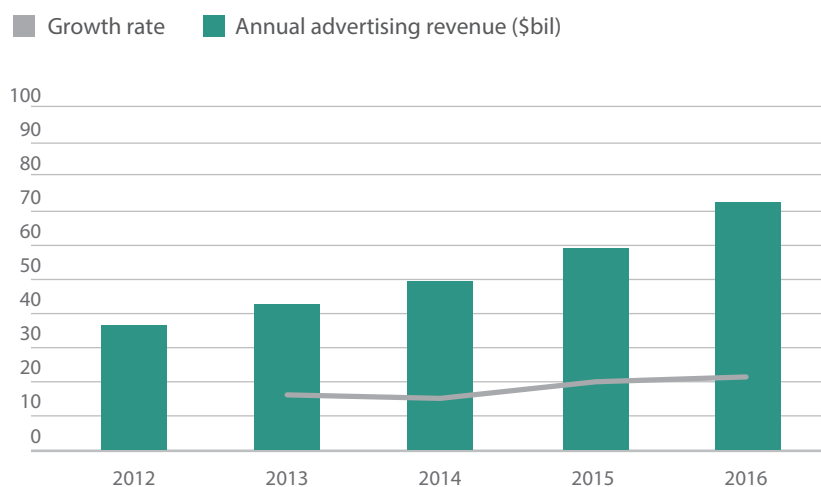
The challenge of maintaining advertising revenue while transitioning from print to digital has been significant, but new models have also emerged that are leaving legacy media struggling to reap the benefit of digital advertisements. As indicated below, after years of uncertainty about the profitability of digital advertising, the phenomenon has dramatically increased in recent years, doubling revenues between 2012 and 2016 (see Figure 2-5).<sup>21</sup>

This growth has unequally benefited different types of digital actors. Google and Facebook have benefited the most, capturing almost two-thirds of the market in many regions. Their leading positions as search engine and social networking providers and their ability to collect information

to develop complex user profiles have been unrivalled in helping advertisers reaching their targets. This dominant position, however, has been achieved often by relying on content produced by media companies which may or may not be financially rewarded, depending on whether a user decides to land on the original websites after having read a title and caption of a story or to continue browsing within the same application or social networking/search website.

With the rise of big data, media have been seen to lose the 'advertising subsidy' for journalistic content, through which 'private' advertising paid for 'public journalism'.<sup>22</sup> Before the targeted advertising that has emerged through profiling created through big data, advertisers were willing to pay premium prices to quality publications for placing their ads in front of their audience which, in turn, provided publications the resources to

**Figure 2-5: Internet advertising revenue, 2012-2016**



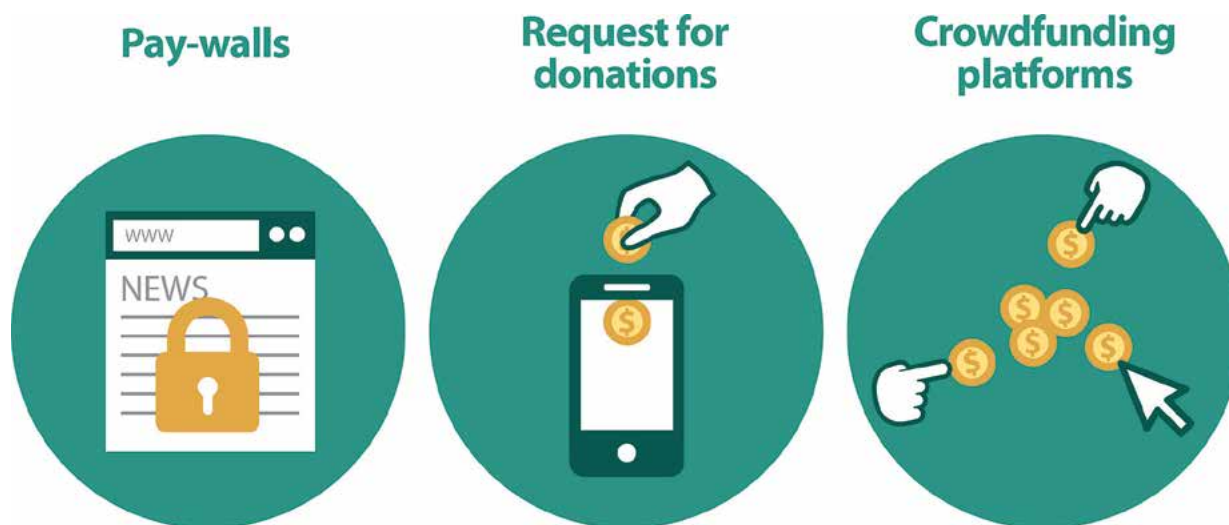
**Source:** PwC, 2017. IAB internet advertising revenue report 2016 full year results. Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB).

<sup>21</sup> PwC 2017. The trend captured by the study of the Internet Advertising Bureau is limited to the USA, where the largest multinational companies that are responsible for transformations in digital advertisement are headquartered.

<sup>22</sup> Harper 2016.



**Figure 2-6: Alternative media business models**



fund quality journalism. However, with the rise of big data, advertisers can instead find individual media consumers based upon big data analytics and place their ads in front of them regardless of the particular content they are consuming. This includes political advertising, which sometimes serves to bypass the significance of news in election contexts.<sup>23</sup>

### **New platforms and business models**

Alongside the disruptions that traditional segments of the information market have faced, new business models have emerged (see Figure 2-6). Some represent extensions or variations of existing schemes, such as pay-walls created by publications considered to be of particularly high quality or addressing a particular niche (e.g. the *New York Times* in the USA, or the *Mail & Guardian* in South Africa).

Others have borrowed strategies from other sectors, as illustrated by the *Guardian's* frequent requests to readers for donations to the paper in order to support its quality journalism, following Wikipedia's appeals to readers to financially support its free content.

Enthusiasm for crowdsourced journalism has increased. On Kickstarter, a crowdfunding platform launched in 2009 to support creative projects in various sectors, the number of crowdfunded journalism projects has increased significantly. While in 2012, 88 projects received funding through the platform, in 2015, the number of projects rose to 173, scattered across 60 countries (even if North America continues to register the majority of funded projects). The funds collected grew from \$1.1 million in 2012 to \$1.9 million in 2015.<sup>24</sup> These projects, however, represent a small portion of the news market, and have to

<sup>23</sup> Pariser 2011; Couldry and Turow 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Vogt and Mitchell 2016.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

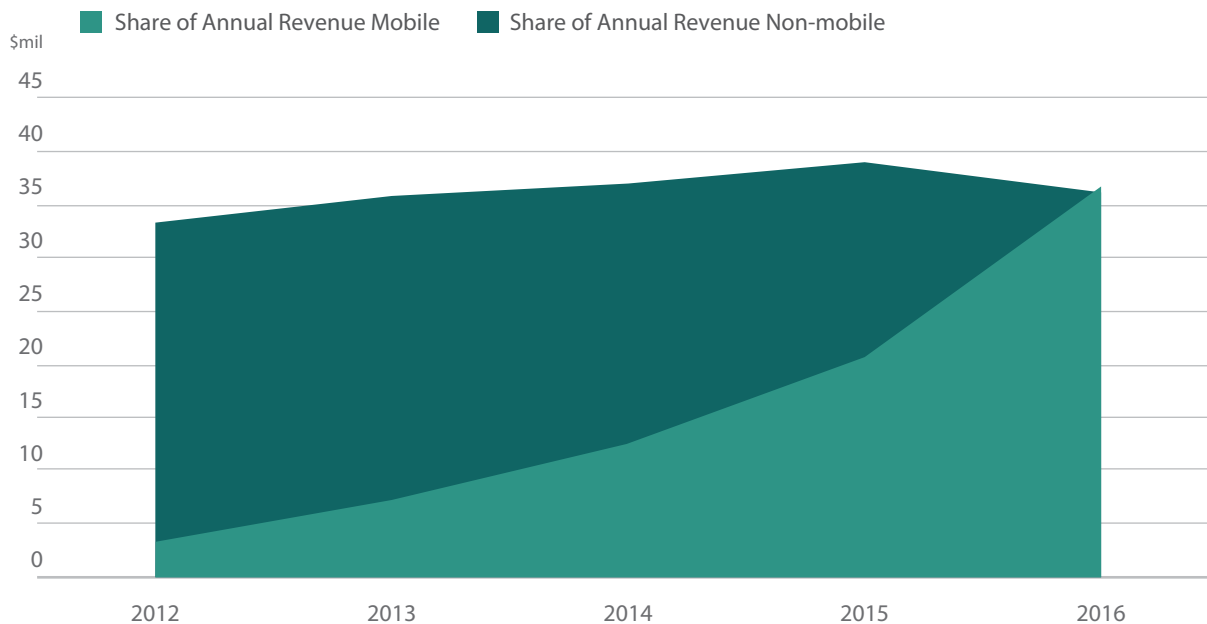
be considered in combination with the failures of similar initiatives. Spot.U.s, Contributoria, and Beacon all started to create or strengthen communities of like-minded individuals seeking to support and produce quality journalism but had all shut down by 2015.<sup>25</sup>

Other changes in economic models depend on larger structural reconfigurations of the market. As indicated earlier, the digital advertisement market has grown exponentially in the years covered by this study, but new trends have also changed its dynamic from within. As illustrated in Figure 2-7, while in 2012 advertising revenues from mobile represented a tiny portion of the market in the

USA, in 2016 they surpassed revenues from all other platforms.

A variety of media actors has also started testing new formats and technologies of journalism, experimenting with how virtual reality or gaming can facilitate immersive experiences of relatively distant events. In 2015 for example, the *New York Times* opened its Virtual Reality Lab, seeking to provide original perspectives on issues ranging from the war in Iraq, to the conflict in South Sudan, to the thinning of the ice cap in Antarctica. The VR app proved the most downloaded in the history of interactive applications launched by the paper.<sup>26</sup> Efforts to develop video games to

**Figure 2-7: Share of internet advertising revenue by platform, 2012-2016**



**Source:** PwC, 2017. IAB internet advertising revenue report 2016 full year results. Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB).

<sup>25</sup> DeJarnette 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Welsh 2015.

promote awareness of complex issues, from conflicts to famine, have continued in the years covered by this study, as illustrated for example by the communities gathering around initiatives such as Games for Social Change, and increasing attempts to involve students in programming and game development.<sup>27</sup> While these initiatives represent an additional contribution to enhancing pluralism, by offering users multiple avenues to engage with content, their economic sustainability continues to be a challenge, as most games or VR documentaries either rely on donations or on subsidies from large media houses, and have a limited capacity to generate sustained revenues.

## Content

In parallel with significant progress in access, the availability of media content has strongly increased since 2012. While this dimension of media pluralism is more difficult to assess quantitatively, evidence on the amount of data exchanged globally does exist. According to Cisco Systems, in 2016 an average of 96,000 petabytes was transferred monthly over the internet, more than twice as many as in 2012.<sup>28</sup> In 2016, the number of active websites surpassed 1 billion, up from approximately 700 million in 2012.<sup>29</sup> These figures, however, while making clear the trend towards the greater availability of information, risk obfuscating subtler transformations that have characterized content production across media platforms that are addressed below.

## User-generated content

Growth of content on the internet has been driven in large part by the increasing popularity of social networking platforms. Facebook has emerged as by far the most popular social media platform globally, reaching two billion daily active users in June 2017.<sup>30</sup> At the regional level, however, alternative platforms have been able to challenge Facebook's market dominance.<sup>31</sup> Twitter is the most popular social media platform in Japan, while Naver, a platform that offers news, video games and email, is the most visited online space in the Republic of Korea. In Africa, Instagram (owned by Facebook) and LinkedIn (owned by Microsoft) have gained increasing prominence. In the Russian Federation and in a number of Russian-speaking countries in Central and Eastern Europe, VKontakte (VK) and Odnoklassniki have dominated the social media scene. In China, where Facebook and Twitter are restricted, WeChat and QQ have established themselves as the leading platforms for social interaction, progressively adding new services for users.

Despite this variation, since the period covered by the first *World Trends Report*, social media use has become increasingly concentrated on a few platforms. Hi5, which used to be the most popular in a few countries in Latin America and in Asia, has lost its prominence to Facebook in both regions. In September 2014, Google shut down Orkut, once the most popular social networking platform in Brazil and India. Other platforms, however, have become increasingly

<sup>27</sup> Games for Social Change 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Cisco Systems 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Internet Live Stats 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Reuters 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Cosenza 2017.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

popular for some unique features they provide, most commonly for the added privacy they offer users through disappearing messages or end-to-end encryption (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat, Signal, and Telegram), but they have tended to occupy niches and to facilitate the exchanges of information that remain rather invisible to larger audiences. The possibilities offered to new entrants at the beginning of the evolution of the internet to challenge market leaders seem to have dramatically shrunk, while established players are consolidating their position, including through acquisitions of new services.

The production of freely accessible information has also registered a significant increase in the last five years. This trend can be witnessed in relation to Wikipedia. In January 2017, Wikipedia had more than 43 million articles, almost twice as many as in January 2012. This trend corresponded to a progressive diversification of content and increase in contributions in languages other than English. In 2017, less than 12 per cent of Wikipedia content was in English, down from 18 per cent in 2012.<sup>32</sup> However, as research on the production and editing of Wikipedia entries has shown, the increase in the availability and diversity of content has not radically changed the structures and processes for the production of knowledge. For example, while content on Africa has dramatically increased, a significant portion of this content has continued to be produced by contributors operating from North America and Europe, rather than from Africa itself.<sup>33</sup> The production of Wikipedia content is relevant to news media consumption habits, as users consult the crowd-sourced platform to provide context for news

items reported on television and radio with which they may not be immediately familiar.<sup>34</sup>

### Algorithms, echo chambers and polarization

Pluralism can serve as an end in itself, with the availability of a plurality of media institutions, outlets and views representing a symbol of a healthy communicative environment. Pluralism can also contribute to the promotion of informed national and global debates where a variety of voices can compete and co-exist.

This distinction is particularly relevant to analysing the paradox that has emerged with the increasing reliance on social networking platforms, apps, and search engines as gateways for accessing information: while information is becoming more diverse and easily available, many individuals seem less likely to access material that challenges their pre-existing views. According to the first understanding of pluralism highlighted above, the proliferation of online sources represents a vector leading to an increase in pluralism. According to the second, algorithms used by social networking platforms and search engines to provide users with a personalized experience based on their individual preferences represent a challenge to pluralism, restricting individuals' exposure to differing viewpoints and newsfeeds.

The images of 'echo-chambers' and 'filter-bubbles' have become common metaphors to describe this phenomenon. Algorithms are used to offer a service to users, responding to the excess of information occurring in a communicative

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<sup>32</sup> Wikimedia Foundation 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Graham, Straumann, and Hogan 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Geiß, Leidecker, and Roessing 2015.

environment where attention has become an increasingly scarce resource, but they also risk distorting the perception of reality. Algorithms present users with more sources of information that users have selected in the past, and with fewer that they have ignored or do not know about.

This process is similar to what has traditionally characterized content selection. In the case of print or broadcast media, for example, users, based on their tastes and leanings, and entrusted their favourite radio or newspaper to collect and analyse information, without necessarily seeking alternative channels that could challenge their worldview. What is distinctive in the case of ‘filter-bubbles’ in the age of the internet is how individual choices are influenced by algorithms whose functioning is hidden from users, combining individual preferences and computational bias. Over time, this combination risks building the artificial perception that a particular representation of reality or viewpoint is not only verifiable or persuasive, but is widely shared. The consequences of this type of media consumption gained attention especially following the 2016 referendum on membership of the European Union in the UK and the US presidential elections, when many confessed their surprise at results that seemed very distant from their expectations.

This paradox is deeply rooted in the new reality, and in the contradictions of ‘algorithmic pluralism’. In the past, when users assembled distinctive bouquets of media outlets for their news diet, it was easier for them to assess whether their radio stations or newspapers of choice belonged

to a niche or the mainstream, and whether or not the views embraced by those outlets were gaining or losing traction. As news sources now appear in similar formats on social networking platforms, connecting niche blogs, aggregators, and mainstream media, it becomes increasingly challenging to understand and weigh where information is coming from and where the tide of opinion is shifting. The range of pluralism is obscured by the personalized individualism of the services and the way it diminishes choice.

Research on echo chambers has also gained momentum, offering a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon and its variations in different contexts. While the majority of research has focused on Western Europe and North America, studies on the functioning and consequences of echo chambers in Asia-Pacific and Africa have also been conducted.<sup>35</sup> The evidence emerging from these studies suggests that use of social media and search engines tends to increase ideological distance among individuals, but there is no consensus on the magnitude of this phenomenon. Comparisons between online and off-line segregation have indicated how segregation tends to be higher in face-to-face interactions with neighbours, co-workers, or family members,<sup>36</sup> and reviews of existing research have indicated how available empirical evidence does not support the most pessimistic views about polarization.<sup>37</sup> A study conducted by researchers from Facebook and the University of Michigan, for example, has suggested that individuals’ own choices drive algorithmic filtering, limiting exposure to a range of content.<sup>38</sup> While algorithms may not be causing polarization,

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<sup>35</sup> Flaxman, Goel, and Rao 2016; Pariser 2011; Grömping 2014; Gagliardone et al. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Gentzkow and Shapiro 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. 2016.

<sup>38</sup> Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic 2015.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

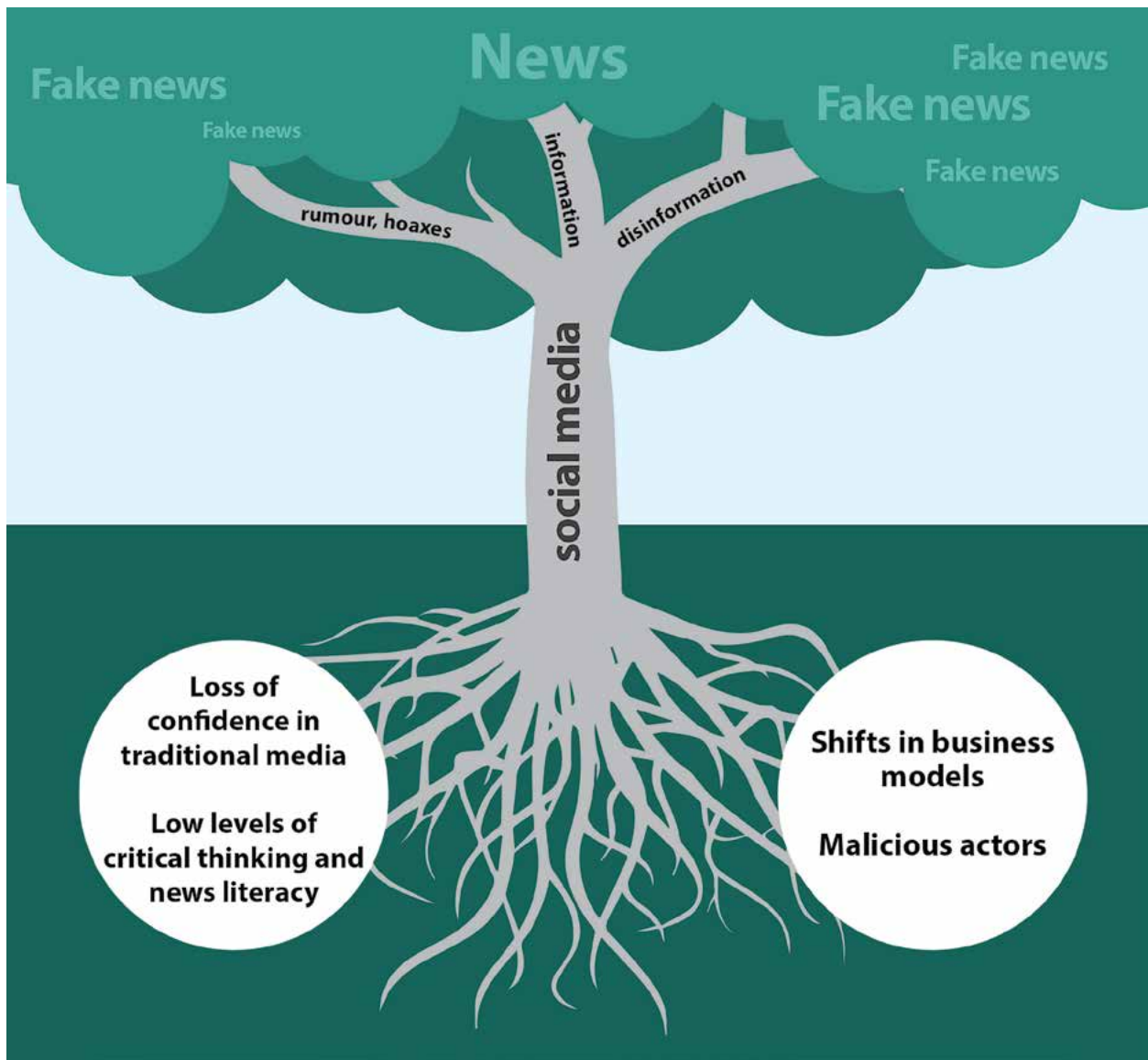
they could amplify it, representing a significant component of the new information landscape.<sup>39</sup>

### ‘Fake news’

The phenomenon of so-called ‘fake news’ gained attention in the aftermath of the unexpected outcomes of electoral contests in Western Europe and North America in 2016. ‘Fake news’ is not simply ‘false’ news. Its nature is determined by

fraudulent content in news format as well as by an ability to travel as much as, and in some cases, even more than, authentic news. As a recent analysis of the origin and proliferation of ‘fake news’ has suggested, it is when a deliberate lie ‘is picked up by dozens of other blogs, retransmitted by hundreds of websites, cross-posted over thousands of social media accounts and read by hundreds of thousands’ that it then effectively becomes ‘fake news.’<sup>40</sup> (see Figure 2-8)

Figure 2-8: The roots of ‘fake news’



<sup>39</sup> Hargittai 2015; Sandvig 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Bounegru et al. 2017.

The power of ‘fake news’ to masquerade as verified information and be shared widely, is closely connected to its ability to offer information conforming to and strengthening existing beliefs among a community of like-minded individuals.<sup>41</sup> It also rides on more transformations that have affected information online: online business models and the nature of trust.

First, the business model pursued by social networking platforms and search engines encourages the production of information that is ‘click-worthy’, independently of its accuracy or public interest. This dynamic has been exploited by groups of individuals who are producing hoax articles attracting millions of clicks and shares, which can be turned into revenues through services such as Google AdSense.<sup>42</sup> Electoral contests that took place in Western Europe and North America in 2016 have highlighted what has been seen as the transnational nature of this dynamic, and its potential dramatic consequences for trust and political debates at a national and international level. Actors residing in Central and Eastern Europe and South East Asia have attracted attention for their reported ability to produce news items widely shared by users in Western Europe and North America, while knowing relatively little of the political systems and candidates about which they were writing.<sup>43</sup>

The second and related phenomenon is connected to the nature of trust. It depends on assumptions that non-institutional forms of communication are freer from power and more able to report information that mainstream media are perceived as unable or unwilling to

reveal. There are numerous cases where blogs and social media have been able to uncover scandals or put pressure on public authorities. There are also evident shortcomings in mainstream media coverage. Authors of ‘fake news’, however, have exploited a belief in the independence of content shared across social media and turned it on its head, exploiting people’s credulity to gain economic or political advantage. Declines in confidence in much traditional media<sup>44</sup> and expert knowledge<sup>45</sup> have created fertile grounds for alternative, and often obscure sources of information to appear as authoritative and credible. This ultimately leaves users confused about basic facts.<sup>46</sup>

Large internet companies, whose credibility has been threatened by this phenomenon, have sought to develop new responses to limit ‘fake news’ and reduce the financial incentives for its proliferation<sup>47</sup> [see TRENDS IN MEDIA INDEPENDENCE]. Growing public attention to this issue is likely to transform how users relate to information, especially if combined with more aggressive media and information literacy campaigns.

## Reporting on marginalized groups

The deepening of crises with regional and global repercussions, including civil wars in parts of Africa and the Arab region, has led to unprecedented migration. This has raised questions relevant to content pluralism about how marginalized groups such as migrants are represented in the media, and what repercussions these representations may be having. Media coverage of migrants and refugees may indicate the extent to which biases

<sup>41</sup> Howard et al. 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Byrne 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Edelman 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Morozov 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Kuchler 2016; Wingfield, Isaac, and Benner 2016.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

against the 'other' are present not only in editorial practices, but also in society at large.

As further illustrated below, despite the availability of media that could allow for understandings of these crises to be proffered by the very people who are involved in them most immediately, the framing has continued to be done predominantly by existing political and media actors, including politicians, and experts selected by media organizations.

While tendencies towards stereotyping and misrepresentation of diverse groups are widespread in the press, there has been relatively little awareness and scrutiny of these practices in the years covered by this study.<sup>48</sup>

Systematic and reliable data on the period covered by this study is difficult to establish. The limited findings available to date, however, indicate that while a large proportion of the European press initially articulated a sympathetic and empathetic response towards the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Syria, this sentiment was gradually replaced by suspicion and, in some cases, hostility towards refugees and migrants.<sup>49</sup> Both the quality and tabloid press tended to employ 'established, stereotyped narratives' of security threats and economic costs.<sup>50</sup>

A portion of the press, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, turned to systematic hostility towards migrants and refugees.<sup>51</sup> In some cases, this has been worsened by intense media coverage of terrorist attacks, and disingenuous

conflation between the issues of terrorism and forced migration continues to complicate efforts to peacefully settle new arrivals.

Research on media coverage of forced dislocation in Arab and African media is not extensive enough to draw conclusions in these areas, although they experienced massive refugee flows. The lack of media services for and by exile communities remains a trend, despite diaspora efforts to create such outlets (see Box 2-2).

While the most research available concerns media coverage of migrants or refugees in Europe, the issue is a global one, given that its causes are multifaceted and often involve more than one country or region. This explains why European countries, for example, are engaging with African countries from which some of the migrants hail. It demonstrates that both the causes and possible solutions will take a global effort.

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**Narratives of suspicion and fear crowd out other perspectives, reducing more pluralistic possibilities.**

<sup>48</sup> Bleich, Bloemraad, and Graauw 2015; Esses, Medianu, and Lawson 2013; Esses, Hamilton, and Gaucher 2017; Parker 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Georgiou and Zaborowski 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Gábor and Messing 2016; Georgiou and Zaborowski 2016.



## Box 2-2: Lina Chawaf, giving a voice to Syrian civilians



***'Rozana is the way for Syrian civilians to express their souls, their values, their beliefs...***

***Rozana is really their media.'***

*– Lina Chawaf,  
founder of Rozana Radio*

For two hours each day, Rozana Radio serves as a voice for Syrian civilians continuing to live through the ongoing civil war. Founded by Lina Chawaf, who has been living in exile in Paris since 2013, Rozana Radio ('the window that lets in the light') shines a light on the plight of civilians from within Syria, amplifying the voices of those who are living inside refugee camps and throughout cities still in the grip of conflict. It also reports on the broader diaspora, those who have left and have resettled elsewhere, or are still in transit.

Speaking to Reporters without Borders, Chawaf states: 'In the ongoing Syrian conflict, there is a massive need for independent, professional journalism to keep citizens and refugees informed about political, social and humanitarian developments in the country to contribute to the development of a free and democratic society in Syria.'

To meet this need, Rozana broadcasts as an independent and politically non-affiliated radio platform. It broadcasts live from Paris and Gaziantep (a Turkish town close to the Syrian border) each morning, via the internet, satellite and an FM radio frequency broadcast within Syria itself. Working with around 160 Syrians worldwide, including 70 citizen journalists based inside the country, Rozana has pursued a dynamic approach to radio in order to overcome the immense challenges that confront journalists working both within and outside of Syria. This includes taking steps to ensure privacy and anonymity by using digital tools like Viber and WhatsApp that come equipped with built-in encryption, in addition to social media and communication platforms like Facebook and Skype, where personal information can be partly concealed.

For Chawaf, Radio Rozana is as much about listening to Syrians as it is for broadcasting to them. The station has dedicated itself to giving Syrians a voice and hearing their stories, wherever they may be: 'This radio [station], when it started, it had to be the voice of the people,' Lina explains. 'They needed a platform, they needed media where they can talk with free opinion. They need to express themselves... Rozana is the way for Syrian civilians to express their souls, their values, their beliefs.'

## Trends in Media Pluralism

Terrorism itself has become the single biggest fear highlighted by political leaders. In a recent study of 20,000 young people in 20 countries, 83 per cent said terrorism made them fearful for the future, with high numbers even in countries untouched by attacks.<sup>52</sup> As the political and social consequences of this fear begin to become apparent, and the sometimes-violent backlash against marginalized groups continues to rise, it is important to reflect on the potential contribution of almost non-stop news coverage devoted to the issue. This is especially relevant since one of the major goals of terrorism is to use the media to spread fear.<sup>53</sup> Narratives of suspicion and fear crowd out other perspectives, reducing more pluralistic possibilities.

### New news players: the democratization of news production?

The lowering of barriers to entry for producing media content and the proliferation of platforms, allowing users to share what they know and believe, have raised expectations about a possible democratization of information. They implied a shift from large and relatively centralized media institutions to more dispersed and heterogeneous networks. While individuals have access to unprecedented opportunities to publish information, this does not mean their voices are heard, and it has not necessarily affected the power relationship between the media and their publics. When it has done so, it has happened in ways that are subtler than sometimes claimed.

Gatekeeping mechanisms continue to influence not only what is being communicated, but also who is given the opportunity to frame events.

Research on both traditional and new media has highlighted how, while citizens' voices have indeed increased in new stories, individuals included in these stories tend to be treated, not as agents capable of asserting their world views and their interpretation of events, but rather as vox-pol, employed to add colour to a narrative.<sup>54</sup>

Similarly, in the case of protests, demonstrations, and conflicts, despite the increasing availability of information emerging from activists and involved actors, established institutions and elites tend to prevail as news sources.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly the case for mainstream media, such as large newspapers and broadcasters. Greater reliance on, and integration of, users' voices in news narrations can be found in alternative news actors (e.g. Global Voices), or in specific programmes or spin-offs of existing media institutions targeting youth and focusing specifically on 'digital life' (e.g. Al-Jazeera's Stream, Listening Post and AJ+). Therefore, when it comes to the ability to shape narratives and offer perspectives from ordinary users, it seems that although novel media operations and actors have had a smaller impact on mainstream reporting, they have been instrumental in animating intermediate spaces, which aggregate content in ways that can reach broader audiences.

In relation to the possibility of content to reach broad audiences, early research on online media has suggested that, rather than challenging the dynamic of winner-take-all that characterized older media, online media may have actually reinforced it. An empirical study of traffic to more than three million webpages collected in

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<sup>52</sup> Broadbent et al. 2017.

<sup>53</sup> Marthoz 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Van der Meer et al. 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Harlow and Johnson 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Hindman 2008.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 97.

2007 found content consumption to be more concentrated online than off-line.<sup>56</sup> A small number of websites, mostly those connected to traditional news media (e.g. BBC, CNN), attracted the vast majority of users. While the overall number of online media outlets had already boomed by 2007, the portion of those reaching a 'non-trivial audience' had not expanded.<sup>57</sup>

As users increasingly move from broadcast to online media to access information, the same large media institutions tend to predominate online spaces, even if filtered and mediated in much of their social media presence. A decade later, the majority of the most visited and viewed news websites remain traditional media outlets (CNN, *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Washington Post*, BBC), although news aggregation websites such as Reddit and Google News have emerged among the top five sites with the highest web traffic.<sup>58</sup>

This trend, based on analyses of online newspapers and blogs conducted before the wide adoption of social media, has only been partially challenged by more recent research on social networking platforms. Examinations of debates on social media during elections,<sup>59</sup> have suggested that political leaders and leading media actors continue to prevail in setting the agenda and to provide content that is then disseminated by less influential actors. At the same time, while traditional media continue to drive what is being reported, users of social networking platforms have gained greater opportunities to influence the framing of events, albeit in a limited number of areas. While research in this area is still patchy and has covered a limited number of cases and

geographic areas (mostly Western Europe and North America), some emerging results indicate users of these platforms tend to adopt a more negative and adversarial tone compared to news media while commenting on a given event.<sup>60</sup>

## Media and information literacy

Researchers have long argued that one method for increasing effective diversity in media content is to empower audiences through enhancing media and information literacy.<sup>61</sup> Media and information literacy may be particularly useful in addressing the consequences of democratized, unfiltered user-generated content and understanding the consequences of algorithms on modes of diffusion. Many media literacy initiatives have historically focused on young people and school-aged children,<sup>62</sup> but the related capacity has a broader and growing relevance in a time of growing media consumption over the internet, 'fake news' and proliferating disinformation on social media.<sup>63</sup> This also suggests a need to widen efforts to target a broader demographic,<sup>64</sup> although States and other actors have remained slow to even systematically integrate these competencies into educational institutions.

As media and information literacy has increased in salience, it has taken many forms, with many specialisations: information literacy, media literacy, news literacy, advertising literacy, digital literacy, media education and more recently digital and media literacy. There have been calls for harmonization of terms to enable greater understanding and impact of relevant research, and UNESCO has long urged using the term 'media and information literacy' or MIL as an umbrella.

<sup>58</sup> Alexa 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Shah et al. 2015; Vaccari and Valeriani 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Frau-Meigs, Velez, and Michel 2017; Frau-Meigs and Torrent 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Buckingham 2013; Carlsson and Culver 2013; Hobbs 2005; Hobbs and Jensen 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Livingstone 2004; Spratt and Agosto 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Livingstone, Van Couvering, and Thumim 2005.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

Recent years have seen a push to focus MIL on creating a demand for quality media and creating an understanding of how multiple outlets can increase diversity. For example, there have been various efforts to develop guidelines and strategies that can encourage users to better understand the limits and possibilities offered through the tools of MIL. There have been policy recommendations and frameworks to encourage countries to adopt media and information literacy plans, as well as initiatives such as UNESCO's *Global MIL Assessment Framework: country readiness and competencies*.<sup>65</sup>

UNESCO launched in 2013 the Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy (GAPMIL), as an 'effort to promote international cooperation to ensure that all citizens have access to media and information competencies'.<sup>66</sup> As indicated in GAPMIL's Plan of Action, the spirit informing the initiative is to equip all users, and especially those from marginalized groups, with the skills to reap the benefits offered by new information technologies. Many of the initiatives, particularly in the context of the increasing role of social media as a key news source, have been around educating school-age children how to identify and critically assess 'real' news and trusted sources. Most initiatives are based in North America or Western Europe, but some international organizations do work on a global scale. The recent annual yearbook by the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, in collaboration with UNESCO, focuses, for example, on trends and opportunities for MIL in the Arab region.<sup>67</sup>

In a limited number of cases, there have been efforts to embed media and information literacy initiatives and requirements into legislation. Serbia, Finland, Morocco, the Philippines, Argentina, Australia and several states in the USA have passed laws that address MIL. Such steps typically, for example, make it a requirement for school systems to teach MIL and/or embed such policies in Education Acts (as is the case with Finland). Further education initiatives have been proliferating online reflecting a growth of MOOCs or massive online courses. Available on platforms such as Coursera and edX, as well as by public service broadcasters, these courses target both students and consumers of media, as well as teachers. While often led by universities or institutions in North America or Western Europe, and typically reflecting a distinct approach to this issue, they are available for audiences globally.

There have also been a growing number of initiatives launched by internet companies to combat online hate speech or the proliferation of 'fake news', largely built on users' inputs and support in flagging content that appears to not comply with a platform's terms of service. As existing research has indicated, however, users have a limited ability to distinguish between different types of content, including sponsored news and 'fake news', and very few are aware of the possibilities offered by social networking platforms to flag content and of the procedures needed to do so.<sup>68</sup> In 2017, in the aftermath of political events in which the spread of 'fake news' was seen to play role, companies such as

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<sup>65</sup> UNESCO 2013a.

<sup>66</sup> UNESCO 2013b.

<sup>67</sup> Abu-Fadil, Torrent, and Grizzle 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Stanford History Education Group 2016.

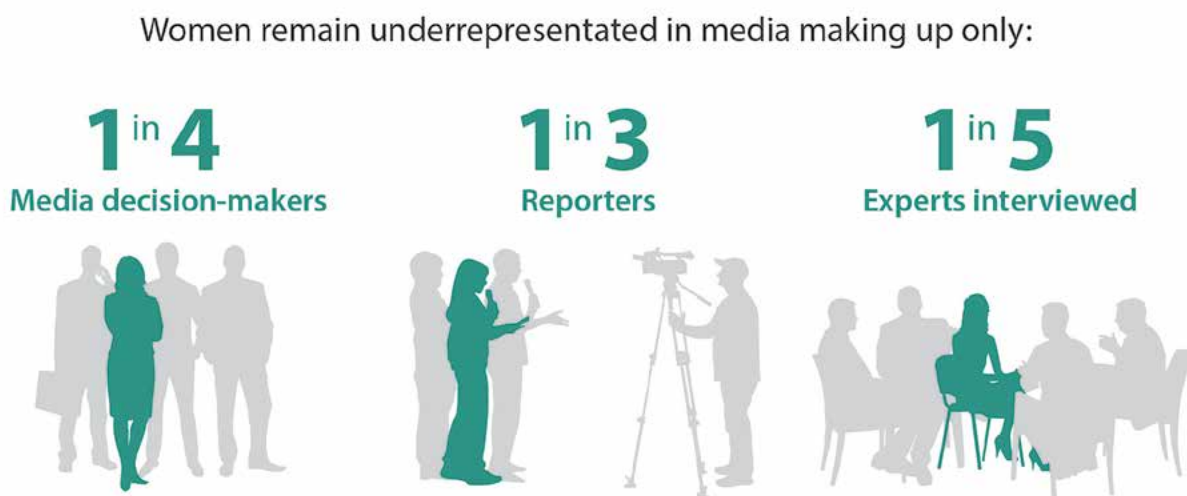
Facebook started initiatives to strengthen news literacy and support journalism [see TRENDS IN MEDIA INDEPENDENCE].<sup>69</sup>

## Gender equality and media pluralism

In this chapter, media pluralism has been evaluated in terms of access, plurality of economic models and diversity of content. This section focuses specifically on gender equality in decision-making roles, the media workforce and representation in the media. While advances have been made, gender equality has not yet been reached in any of these areas.

In the mid-1970s, pioneering academics made the first systematic analysis of women's relationship to and visibility in the mass media and in their ground-breaking study, they used the term 'symbolic annihilation' (originally credited to George Gerbner) to describe what they found.<sup>70</sup> Almost 40 years later, most gender and media scholars would suggest that progress has stalled, and there is significant work left to be done, including in relation to mainstream media. Women still feature less frequently than men in news discourse; women journalists and media professionals are often locked out of the more prestigious beats, and their occupation of senior positions within media organizations is still minimal (See Figure 2-9).

**Figure 2-9: Invisible women? Gender equality in media content, decision-making and media workforce**



**Source:** Global Media Monitoring Report. 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Simo 2017.

<sup>70</sup> Tuchman, Daniels, and Benoit 1978.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

Progress in increasing women's presence in media content has been slow; women's visibility in newspaper, television and radio increased by only seven percentage points between 1995 (17 per cent) and 2015 (24 per cent).<sup>71</sup> The opportunities afforded to 'ordinary' citizens by the creation of alternative online news platforms has meant, however, that women's voices and perspectives are finding expression via these informal media channels.

The existence of problems regarding gender and media pluralism has also been recognized by regional and international organizations and agencies over several decades. In 2010, UNESCO developed a comprehensive set of Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media, aimed at encouraging media organizations to benchmark themselves against equality criteria. In 2013, the Council of the European Parliament adopted the recommendation made by the European Institute for Gender Equality, that the media industry should adopt and implement gender equality indicators relating to women in decision-making, gender equality policies and women on boards.

During the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2016, UN Women launched a new partnership with major media organizations to draw attention to and act on the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which aims to eradicate all forms of inequality. The Step it Up for Gender Equality Media Compact comprises a coalition of media outlets from around the globe and from diverse sectors who have committed themselves to focusing on gender equality in three main ways: in their reporting routines, by disrupting stereotypes and biases; by increasing

the number of women in their organizations, including in leadership and decision-making roles; and in developing gender-sensitive corporate practices. At its launch, 39 media houses had already signed up as founding members of the Compact and although each will devise their own internal agenda, being a member of the Compact requires a minimum set of actions to be carried out. These include championing women's rights and gender equality issues through editorial articles, features and news coverage; ensuring production of high-quality stories with a focus on gender equality and women's rights, with a minimum of two per month; ensuring inclusion of women as sources in stories produced; aiming for gender parity, including across diverse subjects such as business, technology, science and engineering and adopting a gender-sensitive Code of Conduct on Reporting.

In 2015, UN Women launched 'Step it Up for Gender Equality', which had the tagline of 'Planet 50:50 by 2030'. At the launch of that initiative, 70 nations committed to the gender equality agenda, and two years later, that number had increased to 93. In 2016, a review by UN Women of actions taken by these pledging nations reported a large number of initiatives, although none of them explicitly mentioned the media. Yet despite these initiatives, women remain excluded or marginalized in the media on the one hand, or else stereotyped and trivialized on the other. Longitudinal studies of women and news predict that this is unlikely to change soon. At the current pace of change, parity of visibility between women and men is unlikely to occur for another 40 years.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Macharia 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

## Gender equality in the media workforce

In many countries, as many women as men are graduating from media, journalism and communication degree programmes and entering the industry.<sup>73</sup> In fact, a number of media organizations, especially public service broadcasters, run graduate schemes with reserved places for women and other underrepresented groups. Even as long ago as 1995, when the first substantial analysis of women media professionals across 43 nations was produced, women constituted around 40 per cent of the media workforce.<sup>74</sup> The problem is less about diversity in the industry as a whole and more about the limits placed on women to pursue different types of work within the industry and on how far women can progress. Typically, women are encouraged not to go into 'hard' news beats and instead are channelled into areas of news that are allegedly of more 'interest' to women and are also commonly held as being less prestigious. For example, a Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2015 report found that 31 per cent of stories on politics and 39 per cent of stories about the economy have female by-lines.<sup>75</sup>

Stories about politics and crime see the least number of women reporters across all regions with the exception of Asia and Latin America. Unlike men, even when women do work on 'hard' news stories, they often struggle to achieve visibility for their copy: just over a third (37 per cent) of stories in newspapers, television and radio newscasts had a female by-line or were visibly or audibly reported by women, the same

as in GMMP's 2005 study. More focused individual country analyses show exactly the same trends; for example, research from the USA shows that while women journalists are writing on a wider range of topics, they are still a minority of columnists at the major dailies.<sup>76</sup>

In terms of presenting on broadcast news, the 2015 GMMP found that the global proportion of women was 49 per cent, the same as in 2000 and two percentage points below the 1995 finding. Since 2005, the number of women working as reporters in broadcast news has dropped by four percentage points in television and radio.

Closer analysis shows that women were more numerous on television (57 per cent), for example, and less numerous on radio (41 per cent), where 'looks' are obviously far less important. The majority of younger presenters were women, but that trend reversed for older presenters, nearly all of whom were men. There were almost no women reporters recorded as older than 65. Part of this is likely due to recent improvements that have allowed more young women to enter the field, but it could also relate to the differences in how aging is perceived between men and women, as well as limitations in career advancement.

The Women's Media Center (WMC) 2017 report on women and the media in the USA shows a picture that has little changed from the GMMP's latest findings or indeed, from findings of its own previous studies. At 20 of the nation's top news outlets, women produced 37.7 per cent of news reports, an increase of 0.4 percentage points

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<sup>73</sup> Byerly 2011.

<sup>74</sup> National Watch on Images of Women in the Media (MediaWatch) 1995.

<sup>75</sup> The Global Media Monitoring Project is the longest-running longitudinal and global study of gender and news media and provides a snapshot of how women and men feature in, make and report the news on one day every five years. The first GMMP report was in 1995 and the most recent one (in 2015) published its findings in November 2015. The Project provides comparative data across time and region. Teams in 114 countries who monitored 22,136 stories published, broadcast or tweeted by 2,030 distinct media outlets carried out the 2015 report. In sum, data were collected on the work of 26,010 journalists and the representation of 45,402 individuals who featured in or were quoted in the stories.

<sup>76</sup> Harp, Bachmann, and Loke 2014.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

compared to 2016.<sup>77</sup> In broadcast news, women's presence as anchors, reporters and field journalists actually declined by nearly seven percentage points between 2015 and 2016. The WMC study found that these gender-based disparities existed across all news media as much in newspapers, online news, wire services as broadcast, but were especially stark in television news.

Is the situation any better for journalists working in digital media? Contrary to the hopes of those who thought the internet would be the ultimate levelling medium, the digital world is as likely to perpetuate the same gender divisions that exist in the off-line world as the opposite. There is little evidence to suggest that digital media are employing or promoting more women than other parts of the media ecology. The GMMP's latest findings suggest that women's visibility as both citizens and media professionals in online news sites and Twitter feeds was 26 per cent, only two percentage points higher than for television, radio and print. The situation behind the scenes at large internet companies, which hold influence over which news content is presented most visibly and are responsible for moderation of discussion and comments, has been equally dire. They have struggled to address gender balance issues and attract a more diverse array of employees, despite the goodwill shown through some of these companies agreeing to report publicly the makeup of their workforces.

### Women and decision-making

The challenge for many women is much more than just breaking into the industry, but also being able to advance to the highest levels in

their careers. The Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media found that women in media occupied just over a quarter of the jobs in top management (27 per cent) and governance (26 per cent) positions.<sup>78</sup> The regions that fared best for women representation were Central (33 per cent) and Eastern Europe (43 per cent) and the Nordic countries (36 per cent). Elsewhere, women comprised only about a fifth of governance positions and held less than 10 per cent of top management jobs in Asia and the Pacific region. A major European project funded by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) found very similar findings. As Figure 2-10 shows, men held most of the senior management positions and board membership in 99 media houses across the European Union.<sup>79</sup> Public sector organizations were more likely to recruit and promote women into senior positions than private sector media outlets.

In the Asia and Pacific region, a joint report by the UNESCO Office in Bangkok, UN Women and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Asia Pacific<sup>80</sup> found women were significantly under-represented in decision-making roles.<sup>81</sup> In Southern Africa, a Gender Links study found that women constitute 40 per cent of media employees and 34 per cent of media managers.<sup>82</sup> The study also revealed that sexual harassment remains a key issue for women: just under 20 per cent of women media professionals said that they had personal experience of sexual harassment and the majority of those women said that the perpetrator was a senior colleague.

Women remain vastly underrepresented as media owners, a trend that has continued unabated

<sup>77</sup> Women's Media Center 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Byerly 2011. The largest recent study of women media professionals, this report, which was researched for the International Women's Media Foundation and supported by UNESCO, looked at 59 countries and 522 news outlets.

<sup>79</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) 2017.

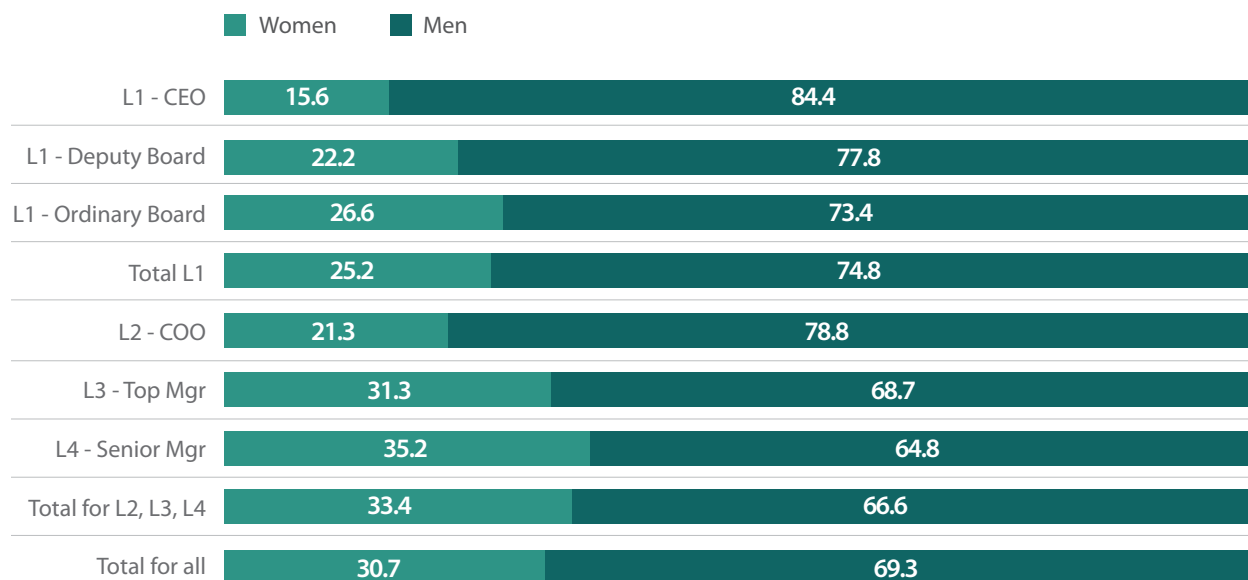
<sup>80</sup> UNESCO Bangkok Office, UN Women and International Federation of Journalists 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Byerly 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Ndlovu and Nyamweda 2016.



**Figure 2-10: Gender equality in decision-making positions and on boards in media organizations in Europe**



**Source:** European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2017. Gender Statistics Database.

as media concentration has increased through media consolidation and convergence.<sup>83</sup>

### Gender and representation

Many feminist media scholars have argued that what we see in front of the camera is determined to some extent by who is behind the camera and there is some reason to believe that more women in the newsroom would produce news that is more diverse. Several studies, including the GMMP (discussed above), show that women journalists are more likely to source women in their stories than men, leading to more balanced reporting which is better able to reflect the views of more and diverse communities. However, given the relative under-representation of women

journalists identified in the preceding section, it is not surprising that most studies which focus on news content report a corresponding under-representation of women featured or quoted in stories. The 2015 GMMP was able to make comparisons across the 20 years in which it has been operating. Despite women’s considerable advancement over the past two decades in the public and private sectors, female appearances in television, radio and print rose by only seven percentage points between 1995 (17 per cent) and 2015 (24 per cent). Where women most often appear in media, it is when they speak from personal experience (representing 38 per cent), while only 20 per cent of spokespersons and 19 per cent of experts featured in stories are women.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Kosut 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Macharia 2015.

## Trends in Media Pluralism

The underrepresentation of women in media content extends across regions. Women featured in stories as 32 per cent of experts interviewed in North America, followed by the Caribbean (29 per cent) and Latin America (27 per cent). In the southern African region, Gender Links' latest Gender and Media Progress Study covered 14 countries and found that women's views and voices accounted for a mere 20 per cent of news sources across Southern Africa media.

Simply increasing the number of women in decision-making roles does not automatically change the small proportion of women seen, heard and read about in the news. Even if more women appear in media, there may be limited impact on the entrenched biases and stereotypes present in media content. This can promote narrow gender roles that limit the choices and options available to everyone. In other words, simply addressing the quantity aspect may not improve the quality. This is why many actors continue to encourage all media workers to become more gender-sensitive through training and internal policies that monitor coverage and promote greater awareness of gender issues.

### Changing the picture for women in media

A range of NGOs, civil society organizations, media outlets and individuals have developed initiatives to bring about improvements, in relation to employment, recognition and representation. These initiatives have ranged from in-house positive action programmes such as women's leadership courses, to national projects such as directories of women experts, as

well as regional initiatives such as the EU-funded project Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries (AGEMI). Both the European Institute for Gender Equality and the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Commission have brought together collections of methods, tools and good practices relating to women and the media. Examples of good practice include monitoring equality policies and plans, adoption of quotas, use of sex-disaggregated statistics, awareness-raising, training for women, training for women's leadership, self-regulation, shadowing, buddies, mentoring, awards for gender-aware journalism and advertising, internal surveys (media houses) and commitments to monitor media content for gender-bias and do something different as a result.

Media regulators are also being encouraged to adopt policies aimed at improving gender balance in media organizations and content, including through publicly owned media. Some countries currently have some level of gender and media policy, although a 2015 UNESCO survey found that roughly three-quarters of the 27 countries that responded do not, and two-thirds have not mainstreamed gender and media issues into national cultural policies and programmes.<sup>85</sup>

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), which represents more than 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and more than 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries, leads the Women in the News (WIN) campaign together with UNESCO as part of their Gender and Media Freedom Strategy. In their 2016 handbook, *WINning Strategies: Creating Stronger Media Organizations by Increasing Gender*

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<sup>85</sup> UNESCO 2015.

*Diversity*, they highlight a range of positive action strategies undertaken by a number of their member organizations from Germany to Jordan to Colombia, with the intention of providing blueprints for others to follow.<sup>86</sup> The AGEMI project, cited above, aims to develop an online platform that brings various resources together in one place as well as develop a set of thematic teaching and training units on different elements of the gender-media relation, which will be freely available to download and share.

Women's accomplishments in the media sector have long remained under-recognized by traditional professional and news organizations, a trend that remains unchanged. For example, women have won only a quarter of Pulitzer prizes for foreign reporting and only 17 per cent of awards of the Martha Gellhorn Prize for Journalism.<sup>87</sup>

A number of organizations, mostly gender-focused, have launched dedicated prizes to recognize achievements of women in media. The International Women's Media Foundation continues to recognize the courageous work of women journalists. In 2007, the Alliance of Women Film Journalists' began giving out the EDA Awards annually to recognize women filmmakers and photojournalists. More recently, in 2015 the African Development Bank began sponsoring a category for Women's Rights in Africa, designed to promote gender equality through the media, as one of the prizes awarded annually by One World Media.<sup>88</sup> In considering the way in which women's contribution to the news environment is made visible, the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize is an annual award that

honours a person, organization or institution that has made a notable contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world. Nine out of 20 winners have been women.

A number of initiatives have been developed that differ in terms of focus, purpose and sector. In countries like the UK, USA and Thailand, directories of women experts have been established to provide an easy reference for journalists who want to seek out voices other than the usual male suspects as sources for news stories. Similar directories have been set up elsewhere, including in most of the Nordic countries.

The Poynter Institute since 2014 has been running a Leadership Academy for Women in Digital Media, expressly focused on the skills and knowledge needed to achieve success in the digital media environment. Similar initiatives have begun to appear in other regions. UNESCO has also led workshops media professionals and community media in Gabon and Burundi, as part of its global efforts to enhance gender equality in the media.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> WAN-IFRA 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Asquith 2016.

<sup>88</sup> African Development Bank 2015.

<sup>89</sup> Kenmoe 2016.

# Conclusion

The dramatic changes in media pluralism require the elaboration of new frameworks able to capture not only the range and diversity of producers of news and how much information is available, but also how likely users are to be exposed to and engage with it.

The trends analysed in this chapter indicate that while access is increasing and content is abundant, media pluralism remains inhibited in important ways. Disempowered and marginalized peoples continue to have great difficulty reporting their stories or having their stories fairly reported on, large numbers of people remain digitally unconnected and women remain unequal in the media. Furthermore, a limited number of large players, particularly algorithm-driven internet companies and the rise of mobile apps, are increasingly structuring how users may or may not be able to reach specific information. The dominance of large players is also affecting traditional media, newspapers above all, which have been unable to reap the benefits in the increasingly profitable market in digital advertising and have struggling to compete with other content, including 'fake news'.





# Trends in Media independence

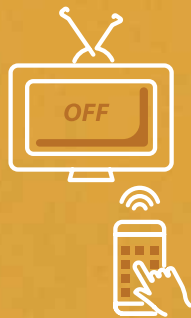


**RISE IN RHETORIC AGAINST THE MEDIA** by political figures is encouraging self-censorship and undermining media's credibility

**INCREASED DEPENDENCE ON government and corporate subsidies** is linked to disruptions in business models



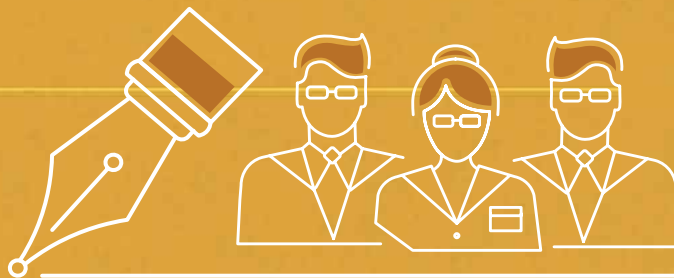
**TRUST IN NEWS MEDIA** is seen to have **declined in some regions**



**BROADCAST LICENSING** continues to be driven by **political and commercial interests**



## VULNERABILITY/CAPTURE



**SELF-REGULATORY BODIES**, which can support the exercise of professional standards while maintaining editorial independence, **have grown in post-conflict and developing countries**



**INCREASED SELF-REGULATORY EFFORTS BY INTERNET INTERMEDIARIES** are promoting media and information literacy, counteracting 'fake news' and tackling online abuse

**RESILIENCE/RESISTANCE**





# Trends in Media Independence

## Overview

In most regions of the world, media independence is under pressure. The disruption and crisis in business models that have supported print and broadcast media for decades have left traditional media outlets more vulnerable to external influences as they seek to establish new revenue sources. In many regions, austerity measures have led to large-scale budget cuts of public service broadcasters, dislocating employees and limiting innovation in programming.

An indicator of a lack of independence is the level of public trust in the credibility of journalism. Trust in media seems to be declining, reflecting similar declines of trust in government, business and NGOs.<sup>1</sup>

Changes in trust, however, have also been dependent upon significant variations, both across media forms and across regions. In the vast majority of countries surveyed, media seems increasingly associated with feelings of distrust.<sup>2</sup> Western Europe and North America, in particular, have evidenced the most significant declines in trust, while

only a few countries in Asia and the Pacific have registered an improvement. Of different media forms, traditional media have shown the steepest decline in terms of trust throughout the world, while online media have gained trust since 2012. Although it is not a new phenomenon, the significant increase in public discussions and awareness of so-called 'fake news' following political contents in Europe and North America in 2016, however, has begun to change perceptions of the credibility of online information.<sup>3</sup> The evolution of this trend will largely depend on the ability of online media, governments, and citizens to develop appropriate responses to address this growing issue effectively, including media and information literacy, targeted responses to hate speech, and more self-regulation on the part of social media platforms.

This perceptible decline in trust of traditional news media has been accompanied by shifts in journalists' perceptions of their editorial independence.

This chapter focuses on the key trends that have emerged that may be seen as potentially particularly damaging for media independence. This includes the continued state ownership and government control of many media institutions, as well as political pressures designed to undermine the credibility of other media outlets. It also discusses what appears to be a continued weakening of organizations and institutions that have played an important role in enhancing professionalism in the media sector, eroding its role as an independent watchdog. This chapter also focuses on the challenges of 'media capture'<sup>4</sup> and polarization. Despite the initial optimism that

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<sup>1</sup> Edelman 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Chahal 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Schiffrin 2017b.

## Trends in Media Independence

social media would reduce such tendencies by enabling broader citizen participation in media, there are growing signals that social media are similarly susceptible to political capture and polarization, further impacting on the trust that users may have towards information on these platforms.

Across all regions, media regulators continue to impact on the editorial independence of media, and regulation is struggling to evolve to address these new circumstances. Even where regulatory systems themselves may meet all the formal standards for independence, they are often still deeply entwined with political and economic influences and pressures. At the same time, such control of media continues to be challenged by media providers increasingly bypassing regulations for traditional media through the use of the internet.

Furthermore, private media that function outside of government control or with minimum official regulation continue to be dependent on advertising support. In many regions, private media risk dependence on only a few advertisers, opening them up to the potential misuse of advertising as a political tool by the largest advertisers, often governments. In regions that tend to have weak regulatory systems or countries where private media struggles to be economically viable, there can be pervasive corruption of news whereby politicians, companies or other interest groups pay to have certain newspaper articles written or radio talk shows steered to focus on a certain agenda or perspective. Journalists themselves in many countries continue to accept “brown envelopes”. Some media initiatives are expressly established to do “journalism for sale”, and their content producers do not seem even

to think of themselves as journalists imparting verifiable news in the public interest.

New technologies have also added new meaning to what constitutes media independence. The collection, selection, aggregation, synthesis and processing of data are now increasingly delegated to forms of automation. While the sharing of social media posts is crucial in elevating the importance of certain news sources or stories, what appears in individual news feeds on platforms such as Facebook or news aggregators such as Google News is the product of other forces as well. This includes algorithmic calculations, which remove professional editorial judgement, in favour of past consumption patterns by the individual user and his/her social network. In 2016, in some parts of the world, a majority of users declared preferring algorithms over editors for selecting the news they wanted to read.<sup>5</sup> Despite apparent neutrality, however, algorithms may often compromise editorial integrity, and have been found to lead to discrimination against people based on their race, socio-economic situation and geographic location.<sup>6</sup> The increasing relevance of big data, and the influence of ‘fake news’ and automation, are fundamentally changing the context of knowledge production, and they are eliciting demands for algorithmic transparency and accountability. On the other hand, this creates a niche for news that is generated and curated by trustworthy, independent, professional journalism, as well as a significant role for fact-checking actors. Issues of regulation and self-regulation of news information for internet companies are particularly complex given the platform, rather than content producer, status of these actors. Nevertheless, their degree of independence and accountability as regards, inter alia, journalistic content has become a major issue over the period surveyed by this study.

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<sup>5</sup> Levy et al. 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Sweeney 2013; Turow 2013; Diakopoulos 2014.

# Understanding media independence

Evaluations of media independence can be categorised around two significant and distinct components. The first element concerns the role of regulatory authorities as to whether they ensure editorial independence or not. This includes institutions that license broadcasters or other content providers and platforms, and which set standards for media institutions. The second element is about resistance to political and commercial interference in the autonomy of the media sector. This entails the presence and strength of actors who fight for editorial independence and integrity, including through self-regulatory institutions, professional associations and civil society organisations.

For the first element, it is important that regulatory authorities are placed outside the direct control of politicians and that government directives formally institutionalize their independence. When regulatory authorities lack distance from government leadership, and are controlled or influenced by political and commercial factions, they can be limited in performing their functions in the public interest. Ensuring the rights of regulatory authorities to determine their agency and regulatory competency within a clear legal and policy framework favouring editorial independence for journalistic enterprise, empowers regulatory authorities to perform according to a public interest rationale.

The legal framework for independent regulatory

authorities is measured by examining laws, agency statutes and rules on issues such as whether the legal provision delegating authority to an agency conforms to international norms, and whether the regulatory authority has autonomy over budget and staff. Additional important issues to evaluate include the enforcement of anti-trust and competition laws, transparency of media ownership, parameters for government advertising, and accountability requirements from executive and legislative branches in terms of oversight of media and internet regulators.

The second component of media independence to consider is the extent to which media outlets and an expanding network of producers of information are able to function separately from both political and commercial interference. While the structures supporting this type of independence differ across societies, in general, for media to be independent there should be strong professional ethics that enable media organizations and professionals to perform their role, including that of being a watchdog over a plurality of interests and institutions. Such ethics often entail systems of accountability in various forms of self-regulation at enterprise, professional and/or industry level. A supporting ecology of civil society bodies is a factor in securing editorial independence in the media.

There is significant variance in the types and range of political and economic pressures around the world, making it difficult to generalize and compare. Nevertheless, several areas serve as indicators of trends in political and economic pressures that are relevant for the period considered by this study. The increasingly vocal attacks on the media, including by prominent leaders, have contributed to the de-legitimation of

## Trends in Media Independence

the media sector. Changes in techniques of media capture, both with traditional media and newer media, are also relevant. In terms of economic pressures, independence is impacted on by

shifts in business models as a result of changing technologies and media consumption patterns as well as evolving concepts of professionalization, again in the context of new media.

### Box 3-1: 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 level to foster media independence and trust in media institutions. In recent years, UNESCO has worked in the following areas:

1

#### Media organizations empowered and self-regulatory mechanisms supported

Through the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), UNESCO has supported community media development worldwide.

In partnership with the European Commission, UNESCO has worked to build trust in media, promote media accountability and address online hate speech in South East Europe and Turkey by raising public awareness, supporting the establishment of media self-regulatory mechanisms and promoting media and information literacy.

Publication of the study: *Fostering freedom of expression – the role of Internet intermediaries (2014)*

2

#### Journalism education enhanced through the development of the following guidebooks and syllabi:

*The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook (2012)*

*Climate Change in Africa: A Guidebook for Journalists (2013)*

*Model Curricula for Journalism Education: A Compendium of New Syllabi (2013)*

*Teaching Journalism for Sustainable Development: New Syllabi (2015)*

3

#### National assessments based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators have been produced in more than 20 countries, including, since 2012:

Africa: Gabon, Madagascar and South Sudan

Arab States: Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Palestine and Tunisia

Asia and the Pacific: Mongolia, Myanmar and Nepal

Latin America and the Caribbean: Curaçao and Dominican Republic

4

#### More academic research produced to foster understanding of freedom of expression

A Manual on Freedom of Expression and Public Order was published and implemented throughout tertiary institutions in the Arab region.

These two aspects of independence—regulatory, as well as economic and political—are shifting globally, with support for the normative definition of independence diminishing in important ways. Media organizations exist in highly interconnected structures of government, political and economic interests, and professional activity. Complete independence is rare (if not impossible), but remains a mission-critical aspiration, and the extent to which media institutions are able to enjoy autonomy remains an integral part of a functioning media system.

## Trends and transitions in regulation

An independent media system normally has regulatory authorities and courts that administer broadcast licensing and other aspects of the media such as codes applicable to election coverage and political advertising. These institutions should ideally have a transparent structure and be empowered to self-determine their agency and competency. An expert report for UNESCO described the reasons for taking care in the design of such an agency:

*If decisions on who shall hold a broadcast licence are left as the preserve of government, there is unlikely to be—or to be seen to be—a fair, equitable range of service provision. Indeed, in those countries where the government (or a government-controlled regulator) issues licences, most broadcasters—unsurprisingly—tend overtly to support the government.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Salomon 2016, 16.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCO 2014a, 68.

Establishing a separation of powers between governments and regulatory agencies is a prerequisite for journalistic credibility. Across most countries, regulatory authorities are expected to engage with economic aspects, such as competition and ownership, and non-economic concerns, such as preservation of fundamental rights of citizens and protecting consumer rights. Independent regulatory authorities lead to greater public confidence in the fairness of their decisions and strengthen appreciation of the role that freedom of expression plays in a society.

### Independence and government regulation

The first *World Trends Report* noted that, ‘the operational independence of regulators has continued to be a challenge, with recurring cases of political pressure and interferences from commercial interests.’<sup>8</sup> This trend has continued and intensified.

Across parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and the Asia and Pacific regions, the licensing of media operators has often been perceived as being driven by political and economic agendas. The process of issuing licenses in many regions still lacks transparency and is considered to follow procedures that are obscure and concealing. In many countries, regulatory authorities stand accused of political bias in favour of the government and ruling party, whereby some prospective broadcasters have been denied licenses or threatened with the withdrawal of licenses. Insufficient checks and balances in regulatory mechanisms, instrumentalist views about the role of the media,

## Trends in Media Independence

and underdeveloped self-regulation have resulted in media liberalization favouring vested political and economic interests. In many countries, diversity of content and views have diminished as monopolies, fostered directly or indirectly by States, not only impact on competition but lead to a concentration of power with potentially excessive influence on public opinion.<sup>9</sup>

Across all regions, regulatory authorities that claim at least some degree of independence or autonomy have become commonplace. However, the procedures for assuring autonomy of regulators from governmental control have been increasingly threatened. There have been countries within all of the regions that have introduced or enforced mechanisms to strengthen the chain of delegation between elected officials and the bureaucracy. In Central and Eastern Europe, Asia Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean regions, there have been recent cases in which these regulators are formally compliant with sets of legal requirements on independence, but their main task in reality is seen to be that of enforcing political agendas, thus not serving the public interest. Examples of this include failure to renew or retain licenses for editorially critical media; folding the regulator into government ministries or reducing its competences and mandates for action; and a lack of due process in the adoption of regulatory decisions, among others.<sup>10</sup>

State control is also evident in the increasing politicization of regulatory bodies operationalized through transfers and appointments of party-aligned individuals to senior positions in regulatory authorities. In some countries, state

control over regulatory authorities is often exercised openly by restricting both the autonomy of the regulatory authorities and through government endorsed appointments and promotion of members and heads. Reform of operational processes is slow, weighed down by bureaucratic procedures and in many countries, regulatory frameworks do not sufficiently empower the regulator to do its job properly and/or have become outdated in the face of shifts in technology and market structure. Often this leads to a regulatory vacuum where agencies from other sectors step in to create legislation. In spite of this, there is an increasing trend to reform regulatory frameworks across many regions. Such efforts, at least on paper, have the aim of granting more independence and impartiality to regulators.

Governments worldwide have sought to extend regulation to internet companies, whether connectivity providers or application service providers, and whether domestically or foreign-based. However, the patterns here are erratic, and the logics and rationales uneven. In many cases, these initiatives are not seen to meet the tests of legality, necessity and proportionality, or legitimate purpose, and both independence and transparency are lacking. The impact on journalistic content can be severe, as internet companies can err too much on the side of caution and take down news reports, including algorithmically, while offering inadequate opportunities for redress to the affected news producers.

### Self-regulation

In some regions, media practices are also often

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<sup>9</sup> Hanretty 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Buckley et al. 2008.

self-regulated; in some cases, particularly in Western Europe, self-regulation provides an alternative to state regulatory authorities. In such contexts, newspapers have historically been free of licensing and regulation, and there has been repeated pressure for them to self-regulate or at least to have in-house ombudsmen. However, it has often been difficult to establish meaningful self-regulatory entities. Frequently, they are weak, with those in charge limited by the extent of remedies they can prescribe and their means of enforcing such fines or punishments as they actually mete out. In the last several years, there has been debate in several countries about finding the proper means of establishing an effective self-regulating mechanism, one that is sufficiently authoritative and effective, but independent of government influence or control.

Generally, self-regulation continues to exist in the shadow of state regulation; its profile is informed by the possibility of state intervention that it is often designed to hold back. In the negotiations between the Government and the private sector over the efficacy and scope of self-regulation, important questions arise: who appoints the self-regulating body and how is it held accountable? Are there activities that can be regulated or prohibited by the self-regulator that are not in the purview of the Government? What measures are available to the self-regulator to enforce?

As the *World Trends* regional reports indicate, the enforcement authority of self-regulatory bodies has remained generally robust in Western Europe and North America, where regulatory systems have not typically posed a significant threat to journalistic autonomy, except in a few examples.

In contrast, in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, self-regulatory structures seem to be lacking or have not historically been perceived as efficient and effective.<sup>11</sup> In the vacuum, the operational independence of broadcast regulators has been seen as continuing to worsen across parts of the region, with some recurring cases of political and commercial pressures. Across the world, in a significant portion of countries where print media are also regulated, legally autonomous self-regulatory bodies have reportedly continued to face mounting pressure and challenges from the executive branch.

Self-regulation remains highly popular and is frequently expressed as a preferential system by journalists themselves. Self-regulation has also received important support from media freedom and development organizations, as well as UNESCO. Non-governmental organizations working in the media space often organize trainings and courses for journalists and regulators about how to enhance self-regulation, further extending the influence of this approach. However, while collective self-regulation systems, such as press councils, have continued to grow in some regions, their efficacy is often debatable. In environments where the media sector experienced growth, such as parts of the Asia and Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean regions, interest in such models increased somewhat while in the Western Europe sub-region, self-regulation has experienced a decline, mainly due to business related cutbacks. There has also been a continued trend of establishing self-regulatory bodies in conflict and post-conflict situations.

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<sup>11</sup> Fengler et al. 2015.

## Trends in Media Independence

Independent and autonomous public broadcasting has made progress primarily in the Western Europe and North American region, where it was already relatively strong. Worldwide, an overwhelming majority of state-owned broadcasting entities, including those in the transnational domain and acting as global media outlets, have tended to remain without effective provision for editorial independence. In addition, many global media outlets have been owned predominantly by States, with journalistic independence remaining limited, even where there has not been direct control.

The rise of satellite delivered channels, delivered directly to viewers, or through cable or online systems, also renders much larger the sphere of unregulated programming. There are, however, varying efforts to regulate the access of programmers to satellite transponders in parts of the Western Europe and North American region, the Arab region and in Asia and the Pacific. The Arab Satellite Broadcasting Charter was an example of efforts to bring formal standards and some regulatory authority to bear on what is transmitted, but it appears to not have been implemented.<sup>12</sup> European regulators have developed a complex scheme for how Governments should regulate, in a limited way, satellite signals that originate outside the European Union. Member States in the Asia-Pacific region manage satellite traffic in a more comprehensive manner. The explosion in user-generated content is another zone of vast expansion of relatively independent content.

Major internet companies have responded to pressure by governments and the public by

elaborating self-regulatory and complaints systems at the individual company level, using principles they have developed under the framework of the Global Network Initiative. The Global Network Initiative has grown to include several large telecom companies alongside internet companies such as Google, Facebook and others, as well as civil society organizations and academics.<sup>13</sup>

Public pressure on technology giants has motivated the development of new strategies aimed not only at identifying ‘fake news’, but also at eliminating some of the structural causes of their emergence and proliferation. Facebook has created new buttons for users to report content they believe is false, following previous strategies aimed at countering hate speech and harassment online. These changes reflect broader transformations occurring among tech giants to increase their transparency. As indicated by the Ranking Digital Rights Corporate Accountability Index, most large internet companies have reportedly become relatively more forthcoming in terms of their policies about transparency in regard to third party requests to remove or access content, especially in the case of requests from governments (see Figure 3-1).<sup>14</sup> At the same time, however, the study signalled a number of companies that have become more opaque when it comes to disclosing how they enforce their own terms of service, in restricting certain types of content and account (see Figure 3-2).<sup>15</sup>

Another relevant development that is indicative of the trend towards self-regulation at this level was the European Commission’s 2013 publication, *ICT Technology Sector Guide on Implementing the*

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<sup>12</sup> UNESCO 2014b

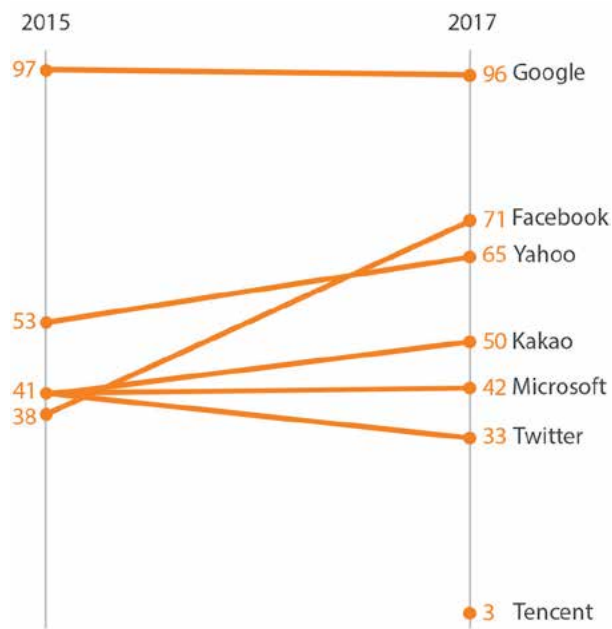
<sup>13</sup> Global Network Initiative (GNI) 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Ranking Digital Rights 2015; Ranking Digital Rights 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ranking Digital Rights 2015; Ranking Digital Rights 2017. Note that the values for 2015 were calculated by taking the average of indicators F3 and F4, which were merged into one indicator (F3) in the 2017 index.

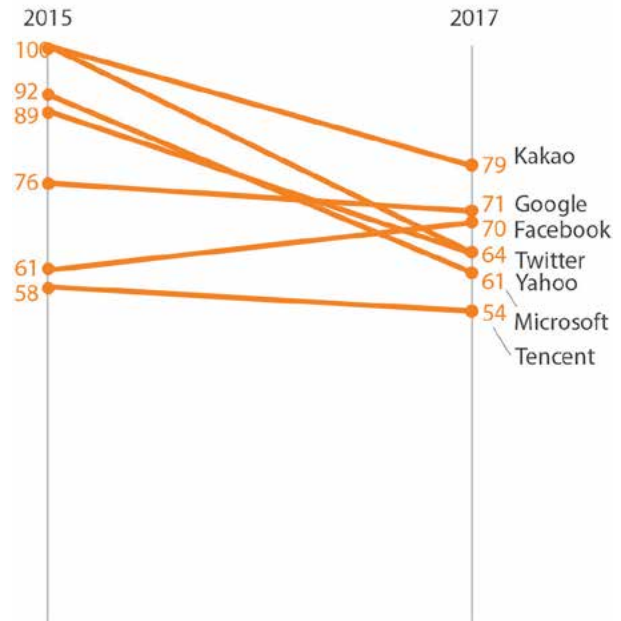


**Figure 3-1: RDR indicator scores for policy transparency in regard to third-party requests for content or account restrictions**



**Source:** Ranking Digital Rights. 2015. Corporate Accountability Index; Ranking Digital Rights. 2017. Corporate Accountability Index. [rankingdigitalrights.org](http://rankingdigitalrights.org/)<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 3-2: RDR indicator scores for policy transparency in regard to their terms of service enforcement (which impact upon content or account restrictions)**



**Source:** Ranking Digital Rights. 2015. Corporate Accountability Index; Ranking Digital Rights. 2017. Corporate Accountability Index. [rankingdigitalrights.org](http://rankingdigitalrights.org/)

*UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*.<sup>17</sup> These steps impact on the presence of independent journalism by defining the limits of what should or should not be carried and prioritized in the most popular digital spaces.

In addition to responding to pressure for more clearly defined self-regulatory mechanisms, and galvanized by the debates over so-called ‘fake news’ [see PLURALISM: CONTENT for more on ‘fake news’], internet companies such as Facebook have launched campaigns to educate users about how to more easily distinguish between ‘fake

news’ and real news sources. Ahead of the United Kingdom national election in 2017, for example, Facebook published a series of advertisements in newspapers with ‘Tips for Spotting False News’ which suggested 10 things that might signal whether a story is genuine or not. There have also been broader initiatives bringing together a variety of donors and actors to promote fact-checking and news literacy, such as the News Integrity Initiative at the City University of New York’s School of Journalism. This 14 million USD investment by groups including the Ford Foundation and Facebook was launched in

<sup>16</sup> Note: The values (out of a total of 100 points) correspond to indicator F6 in the 2015 index and F5 in the 2017 index.

<sup>17</sup> Shift and Institution for Human Rights and Business 2013.

## Trends in Media Independence

2017 so its full impact remains to be seen. It will, however, complement the offerings of other networks such as the International Fact-Checking Network launched by the Poynter Institute in 2015 which seeks to outline the parameters of the field (see Box 3-2).

Another action taken by social media platforms and search engines has been to drain the revenue sources that incentivize ‘fake news’. The makers of ‘fake news’ often exploit algorithms to promote content that can be easily shared and liked, producing sensationalist content in order to increase views and advertising revenues [see TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM: CONTENT]. In response, Google and Facebook have pledged to remove ads from these types of information. These self-regulatory steps may strengthen the independence and credibility of authentic journalism, highlighting, in a system where trust is increasingly in short supply, the importance of professional and transparent journalism and of journalists with a track record of unbiased reporting.

## Political and economic influences in media systems

The two most significant political trends impacting media systems around the world are the widespread de-legitimation by political actors of the media as a venerable institution along with the profession of journalism, and the

growing efforts made towards media capture, particularly online media, which not so long ago was regarded as more resistant to such form of control than other types of media. Media capture has often occurred where there has been economic pressure on media outlets, and recent trends suggest that the upheaval of older modes of media production and the decline of traditional mass media models is changing normative ideas of independence.

## Trends of de-legitimizing media

The consequences of the widespread de-legitimation of the media and supporting institutions on media independence are hard to assess, but are likely to be substantial. The concept of independence—and the professional standards and public interest purpose which independence protects—is sufficiently fragile that it depends on widespread understanding and appreciation of its functions and purposes. In this setting, for government actors and other powerful actors to initiate and engage in the process of systematic attacks on the media by trivializing it, or sometimes characterizing it as an ‘enemy’ has widespread implications for the independence and well-being of the sector. Such tactics were typically less common in Western Europe and North America but these regions have recently provided prominent examples of this kind of process. The de-legitimation of the media, however, is present intensively in many regions and is particularly apparent during elections. A common tactic is to blur the distinction between mainstream news media, and the mass of unverified content on social media. When powerful actors of established

### Box 3-2: Tai Nalon, creating a landscape of trustworthiness



***'I think that the most rewarding outcome is that we have managed to create a landscape of trustworthiness.'***  
*-Tai Nalon, founder, Aos Fato, Brazil*

Tai Nalon had been working as a political reporter for seven years, when in 2014, during a moment of political instability, she began to feel increasingly frustrated by the continued lack of verification of sensitive public statements. Unable to devote sufficient time in her then place of work, she began seriously to consider the potential viability of a fact-checking service as stand-alone project.

In July 2015, Nalon launched Aos Fatos (To the Facts), Brazil's first independent and continuous fact-checking service. Funded by a combination of editorial partnerships, private and civil society sponsorship, and reader contributions, Aos Fatos strives to offer a transparent and neutral investigation of political issues from the local to the national. During its first two years of operation, Aos Fatos has verified almost 400 speeches, documents, resumés, and advertising pieces and has also produced a number of investigative reports. Aos Fatos illustrates how journalists have kept pace with the changing nature of the digital media environment. Although the digital age has created new platforms and new opportunities for independent media, it has also enabled the accelerated proliferation of unverified truths and untruths.

Speaking to the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, Nalon notes that 'the checking of information always existed, it is a foundation of journalism. The problem is that with the increasing speed of daily journalism and the need for real-time coverage on the internet, this method has become a bit neglected.' This is problematic for a number of reasons. As Nalon asserts, due to a low level of media and information literacy and fast-pace nature of contemporary news provision, rumour and 'fake news' can act like 'a nuclear bomb. It can spread quickly among people, and that is how we have to face it: as an epidemic of disinformation.'

The outcomes of the work of this small team of four permanent staff members has been tangible, with many of Brazil's larger media institutions establishing their own fact-checking services, thanks in part to the recognition that Aos Fatos has received from the likes of Google in its own efforts to counteract the propagation of 'fake news'. For Nalon, 'the most rewarding outcome is that we have managed to create a landscape of trustworthiness that other media outlets now want to develop.'

Moving forward, she is positive about the way independent media is developing in Brazil and the opportunities becoming available for new media: 'There's a good trend in Brazil regarding independent media and small outlets...and I'm optimistic, because finally we're seeing something professional, objective and with accountability.'

## Trends in Media Independence

democracies increasingly de-legitimize the media, this is seen as giving growing leeway for leaders in other countries to adopt the same discourse. Referring to credible news stories as 'fake news' [as discussed in TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM chapter] has been used by those in powerful positions to dismiss critical news stories. Again, this has been a growing trend for a number of years, but it has become a norm in the period covered by this study by the prominent use of such discourse in democratic countries.

The systematic de-legitimation of the media has occurred most prominently when powerful actors have attacked major elements of the media, including incorporating such attacks as part of regular communication with the public. De-legitimation is a subtle and effective form of propaganda, reducing the public's confidence in the media to perform a collective and vital function as a check on government.

Dangerous enough on its own, de-legitimation encourages and reinforces attacks on the media by other factions in society. Taken together, all this has the power to intimidate journalists and disrupt public faith in the foundational principles of the function of the media and press, as well as the credibility of facts and science. This can have far-reaching implications for the status of journalism and for journalist safety and for basic democratic practices. The de-legitimizing can be seen as part of a greater problem of political and social polarization, including sustained attacks on the legitimacy of public institutions, including independent judiciaries, throughout the world.

While the broad threat to media independence is clear, there are specific aspects of the de-legitimation process that can be detailed here. One effect is to weaken media institutions (see Figure 3-3) by making them more open to litigation.

**Figure 3-3: Effect of de-legitimation of media on society**



Efforts to curtail criminal defamation are still ongoing in many regions but the dangers from civil law suits with high costs and high risk are also rising, leading to a greater likelihood of bankruptcy of media outlets. Independence is weakened where the right of journalists to criticize public officials is threatened. A general assault on the media can lead to measures making journalists more frequently liable for publishing state secrets and their capacity to shield sources can be reduced. De-legitimizing the media makes it easier to justify these legal changes that make the news business even more precarious.

The ideal legal framework that presently exists in societies throughout the world shows signs of shifting from a conception of a framework as a fortress defending media freedom to a conception of media freedom existing on a balancing wheel between hostility and protection.

Organized, systematic, state-sanctioned de-legitimation of how media function in society has reportedly also led to selective silencing. By undermining the media in general, a government can gain power to unleash trolling and bullying that seeks to mute disfavoured groups, often political or ethnic minorities. In some regions, de-legitimation is reportedly combined with wider attacks on independent media: key properties have been closed down or sold to parties with ties to the government. Newer entrants linked to state power and vast resources gain sway. Opposition to these pressures may strengthen the defence of the press as civil society and mobilise the public in protest, but in some cases, this conflict leads to fear-induced apathy or withdrawal. Lastly, advertisers and investors may be scared-off by de-legitimation.

Media independence and the dissemination of information plays an important role in the knowledge creation and in the democratic decision-making process. Tactics of de-legitimation impact on this function by placing doubt on the relevance of information, leaving questions open as to whether the media are so biased as to be less capable or incapable of acquiring relevant data, and discrediting the professional standards of journalists by rubbishing the notion of a verifiable account of reality. The debate is pushed into contestation about particular discreet facts, instead of assessment of the wider narratives which give meanings to facts and which mobilise audience identities in varying ways. Such deeper considerations are overshadowed by deliberate portrayal of the press as ‘the opposition’ which corrodes the reputation of media, weakens their independence and undermines dialogue and free expression ideals.

De-legitimation also weakens other fundamental institutional supports of freedom of expression. The concept of the rule of law—central to freedom of expression—depends on the existence of the possibility of consensus on fact-based inquiry. Decisions could not warrant the mantle of rule-based if there were no way to agree on factual predicates. The capacity of the press to contribute to this can be placed in jeopardy by persistent questioning of its status.

### Media capture

Media ‘capture’ refers to the full range of forces that can restrict or skew coverage. It has been defined as ‘a situation where the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in

## Trends in Media Independence

manifesting a will of their own, nor able to perform their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for other purposes.<sup>18</sup> Capture corrupts the main role of the media: to inform the public, with media outlets instead opting to trade influence and manipulate information.<sup>19</sup> A distinguishing feature of media capture, as opposed to more explicit expressions of government control of the media, is the collaboration by the private sector. In all regions, there are examples of government control of the media also becoming insidiously intertwined with private business interests while partly giving the illusion of a free and independent media.

Cases abound across all regions of bloggers and citizen journalists putting a spotlight on specific issues and reporting on the ground during protests.<sup>20</sup> Social networking platforms have dramatically increased the ease of sharing information, and this has created unprecedented avenues to uncover scandals, advance alternative interpretations of events, and challenge dominant narratives. This exhibits independence.

However, there are also many examples of political and economic actors intervening to shape media where full capture is not easily achieved. Paid ‘trolls’ leading to phenomena such as ‘paid Twitter’ and mob attacks, along with ‘fake news’ and rumours, are reportedly able to widely disseminate their attacks on independent journalists with the aid of bots. Across much of Africa, a trend of ‘serial callers’ has become increasingly common. Also observed in other regions, such as in North America where the phenomenon is commonly referred to as

‘astroturfing’, serial callers are often individuals commissioned by political actors to constantly phone in to popular radio call in programmes with the intention of skewing or influencing the programme in their interest.<sup>21</sup> In some cases, the programme might be structurally biased towards such actors (e.g., there will be a dedicated phone for those that have planned to phone in with particular political sympathies) but in other cases the process is more ad hoc with sympathetic callers flooding particular radio programmes.<sup>22</sup>

Reacting to such hijacking, journalists’ associations, civil society and international organizations have reiterated the importance of strong professional standards as well as media and information literacy [see section 2.4.6. in TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM].

### Financial regulations and business models

Media independence requires attention to financial regulations so that media entities are not overly concentrated in terms of ownership power, nor threatened with bankruptcy, and instead where there is adequate competition in the sector. It is also important that there are mechanisms that provide sustainable funding for public service broadcasters so that they can avoid the limitations of becoming government mouthpieces or commercially-driven media outlets.

The better economic performance of consolidated media businesses does not necessarily lead to improve its performance as a news institution, although it is typically

<sup>18</sup> Zielonka 2015; Gagliardone and Pohjonen 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Mungiu-Pippidi 2013, 40–41.

<sup>20</sup> Allan and Thorsen 2009, vol. 1; Allan 2013; Hänska-Ahy and Shapour 2013; Mutsvauro 2016; Thorsen and Allan 2014, vol. 2; Wall 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Gagliardone 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Brisset-Foucault 2016; Stremlau, Fantini, and Gagliardone 2015.

a necessary condition. Corporate ownership, as distinct from state-ownership and strict government regulation, is not sufficient for editorial independence. Where transparency of media ownership has improved over the last few years, this has partly been a result of the trend for media companies to increase their capital by entering the stock exchange, where it is mandatory to disclose ownership structures. There has been further progress in the form of a number of lawsuits regarding media ownership concentration, which have helped to increase the exposure of media structures in the courts. The trend towards media ownership transparency, however, is made more difficult through the use of proxies in many parts of the world to hide real media ownership and influence on independence.

Capital controls for media are in place in all regions to manage foreign direct investment in the media sector. Many governments in Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, and the Asia and Pacific regions have passed stringent laws and regulations that limit or forbid foreign media ownership, especially in the broadcasting and telecom sectors, with mixed impact on editorial independence. In Latin America, almost two-thirds of the 15 countries covered by a World Bank study on foreign direct investments impose restrictions on foreign ownership in the newspaper-publishing sector. Almost all countries specify a cap on the foreign investment in media sector, although increasingly the strategy in the region has been to absorb private and foreign capital and experience of media management without losing ownership and political control of the media sector.<sup>23</sup> Shifting patterns of media

ownership and control have led to a conflict between protected editorial independence on the one hand and the commercial considerations of news production on the other, resulting in a blurring of ethics, lack of protection for media institutions, and a weakening of the identity and professionalism of journalists and news media organizations. At the same time, it is more complex to regulate ownership issues when the companies are internet platforms spanning multiple jurisdictions, although European competition and tax law has responded to some of the challenges in this regard, with unclear impact on the issue of independence of journalistic content on Internet companies.

Financial considerations have also affected media independence as business models have changed. Across the industry, media outlets have been re-evaluating where the value in media content lies, with a corresponding increase in government development programmes, corporate benefactors and other special interests funding or cross-funding media content. These kinds of funding have been common historically in international broadcasting, and they typically influence actual media content, framing, and the 'red lines' different from professional principles that reporters feel unable to cross.

While larger media companies have relied on attracting their own advertisers online, many online intermediaries such as Google Ads now exist, which effectively has meant that small online media companies can get some revenues without having to have dedicated facilities—although the requirements of platforms like Facebook for video content, and the power to change news feeds

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<sup>23</sup> The World Bank, International Finance Corporation (IFC), and Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) 2013.

## Trends in Media Independence

without consultation do compromise editorial autonomy. In addition, the media organization concerned can no longer exert strong control over what advertisements are shown, nor can it benefit from accessing full audience data to strengthen its own revenue prospects.

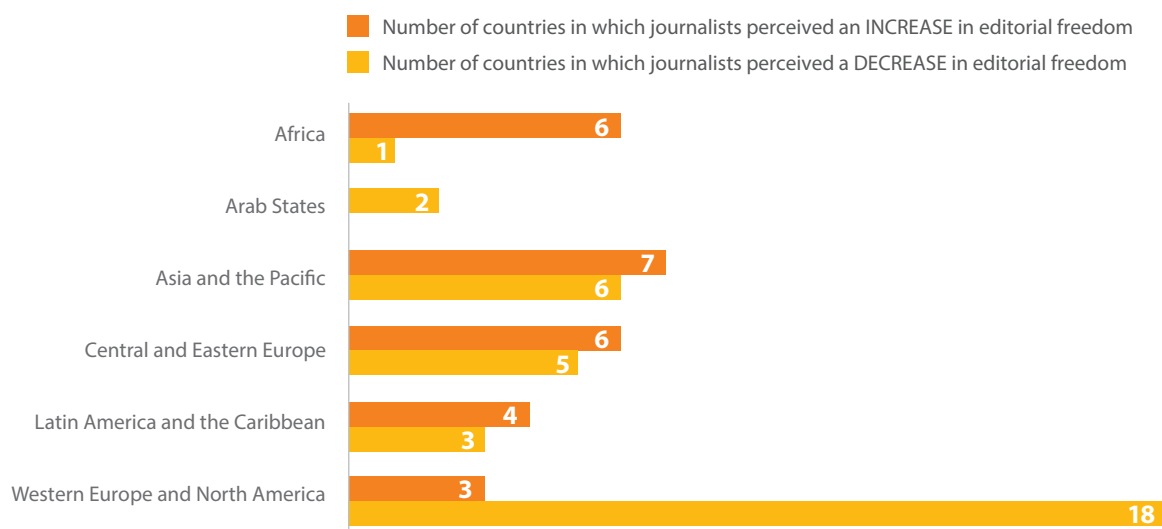
### Journalists' perceptions of media independence

According to the Worlds of Journalism Study, journalists in 18 of the 21 countries surveyed in Western Europe and North America perceived their freedom to make editorial decisions independently to have shrunk in the past five years. However, in all other regions, a plurality of journalists in most countries reported their editorial freedom to have strengthened (see Figure 3-4).<sup>24</sup> This perceived improvement in

editorial freedom was especially strong in Africa and in the South and Southeast Asian sub-regions. A similar trend appears to have affected perceptions around the credibility of journalism as perceived by journalists themselves. These perceptions have improved in Africa, Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Arab States, while decreasing in most Central and Eastern European countries and the vast majority of countries in Western Europe and North America (see Figure 3-5).

There are, however, some indications that some perceived declines in media independence in parts of the world may reverse. While it is too soon to be able to determine the magnitude of this phenomenon, in some countries in Western Europe and North America, citizens are investing and actively working to support the

**Figure 3-4: Trends in journalists' perceived editorial freedom**



**Source:** Worlds of Journalism Study, 2016. Change: Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions

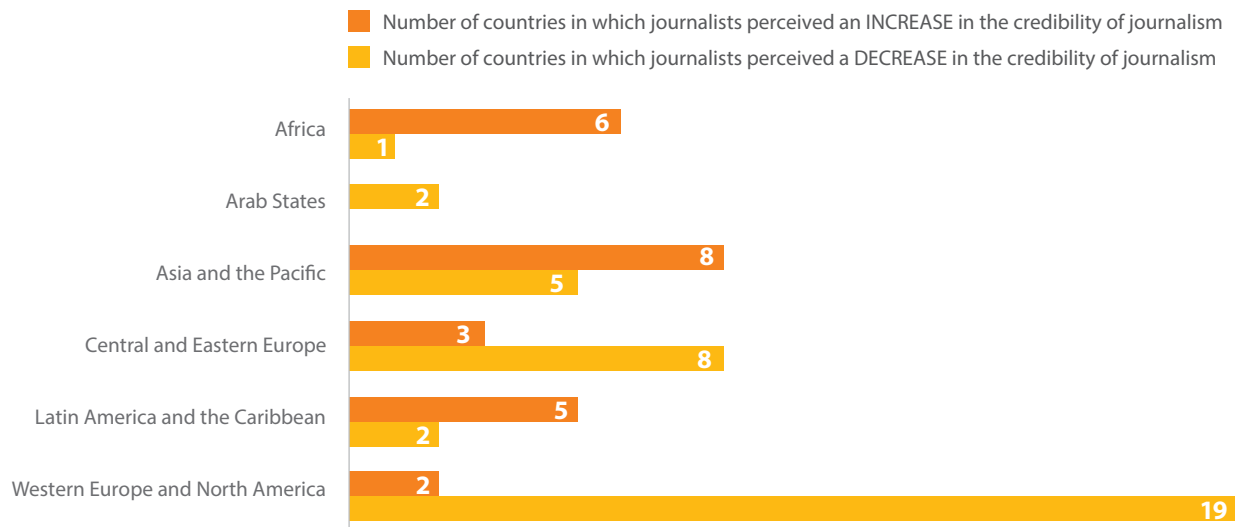
<sup>24</sup> Worlds of Journalism Study 2016. The Worlds of Journalism Study is an academically driven project that was founded to regularly assess the state of journalism throughout the world. Its most recent wave brought together researchers from 67 countries, who interviewed 27,500 journalists between 2012 and 2016.



media. While there remains a marked decline in print advertising sales in these States, some newspapers are reporting an increase in digital advertising revenues and subscriptions that have enabled expansions of newsrooms that

previously faced significant financial difficulty.<sup>25</sup> This development partly reflects the relationship between major news brands and electoral cycles but it may also signal a growing willingness on the part of readers to pay for quality digital content.

**Figure 3-5: Trends in journalists' perception of the credibility of journalism**



**Source:** Worlds of Journalism Study, 2016. Change: Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions

### Professionalism and efforts to mitigate political and economic interference

Media independence is strengthened by professionalism, both in terms of regulatory bodies and journalistic standards. In some countries, the rise of trade bodies as a dominating site of advocacy seems to limit the plurality of voices involved or consulted to those representing mainly owner interests in decision-making. This has occurred as the lobbying power of media

elites has increased with ownership consolidation, particularly in North America. In some cases, the relative formal independence of the media regulator from government may have made it more vulnerable to capture by commercial interests. Some of the board members from these trade bodies and associations sit on government working groups and are members of committees. Such members often facilitate the associations' indirect participation in the drafting of media laws and policy.

<sup>25</sup> Chatterjee 2017; Doctor 2016.

## Trends in Media Independence

Societal demand for the professionalization of regulatory and media bodies is significant. There is an intense global effort to shift public and governmental attitudes towards these international norms. Governmental alliances such as the Freedom Online Coalition and NGOs such as IFEX and the Media Legal Defence Initiative have helped cultivate public support for freedom of expression norms that underpin independence. There are also continued efforts around the world to train new cohorts of media lawyers and to sensitize judges to freedom of expression and independence issues. UNESCO has provided training in this vein to 5,000 employees of the judicial sector in Latin America, and is commencing a similar initiative in Africa. While normative initiatives were largely the purview of media development organizations and intergovernmental organizations such as the OSCE and the United Nations, technology companies are demonstrating a growing interest in these activities, particularly as they attempt to influence policy at a domestic level. Google, Facebook, and others have recently established policy offices also in Africa and the Arab region with a mandate to support the development of conducive policies and legal frameworks, as well as informed lawyers and policymakers, for their products.

As the first *World Trends Report* noted, while there have been a number of codes of ethics for journalists that aspire to universal status, and even some for 'online journalists' and bloggers, most transnational news agencies and broadcasters adhere to their own codes, although not all are publicly available.<sup>26</sup>

In most regions, newspapers have developed their own codes of conduct with consistent values and standards that publishers and journalists should observe. Further ensuring good practices, there has been a trend where some newspapers have appointed an ombudsman or readers' representative to handle complaints from the public. In many countries, press councils and associations function like trade unions for journalists seeking to improve working conditions and to remove barriers journalists face when gathering news. Depending on the country, independent press councils are formed on a non-statutory basis and in some cases, they are mandated by law. While such developments help promote effective professional accountability, they need to continuously ensure their political and economic independence. Contrasting biases exist within some private media to promote the political or economic interests of those close to or within government. Conversely, other media outlets publish sensationalist content with a strong anti-government slant, favouring higher profits or political gains over factual accuracy.

Alongside the growth of online courses, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and increased internet access in all regions of the world over the last few years, there has been an increase in online training material for journalism. For instance, UNESCO has published extensive guides for journalists on a range of topics from conflict-sensitive reporting to investigative reporting, and produced online curricula, including a model curriculum for journalism education and an online media and information literacy course. There are examples of universities in developing countries, such as in Africa, collaborating with universities in

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<sup>26</sup> UNESCO 2014a.

North America or Europe in building journalism and media courses and supporting various forms of distance learning. There are a number of distance learning programmes based in the United States and United Kingdom, such as the Knight Centre for Journalism in the Americas, which also offers courses in Spanish serving countries in Latin America. The BBC Academy is another prominent example. The University of South Africa offers online degrees and short courses, including in media, to a global audience. These initiatives help improve access and extend a normative idea and practice of journalism by increasing a trained cohort of journalists including in regions that have not typically had access to local training and courses. However, the escalating need to empower journalists about covering complex contemporary stories such as the Sustainable Development Goals, populism, genetics and technology is far from being met.

Donor support of media development and freedom of expression non-governmental organizations can vary widely from year to year, posing significant sustainability challenges to organizations, particularly in parts of Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. A recent report by the National Endowment for Democracy's Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) highlighted the swings in funding by tracking United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding to different regions over the past three years.<sup>27</sup> Domestic funding for these beneficiary groups remains limited in developing countries. The same report found illuminating results through a survey of donors' priorities in media development, highlighting the importance placed on access to information (see Figure 3-6). Coordinating the activities of funders and NGOs remains a major challenge affecting the ability

**Figure 3-6: Donor priorities in media development**



**Source:** Kalathil, S., 2017. *A Slowly Shifting Field: Understanding Donor Priorities in Media Development*, CIMA Digital Report. Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA).

<sup>27</sup> Kalathil 2017.

of media donors to ensure independence of the NGOs and media organizations that they support. Priorities often shift from year to year and different donor countries prioritize various themes, sometimes in consultation with the groups that they support but at other times dictated by donor priorities. Private foundations based in the Global North are increasingly providing grants to media organizations in the Global South. Such funds are often directed to cover specific topics of interest, such as health or education, and these donations can either support or weaken editorial independence.<sup>28</sup> The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) continues to seek to facilitate coordination for both donors and for NGOs working in this sector.

As a counter trend, there are increasing efforts by governments to regulate or prohibit the work of NGOs. This trend can be best witnessed where there has been a rise in legislation restricting NGOs and civil society groups.<sup>29</sup> What started a decade ago as only fragmentary efforts has now led to countries in all regions adopting legislation aimed at media development NGOs, especially those that receive foreign financing.<sup>30</sup> This legislation often includes the creation of barriers to external or foreign funding and efforts to constrain who can participate and support these groups and organizations. With the exception of some new and mainly digital independent non-profit investigative journalism enterprises, a trend of suppressing donor support has been felt in many NGOs in the Global South. This trend of restricting foreign investment in media development activities has typically not applied to cases of support coming from rising powers outside of the traditional ranks of media donor countries.

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<sup>28</sup> Schiffrin 2017a.

<sup>29</sup> International Centre of Not-for-Profit Law 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Rutzen 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Wiersema and Mors, 2016.

## Gender equality and media independence

As with media freedom and pluralism, the gendered aspects of media independence are many and varied. In order for media to work effectively in the interests of all, women and men must enjoy the same access and freedom to work independently in the media industry. Despite decades of progressive legislation, the development of internal gender equality policies, and the work of media unions, gender inequalities remain a continuing problem. Without clear sanctions, and without a vision about benefit, there has been little impetus to promote gender equality. In a 2016 study of board members' views in North America and Western Europe on the introduction of quotas, for example, individuals whose organizations (and countries) were committed to positive actions to increase women's representation were enthusiastic about the effects; but in contrast, individuals working in contexts without such commitments were rarely keen to embrace such strategies.<sup>31</sup>

In addressing issues around gender and media independence, a number of advocacy and media monitoring initiatives have developed over the past few years that provide data on persistent gender inequalities. In addition to this work, media unions at local, national, regional and global levels have been prominent in working to protect the interests of women media workers, initiating women's caucuses, appointing women's officers, establishing women's conferences and

developing handbooks of good practice. IFJ, for example, has a Gender Council (GC) which co-ordinates its gender-focused work. Since its inception, the GC has been IFJ's main vehicle to guide projects; formulate policy concerning gender and good practice; and advocate for and mainstream gender-based issues throughout IFJ, its projects and its member unions.<sup>32</sup> During its 2016 Congress, the work of the GC was officially enshrined and protected through inclusion in the IFJ Constitution. Women media professionals themselves have also been active in forming their own networks to support and encourage each other, organizing events, developing mentoring schemes and initiating awards that recognize women's accomplishments.

### **Gender equality in the media workplace**

Research over the past two decades on the working conditions of women media professionals has mostly shown that women sometimes face hostility in the newsroom, which can be partly explained by the lack of organizational policies relating to gender equality and reporting mechanisms for harassment. The International Women's Media Foundation's 2011 global study of women in the news media, cited in the previous chapter, found that more than half of the news media organizations surveyed had a company-wide policy on gender equality, but with significant variations between regions.<sup>33</sup> More than two-thirds of organizations based in Western Europe and Africa had such policies, compared with a quarter in the Middle East and North Africa and less than 20 per cent in Central and Eastern European countries.

The European Institute for Gender Equality's 2013 report, which looked at 99 major media houses across Europe, found that a quarter of organizations had policies that included a provision for gender equality, often as part of broader equality directives in the society. It was notable that of the 99 organizations, public service bodies were much more likely than commercial ones to have equality policies in place. However, media houses with such policies in place typically lacked mechanisms to monitor their effectiveness, thereby limiting their potential to effect change. However, the limitations of work practices to address gender inequalities do not reflect a lack of advocacy as there is evidence of a growing commitment towards gender equality on the part of media organizations.

### **Media monitoring and advocacy**

In addition to the Global Media Monitoring Project [see TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM: GENDER EQUALITY AND MEDIA PLURALISM], there are several regional initiatives which regularly monitor gendered aspects of the media, some of which also work with journalists to promote change within newsrooms. For example, the South Africa-based Gender Links, formed in 2001 to promote 'gender equality in and through the media' in Southern Africa, leads the media cluster of the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance. Gender Links promotes media advocacy through global initiatives such as the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG), hosting gender and media summits, developing policy in collaboration with regulators and working with media organizations through training and policy development. Gender Links is currently developing Centres of Excellence

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<sup>32</sup> International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) n.d.

<sup>33</sup> Byerly 2011.

## Trends in Media Independence

for Gender in the Media in 108 newsrooms across Southern Africa and has established eight Centres of Excellence for Gender in Media Education.

In 2016, the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) Network and other partners launched a campaign to end news media sexism by 2020. The 'End News Media Sexism' campaign encourages and supports advocacy initiatives that promote changes in media policies and journalism practice. The campaign is taking a multi-disciplinary approach and uses a variety of different tools to promote awareness, including a gender scorecard against which media organizations are measured.

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), founded in 1988 as part of a broader project to promote women's empowerment in Africa, prioritizes women's development in the field of communication, where they have created and managed platforms to share information, ideas, strategies and experiences to foster cross-learning and more effective implementation of shared goals. FEMNET provides strategic policy recommendations through the production of reports and policy briefs. It has led extensive local capacity building initiatives, such as facilitating women's access to ICTs in Africa. In Asia, the South Asia Women's Network (SWAN) has rolled out a research project titled 'Women for Change: Building a Gendered Media in South Asia'. Covering nine South Asian countries, it is partly supported by UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication.

In addition, a number of national organizations work locally to redress the disparity in women's representation and participation in the media. Women, Media and Development (known by its Arabic acronym TAM) is a Palestine-based organization founded in 2004. TAM works with local women to promote their increased representation in the media and to foster an environment where they are able to effectively communicate and advocate for their rights. TAM provides training for women on how to access and use various media platforms, in addition to promoting community awareness and advocacy initiatives. Notably, TAM has facilitated capacity building and worked to counter stereotypes of women in the media by producing gender sensitive guides and training manuals, in addition to implementing projects that aim to increase women's access to decision-making positions and civic participation.

### Formal and informal professional associations

Alongside advocacy organizations, a number of formal and informal networks of women media professionals also support women in the media. One of the oldest is the Alliance for Women in Media (AWM), originally established in 1951 as American Women in Radio and Television, which supports women across all media to expand their networks, participate in training and professional development and celebrate their talents.

In 1975, it began its annual programme of awards to recognize the work of programme-makers and content-providers in promoting women

and women's issues. A more regionally focused example is the Marie Colvin Journalists' Network, a bilingual Arabic-English online community of women journalists working in the Arab world that aims to assist vulnerable local women journalists who lack support in relation to safety training, legal contracts, insurance or psychological care.<sup>34</sup> The network links experienced journalists with new or isolated journalists for mentoring and peer-to-peer support, while also working closely with experts in media law, digital security, and health and safety to ensure specialized advice and assistance.

Media unions at local, regional and global levels have established caucuses for women and have campaigned to encourage more women to stand for elected office within formal union structures. In 2001, IFJ found that women represented 29 per cent of union membership in 38 countries but just 17 per cent of members on union governing bodies: in its 2010 report, it found that women's representation on boards had increased only slightly, to 15 per cent. In Europe, between 2006 and 2013, women's union membership went down from 45 per cent to 42 per cent and board membership also declined, from 39 per cent to 36 per cent. Without more locally grounded investigations on the situation of women journalists in European media organizations, it is hard to determine what might be causing such a decline but one likely explanation is that it reflects a decline in the numbers of women in the European mainstream media workforce and the increasing use of freelancers, many of whom are women. The existence of these organizations, networks and associations exist is evidence of the importance women attach to supporting each

other in an industry that is heavily controlled by men. It also shows that there is an appreciation and appetite for women-only social spaces where women can share experiences and strategies for not simply coping but thriving in a competitive and precarious environment.

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**In order for media to work effectively in the interests of all, women and men must enjoy the same access and freedom to work independently in the media industry.**

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<sup>34</sup> Marie Colvin Journalists' Network n.d.

# Conclusion

Among the significant aspects of press freedom that are at stake, media independence is among the most vulnerable. Incorporated in the goal of media independence are at least two aspects: first, the independence of media regulators from government influence and commercial interests; second, the independence of the media and journalists themselves from control, whether by political, governmental or commercial interests. The regional reports in the *World Trends* series indicate that in some regions there has been an increase in government direction and political involvement in decision-making concerning licenses and sanctions. Oligarchic media structures, with close ties between government, politicians and/or powerful business persons, override independent professional standards in the public interest.

Increased efforts to paint the media as a simple instrument of political opposition, rather than an institution whose social role includes playing a watchdog that holds government to task, have been a factor in weakening public support and trust in the media. Divided societies engrossed in polarizing elections mean that media performance has increasingly become political tinder. Elements of the press are portrayed not as professional intermediaries operating within diverse narrative structures, but as political partisans fabricating content, and therefore undeserving of claims for journalistic protection. This trend has intensified since the first *World Trends Report* and spread geographically. Both aspects of independence—the operation of government agencies and the actions of the media themselves—have been deeply affected. Meanwhile, the supporting ecosystem for independence, of NGOs and training programmes, has experienced challenges, and gender inequality continues to be a factor that impacts on how independence is exercised.







# Trends in the Safety of journalists

**530** *JOURNALISTS WERE KILLED,*  
Between 2012 and 2016

MAP OF JOURNALISTS KILLED BY REGION, 2012 - 2016

- Western Europe and North America
- Central and Eastern Europe
- Africa
- Asia and the Pacific
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Arab States



*IMPUNITY FOR  
CRIMES AGAINST  
JOURNALISTS*

**9 in 10**

**CASES  
REMAIN  
UNPUNISHED**

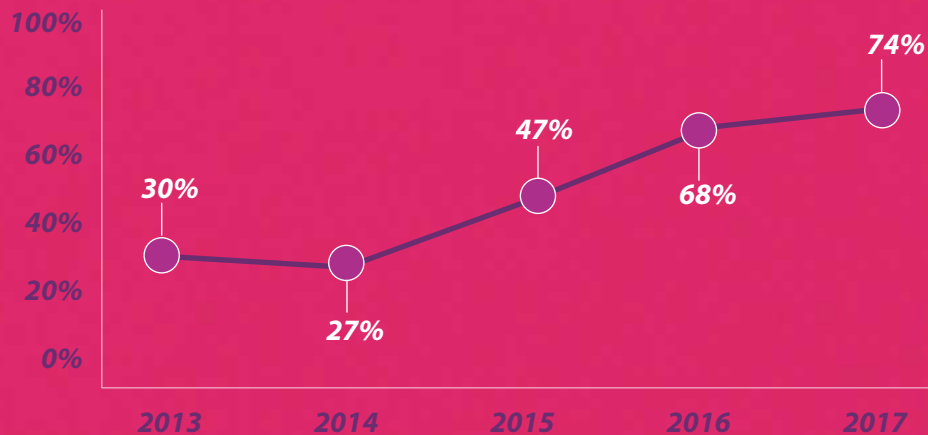


*GROWING THREATS  
TO DIGITAL SAFETY*

include cyberattacks, surveillance, hacking, intimidation and rise in online harassment, especially of women journalists



## WIDENING ATTACKS



**MEMBER STATES  
HAVE BECOME  
MORE RESPONSIVE**  
to UNESCO's requests  
on the safety of  
journalists, 2013-2017



**UN PLAN  
OF ACTION**  
on the  
safety of  
journalists  
and the  
issue of  
impunity



**INCREASING RESPONSES**



# Trends in the Safety of journalists

## Overview

**A**cross the world, journalism remains a dangerous profession. Speaking truth to power, investigating crime and corruption, holding governments to account and reporting from insecure contexts often carry risks of violent retaliation, harassment or arbitrary detention.

The period between 2012 and 2017 has seen an increase in the frequency and regularity of harassment and violence directed towards journalists compared to previous years, most significantly in the number of journalists killed while carrying out their work. Amidst continued conflict and upheaval, killings in the Arab region remain very high; however, since a peak in 2012, numbers have slowly begun to decline. The Africa region too saw a peak in journalist deaths in 2012, but has since witnessed a significant decline. The Latin America and the Caribbean region has demonstrated a significant upward trend in the killings of journalists, largely connected to organized crime, drug trafficking and corruption.

Killings of women journalists increased during the period (from five women journalists killed in 2012 to 10 in 2016), with the Arab region proving the deadliest, followed by Africa.

Although the killings of foreign correspondents tend to garner international publicity, it is overwhelmingly local journalists who are killed while reporting on local expressions of war, corruption or the activities of criminal groups. This trend holds across all regions. Political groups, military officials, insurgent groups, militias and criminal organizations have directly targeted and sought to silence the voices of journalists.

The Arab region continues to experience high rates of abduction and torture, notably from insurgent groups. The arbitrary imprisonment of journalists, which fosters self-censorship and impinges on the public's right to access information, has reportedly continued to rise, although many governments have maintained that particular journalists have been imprisoned for reasons unrelated to their journalistic work. The jailings of journalists in one Member State have seen a significant rise in figures in the Western Europe and North America region.

Impunity for crimes against journalists remains the norm, with justice in only one in 10 cases. However, Member States have shown increased responsiveness to the UNESCO Director-General's request for information on the status of judicial inquiries into killings of journalists, with 74 per cent responding—in varying degrees of detail—in 2017, compared to 30 per cent in 2013. In 2013, the UN General Assembly declared 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, which is increasingly observed across the world.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Digital safety remains a pressing concern, as arbitrary surveillance becomes increasingly widespread across all regions, putting both journalists and their sources at risk and encouraging self-censorship. For women journalists especially, misogynistic cyber harassment has continued to be a significant threat, potentially silencing journalists and hindering media pluralism in terms of gender diversity in media production.

Despite the difficult circumstances under which many journalists work, the period since 2012 has also seen progress made in countering and raising awareness of violence against journalists, including through the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

This chapter provides further detail on trends in the safety of journalists since 2012, taking into account the specific threats faced by women journalists and trends in the digital safety of journalists. It also summarizes the achievements of UN bodies, Member States, academia, civil society groups and media organizations in advancing and promoting journalist safety.

# Understanding the safety of journalists

Journalists and media professionals perform a critical role, reporting news and information to the public that can bring misdeeds to light, make public institutions accountable and contribute to the creation of more just, peaceful and inclusive

societies. Journalists, serving at the frontline of the right to freedom of expression and access to information, must be able to carry out their work without fear of reprisal or intimidation.

The killing of journalists and media professionals is the ultimate form of censorship. Not only is it a grave violation of human rights, it also represents a broader attack on the collective right to freedom of expression and access to information. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of freedom of opinion and expression has noted, protection against attacks on journalists is ‘fundamental not only for journalists to be able to perform their work, but also for society’s access to information and for government accountability.’<sup>1</sup> Such violence censors the voices of individuals, works to intimidate others and encourages the use of self-censorship with a ‘chilling-effect’ on free expression.

There are number of other ways that journalists’ safety is undermined. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 16.10.1 includes, besides killings: kidnappings; enforced disappearance; arbitrary detention; and torture. Other kinds of attacks include threats and intimidation; beatings; confiscation of equipment; enforced exile; and sexual harassment. Digital dimensions of attacks cover cyber-attacks on websites and equipment; arbitrary surveillance; and online harassment. These can all be occupational hazards for those producing and disseminating journalism. Such violence and harassment can be the result of actions taken by state or non-state actors, contextual factors such as political and social circumstances, or norms legitimising intolerance.

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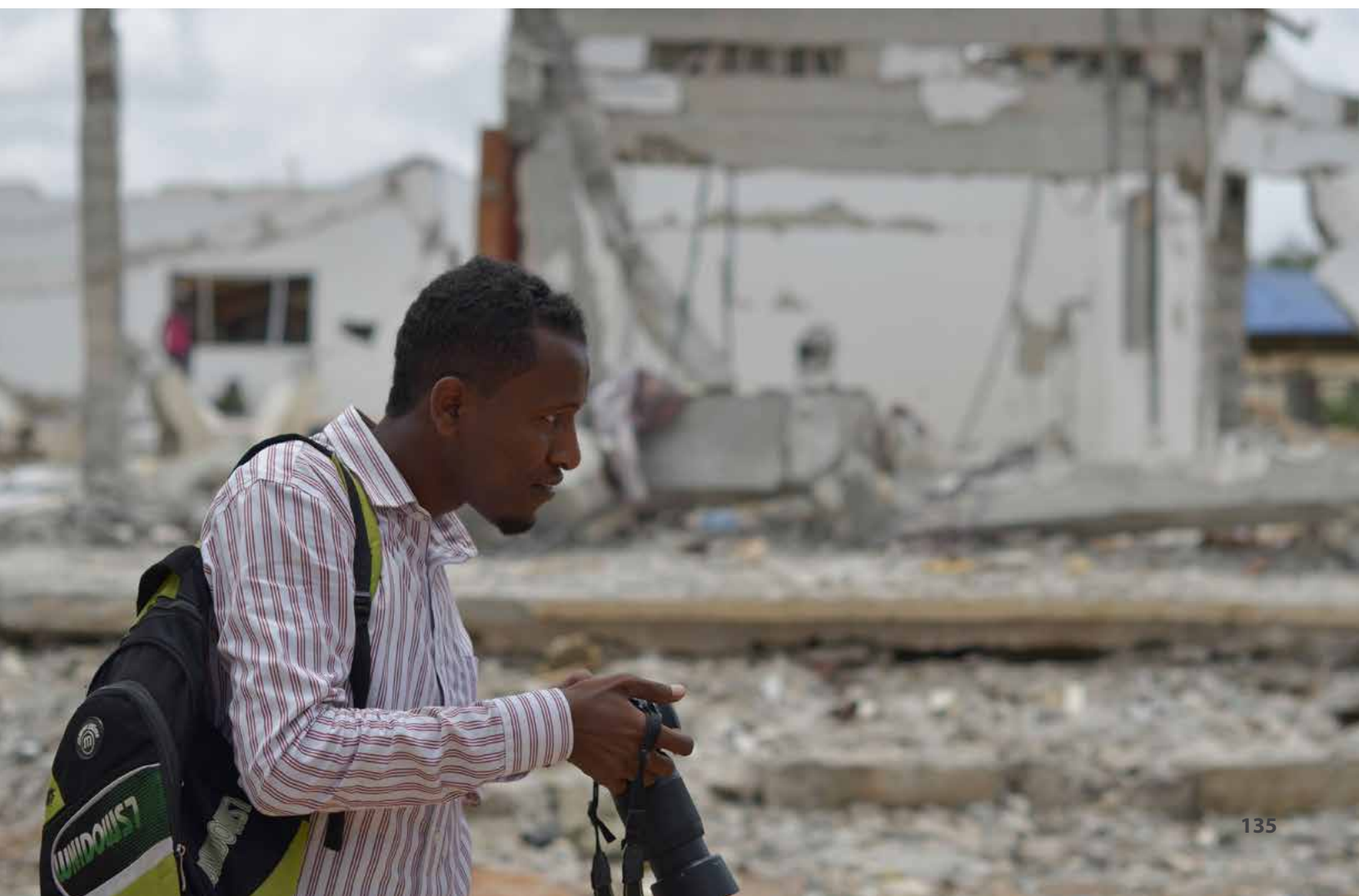
<sup>1</sup> OHCHR 2017.

Since the first *World Trends Report*, there have continued to be significant structural changes within the media landscape. Due in large part to advances in information and communication technology, more people are able to engage in citizen journalism and freelance coverage of conflict, and this trend has continued over the past five years. Yet, such citizen journalists and freelancers often lack sufficient resources and safety training that traditional news media outlets have typically provided, leaving them vulnerable to threats of violence, arbitrary surveillance and tracking. In particular, threats to digital safety pose a new and evolving risk, especially in relation to online harassment and the protection of confidential sources.

Because of this more fluid media environment, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define journalists by traditional occupational status (i.e.

print, television or radio). Many journalists now publish their work on several platforms, and audiences are increasingly accessing content from a variety of sources, such as 'pure-play' digital news media, online blogs and social media, rather than solely traditional news outlets, or the new platforms of these legacy institutions [see TRENDS IN MEDIA PLURALISM].

With this in mind, UNESCO's analysis of the safety of journalists encompasses a range of actors including reporters, camera crew, and social media producers of significant amounts of journalism, amongst others. UNESCO has conducted an analysis of its own data, and complemented this analysis with peer-reviewed academic articles in addition to several databases and reports of major international, independent non-government organizations.



### Box 4-1: UNESCO's work to promote the safety of journalists

As the UN specialized agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression, UNESCO works to create a free and safe environment for journalists through spearheading the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, 2017 marking its fifth year of implementation. This has included impact in the following areas:

#### 1 Strong normative framework in place on the safety of journalists

12 resolutions and decisions on journalists' safety have been adopted since 2012 by the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, Human Rights Council and UNESCO.

An indicator on the safety of journalists (SDG 16.10.1) has been established to measure achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular of Target 16.10 on public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms.

#### 2 Enhanced awareness of journalists' safety and impunity challenges

The UN General Assembly in 2013 proclaimed 2 November as International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, and global commemorations have been led by UNESCO since then.

#### 3 Reinforced monitoring role within the framework of the SDGs

Member States of UNESCO have increased their annual reporting on judicial follow-up to killings of journalists, within the framework of the Director-General's biennial report to UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity.

Assessments based on the Journalists' Safety Indicators have been conducted in 10 countries.

#### 4 Empowerment of key institutions in society on the safety of journalists through capacity building

Relations between law enforcement agencies and journalists have improved through training of security forces on freedom of expression in more than a dozen countries, aided by UNESCO's training manual *Freedom of Expression and Public Order*.

Integration of safety of journalists into the curricula of journalism education schools has been boosted by the UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education and a special Model Course piloted in the Arab region.

The *Safety Guide for Journalists: a handbook for reporters in high risk environments*, produced by UNESCO and Reporters Without Borders, was updated in 2017 to include increased focus on the safety of women journalists.

5,500 justice system workers in Latin America were trained on international standards on freedom of expression and journalists' safety through online courses; and a similar programme was launched in Africa.

#### 5 Building academic research on the safety of journalists

UNESCO has published *Building Digital Safety for Journalism and Protecting Journalism Sources in the Digital Age*, and collaborated on the book *The Assault on Journalism*.

Two academic conferences on journalists' safety have been organized alongside World Press Freedom Day.

The Journalism Safety Research Network was established through the University of Sheffield with UNESCO support.

#### 6 New coalitions created to promote journalists' safety

An informal 'Group of Friends' of Member States that support the safety of journalists has been set up at UNESCO, with similar groups at the UN in New York and Geneva.

A network of safety officers in media companies has expanded following the meeting '*Media Organizations Standing Up for the Safety of Journalists*' held at UNESCO in 2016.

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



# Violence against journalists

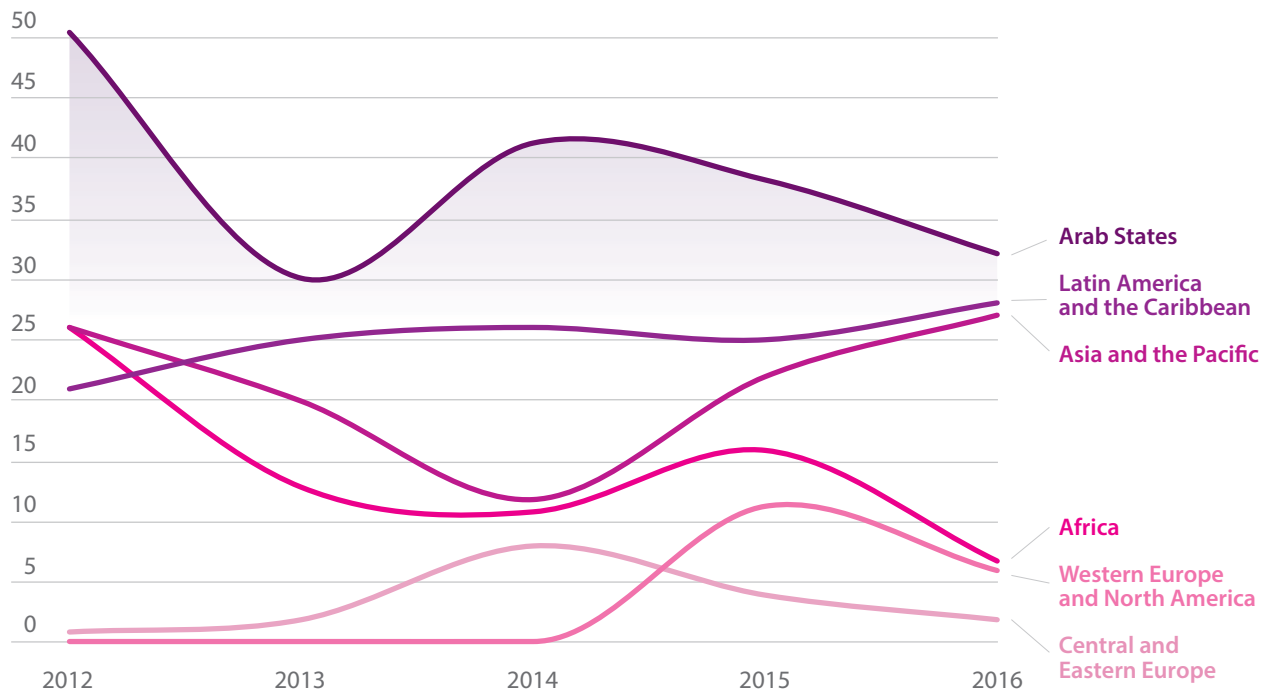
## Killings of journalists

From 2012 through 2016 inclusive, UNESCO's Director-General condemned the killing of 530 journalists, an average of two deaths per week.<sup>2</sup> (See Figure 4-1)

During the previous five-year period, 2007 to 2011, UNESCO recorded 316 killings. The year 2012 proved to be the deadliest year on record, with 124 journalists killed. Although the number of journalists killed per year has slightly declined since 2012, it remains alarmingly high.

With a number of Member States that have experienced periods of violent conflict, the Arab region remains the most dangerous for journalists, with 191 journalists killed between

**Figure 4-1: journalists killed by year and by region, 2012-2016**



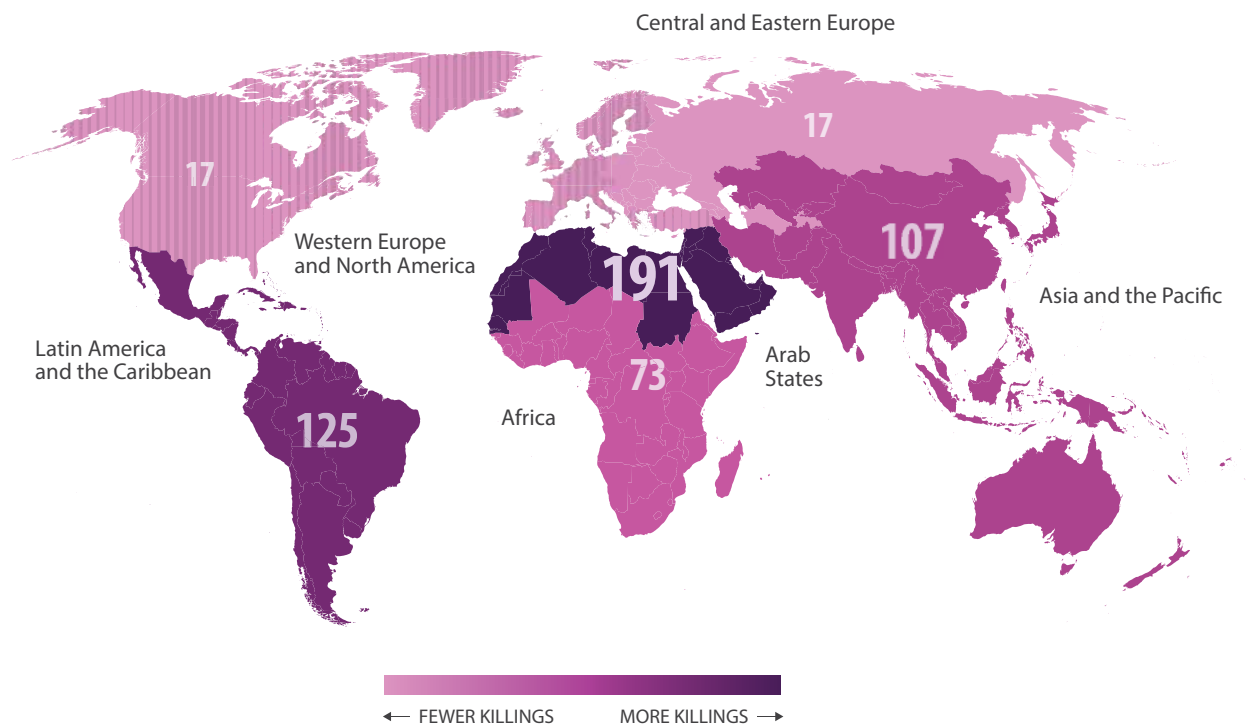
<sup>2</sup> Data on the killings of journalists correspond to those condemned by UNESCO's Director-General, following Resolution 29 adopted by the 29th session of the General Conference. As further detailed in this chapter, on request of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's IPDC, UNESCO has developed a mechanism to monitor ongoing impunity. Each year, UNESCO's Director-General sends requests to Member States asking them to inform the Organization of the status of ongoing investigations into the killing of journalists about whom the Director-General has made public statements. UNESCO's statistics related to impunity are based on this data, which is published biennially in the Director-General's report to the IPDC Intergovernmental Council and in alternate years in the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report*.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

2012 and 2016, including a significant peak of 50 deaths in 2012. Despite registering some decline in the following years, overall the region represents 36 per cent of all cases. Latin America and the Caribbean saw an increase in the number of journalists killed over the past five years, with 125 killings overall and a peak of 28 in 2016. This trend can be largely attributed to organized crime, drug trafficking and corruption. After a steep decline prior to 2014, killings have sharply risen throughout the Asia and Pacific region to a

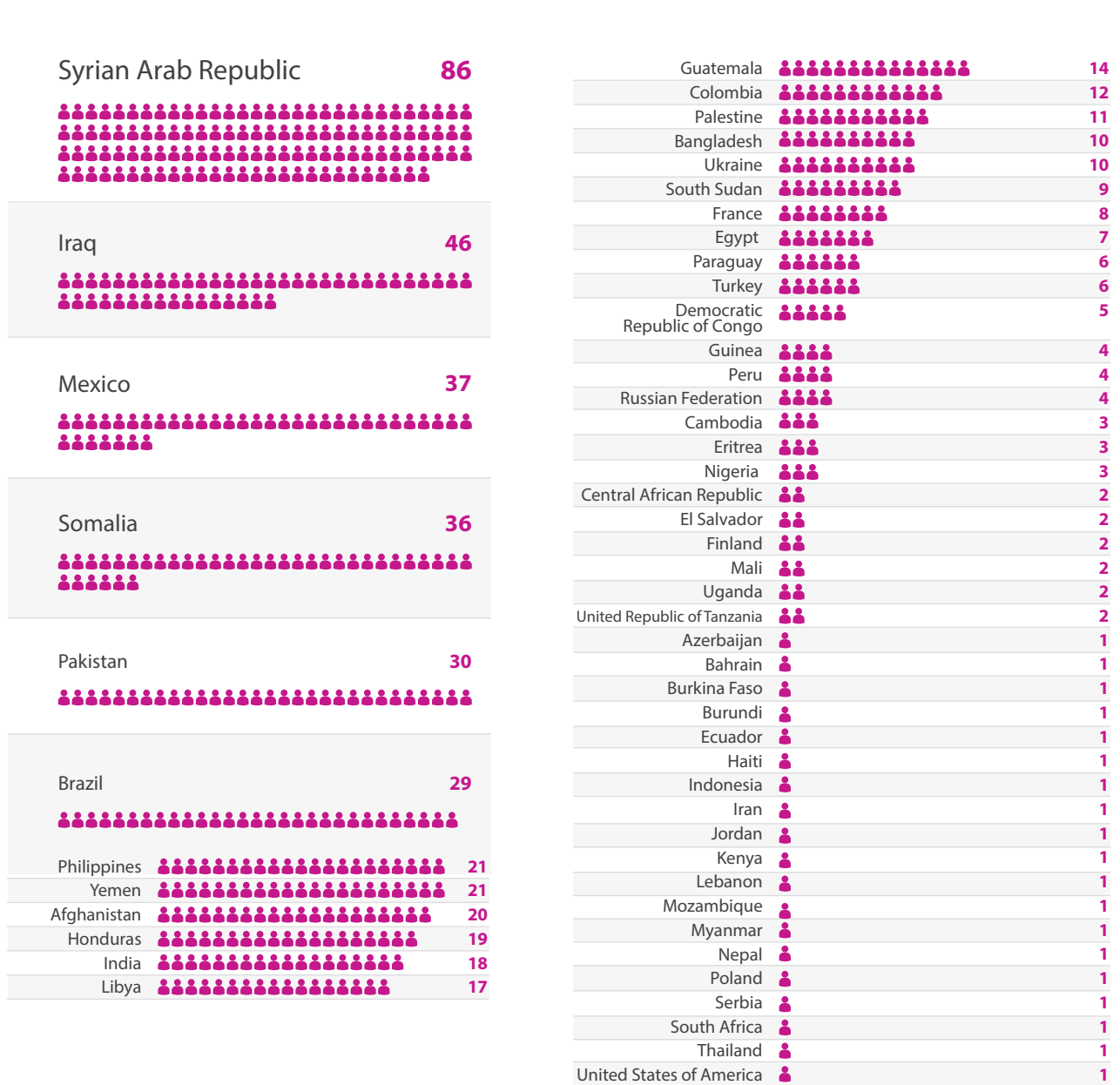
high of 27 in 2016. Comparatively, Africa has seen a distinct decline in killings of journalists over the last five years, down from 26 in 2012 to seven in 2016. Killings throughout Central and Eastern Europe have fluctuated over the past five years, presenting no clear trend but remaining relatively low. A generally low-risk region for lethal violence against journalists, Western Europe and North America has seen uncharacteristically high killings in the past three years largely due to an act of violent extremism (see Figure 4-2).

**Figure 4-2: Map of journalists killed by region, 2012-2016**






























**Killings per country are shown in Figures 4-3 and 4-4**

**Figure 4-3: Journalists killed by country, 2012-2016**



## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

**Figure 4-4: Journalists killed by country, 2016**

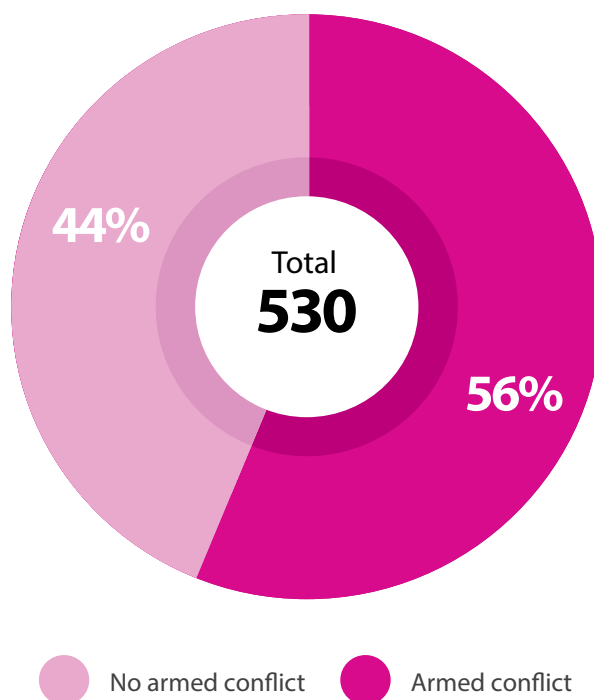
Afghanistan		13
Mexico		13
Yemen		11
Iraq		9
Syrian Arab Republic		8
Guatemala		7
Brazil		5
India		5
Pakistan		4
Libya		3
Somalia		3
Turkey		3
Bangladesh		2
Finland		2
Philippines		2
Burkina Faso		1
Demoratic Republic of Congo		1
El Salvador		1
Guinea		1
Honduras		1
Jordan		1
Myanmar		1
Peru		1
Serbia		1
South Sudan		1
Ukraine		1
United States of America		1

Based on UNESCO data, the majority of journalists killed between 2012 and 2016 have occurred in countries experiencing armed conflict, representing 56 per cent of overall killings (see Figure 4-5).<sup>3</sup>

Of the 328 killings of journalists recorded during the same period by the Committee to Protect

Journalists (CPJ) as confirmed to be related to the person's work as a journalist, nearly 50 per cent were murdered, compared to 36 per cent caught in the crossfire and 14 per cent killed while on dangerous assignment.<sup>4</sup> According to the NGO, political groups were the most likely source of violence (36 per cent) in these killings, followed by military officials (22 per cent) and unknown sources (20 per cent). The percentage of killings that were targeted for murder reached a peak in 2015 at 70 per cent, dropping to 38 per cent in 2016. That year, 54 per cent of journalists were reportedly killed while caught in crossfire in situations of armed conflict, the highest percentage recorded in the period.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 4-5: Journalists killed in countries with armed conflict, 2012-2016**



<sup>3</sup> Countries were considered to be in armed conflict if listed in the annual reports of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

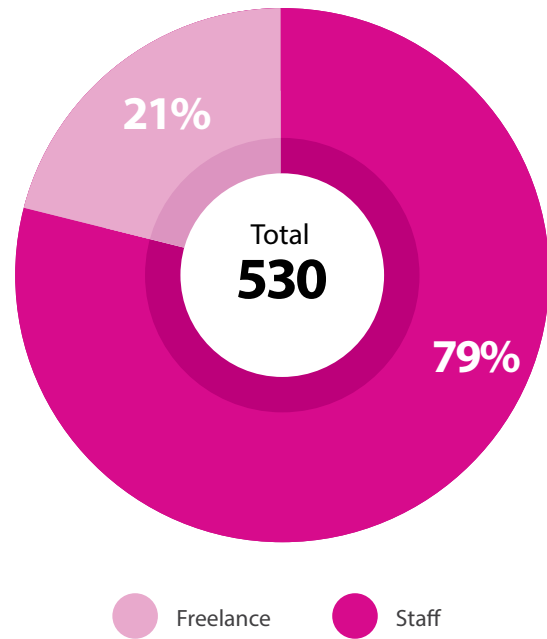
<sup>4</sup> Some of the murders recorded by CPJ occurred in countries experiencing armed conflict.

<sup>5</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists 2017.

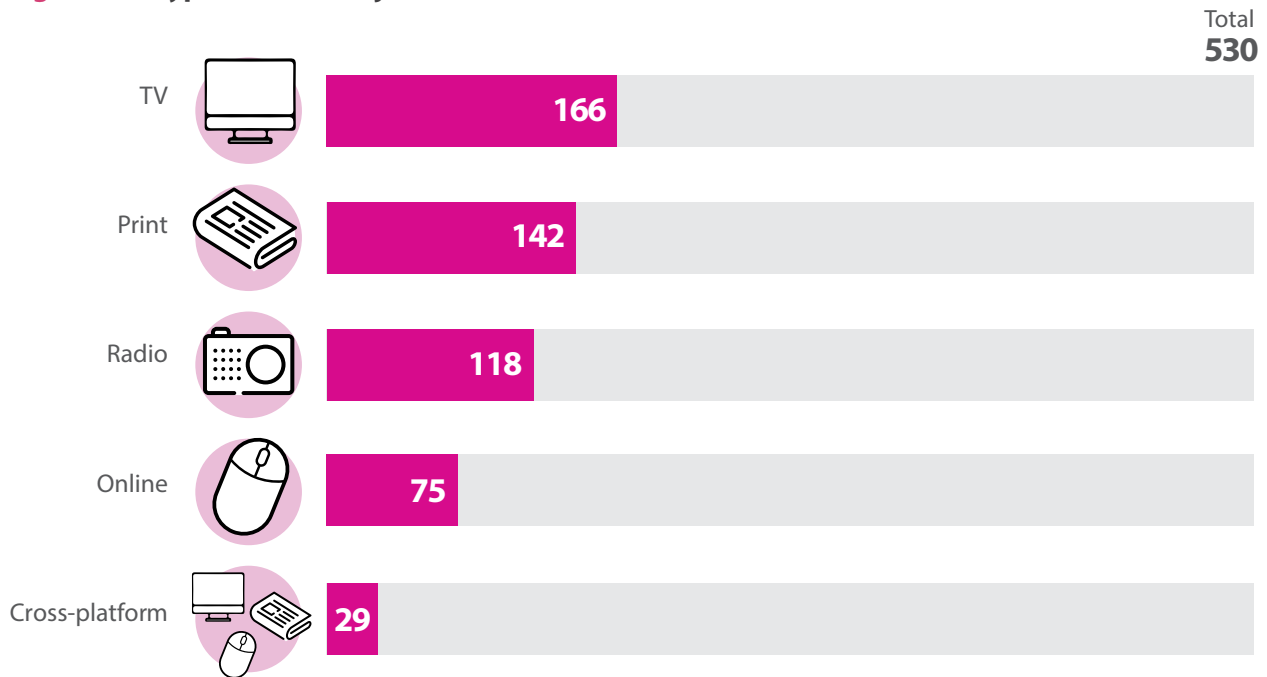
As the reliance on freelance journalists by news organizations is increasing, a rising proportion of journalists killed have been freelance. UNESCO has found that over the past five years, 113 freelance journalists were killed, representing 21 per cent of the total (see Figure 4-6). Freelance journalists are particularly vulnerable, often working alone on stories, in dangerous environments, and without the same level of assistance and protection as staff-journalists.<sup>6</sup>

In the same period, according to UNESCO data, the number of journalists targeted who either work for online publications or maintain a personal blog fluctuated significantly, but accounts for 14 per cent of journalists killed overall. Journalists and crew who work in primarily television experienced the most casualties (166), followed by those mainly producing for print (142), radio (118), online (75) and those working across multiple platforms (29) - see Figure 4-7.

**Figure 4-6: Employment status of journalists killed, 2012-2016**



**Figure 4-7: Type of media of journalists killed, 2012-2016**

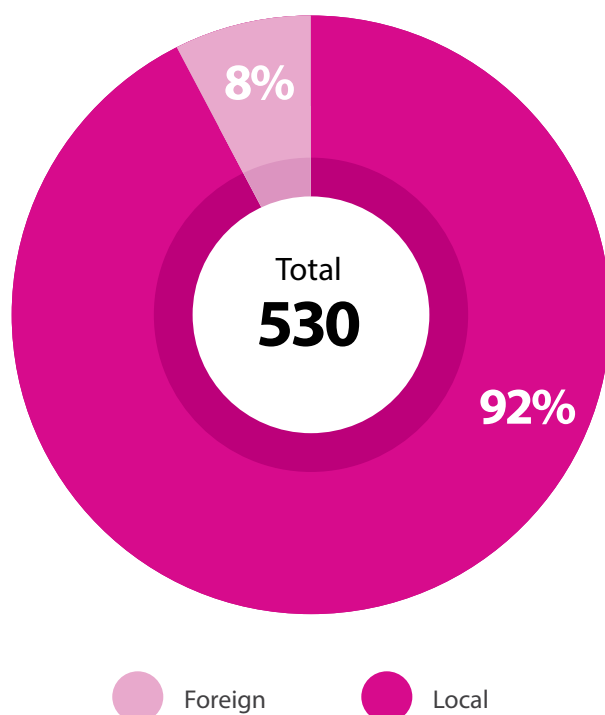


<sup>6</sup> UNESCO Director-General 2016.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

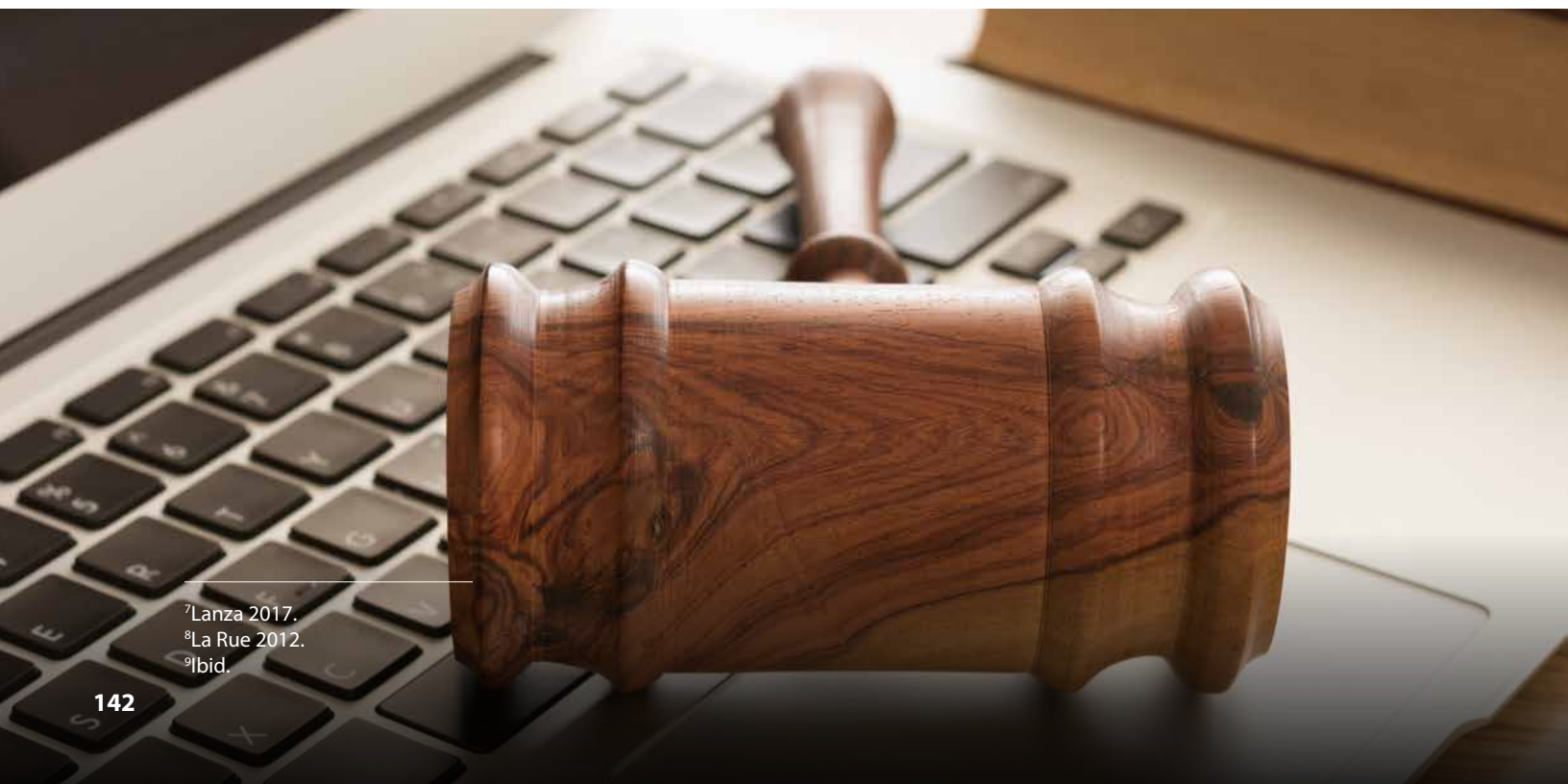
The vast majority of journalists killed were local journalists (92 per cent), while eight per cent were foreign correspondents. This trend holds across all regions (see Figure 4-8).

**Figure 4-8: Local and foreign journalists killed, 2012-2016**



## Impunity for crimes against journalists

Impunity for the killing of journalists prevails as the predominant trend, with the vast majority of crimes remaining unresolved. Impunity is considered a key obstacle to ensuring journalists' safety, while producing a strong chilling effect on the exercise of freedom of expression<sup>7</sup> (see Box 4-2). A culture of impunity works to embolden would-be perpetrators of violence against journalists given the knowledge that their crimes will go unpunished, while also working to silence journalists by encouraging self-censorship within the media itself and deterring the investigation of sensitive topics, ultimately perpetuating more violence in what becomes a 'vicious cycle'.<sup>8</sup> The root cause of the continuing trend of impunity has been attributed to lack of political will to pursue investigations, including for fear of reprisals from criminal networks in addition to inadequate legal frameworks, a weak judicial system, lack of resources allocated to law enforcement, negligence, and corruption.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>7</sup>Lanza 2017.  
<sup>8</sup>La Rue 2012.  
<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

**Box 4-2: Focus on Oscar Cantú Murguía, taking a stand against the killing of journalists**



***‘Everything in life has a beginning and an end, a price to pay. And if this price is life, I am not prepared for any more of my collaborators to pay it, nor myself.’***

*- Oscar Cantú Murguía, Director, Norte, Mexico*

**O**n 23 March 2017, Miroslava Breach, a journalist for the national newspaper *La Jornada* and a frequent contributor to the regional newspaper *Norte*, was shot dead in her car in front of one of her children, who was left unharmed. The gunman left an explanatory note: ‘For being a loudmouth.’

For Oscar Cantú Murguía, the director of *Norte*, this unacceptable crime was the final straw. On 2 April 2017, he wrote his last editorial: ‘On this day, esteemed reader, I am writing to inform you that I have taken the decision to close the newspaper because, among other things, there are neither the guarantees nor the security to exercise critical, counterweight journalism.’

*Norte* was closed in protest of Breach’s murder, ending the paper’s 27-year commitment to shining a light on regional issues. Through the production of critical and investigative journalism at *Norte*, Cantú demonstrated a dedication to his home state, social justice and government transparency. For Cantú, Breach’s murder was a sombre call to action to confront the lack of security for journalists and the prevailing culture of impunity for crimes committed against them.

‘I suddenly realized that I had become accustomed to listening about and reading about journalists getting killed. It’s something that you just get used to,’ Cantú said. ‘But when it happened to...a person that was so near to me. It just woke me up. It made me aware. And I said I need to do something. I have a responsibility.’

Cantú’s experience represents the reality for many journalists working in insecure contexts facing the decision of whether to continue their work in the face of open hostility. Speaking to the *Washington Post*, Cantú explained his reasoning for closing the newspaper: ‘For me, a free press is a pillar of democracy,’ Cantú said. ‘If I can no longer do the type of journalism that I want to do ... I cannot accept it anymore. Enough.’

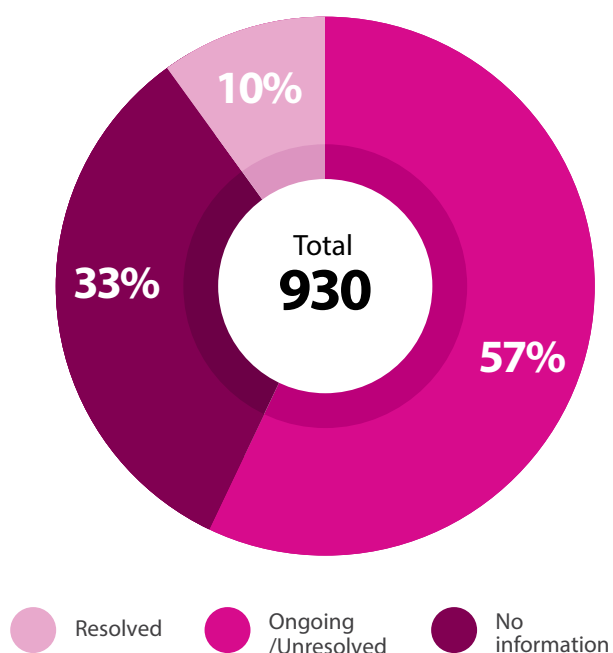
## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

On request of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), UNESCO has developed a mechanism to monitor ongoing impunity. Each year, UNESCO's Director-General sends requests to Member States asking them to inform the Organization of the status of ongoing investigations into the killing of journalists that the Director-General has condemned. UNESCO records the responses to these requests and categorizes them as 'resolved',<sup>10</sup> 'ongoing/unresolved',<sup>11</sup> or 'no response'.<sup>12</sup> In February and March 2017, UNESCO sent letters to 62 Member States requesting information on the status of unresolved cases that occurred between 2006 and 2016.

Based on Member State responses, the percentage of resolved cases has remained low and relatively unchanged. Cumulatively, since UNESCO began requesting information on the judicial follow-up to journalists' killings condemned by the Director-General, the Organization has received

information from 63 out of 75 Member States. The information covers 622 cases out of a total of 930 recorded by UNESCO between 2006 and 2016 (67 per cent).<sup>13</sup> (see Figure 4-9)

**Figure 4-9: Status of judicial inquiry into killings of journalists, 2006-2016**



<sup>10</sup> The status of a case regarding the killing of a journalist is considered as '**Resolved**' if the Member State has provided one or more of the following responses to the Director-General's request to provide information concerning the status of the investigation: a. The perpetrator(s) of the crime has (/have) been brought to justice and been convicted by a court of law. b. The suspected perpetrator(s) of the crime died before a court case could take place or be completed. c. The judicial process has revealed that the death was not related to the victim's journalistic practice. The Director-General no longer requests status updates for such cases.

<sup>11</sup> The status of a case regarding the killing of a journalist is considered as '**Ongoing/Unresolved**' if the Member State has provided one of the following responses to the Director-General's request to provide information concerning the status of the investigation: a. The case is currently being investigated by law enforcement agencies or other relevant authorities. b. The case has been taken up by the judicial system but a final verdict has not yet been reached and the suspect(s) has (/have) not been convicted and sentenced. The 'Ongoing/Unresolved' category also applies to cases where only one of the suspected killers has been convicted and sentenced. c. The journalist has been reported by the Member State as having been killed by foreign actors beyond national jurisdiction. d. A court of law has acquitted the suspected perpetrator(s) of the crime (for example due to lack of or tampered evidence). e. A court of law has ruled to archive the case or is otherwise unable to be processed through the judiciary system (for example, due to statutes of limitations). This category therefore also includes those cases for which a judicial process has been completed, but where no person/s has/have yet been successfully held accountable in terms of due legal process, and hence where the case remains unresolved. The Director-General continues to request status updates for all of the above cases, except in the cases where it is explicitly mentioned that the case is beyond national jurisdiction or that it has been judicially archived.

<sup>12</sup> '**No information received so far**' is used if the Member State has never provided information to UNESCO on the status of the investigation, whether this year or in previous years. 'Acknowledgments', as described above, are included in this category insofar as they do not include any specific information on the judicial follow-up into the cases of killings of journalists condemned by the Director-General. The Director-General continues annually to request status updates for such cases.

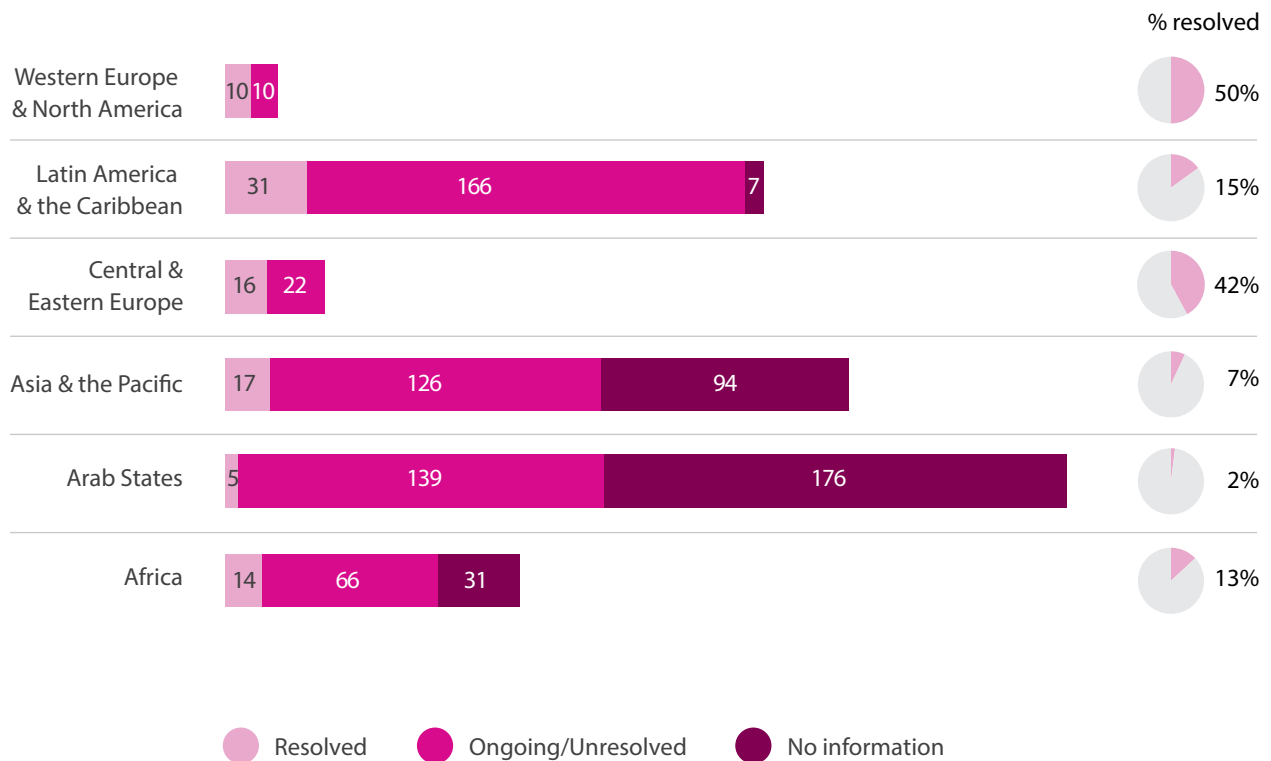
<sup>13</sup> This represents the status of judicial inquiries as of 9 October 2017 for killings that occurred between 2006 and 2016.



Of these 622 cases, 93 cases have been classified as 'resolved', representing 15 per cent of the cases for which information was received, and just 10 per cent of cases overall, an improvement of two percentage points in comparison to 2016. For the remaining 529 cases for which UNESCO received information, either a police or judicial inquiry is still underway, the case is beyond national jurisdiction or the case has been archived or the case remains unresolved.

Regionally, the highest incidence of resolved cases can be found in Western Europe and North America, with 10 out of 20 cases resolved (50 per cent); followed by Central and Eastern Europe, with 16 out of 38 cases (42 per cent); Latin America and the Caribbean, 31 out of 204 cases (15 per cent); Africa, 14 out of 111 cases (13 per cent); Asia and the Pacific, 17 out of 237 cases (7 per cent); and finally, the Arab States with 5 out of 320 cases (2 per cent) (see Figure 4-10).<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 4-10: Status of judicial inquiry in killings of journalists by region**



<sup>14</sup> Eight of the 10 unresolved cases in the Western Europe and North America region occurred in one Member State. Many of the killings in the Arab States occurred in conflict situations, which can create obstacles for a full judicial process to be completed within that temporal context.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Although impunity prevails, in recent years Member States have become more responsive to the Director-General's requests for information. Following the letters sent to 62 Member States in February and March 2017, 46 Member States responded (74 per cent), with 42 providing

specific information on the status of judicial investigations of killed journalists condemned by the Director-General, while five acknowledged the request or provided general information regarding the situation of journalists' safety (see Figure 4-11).

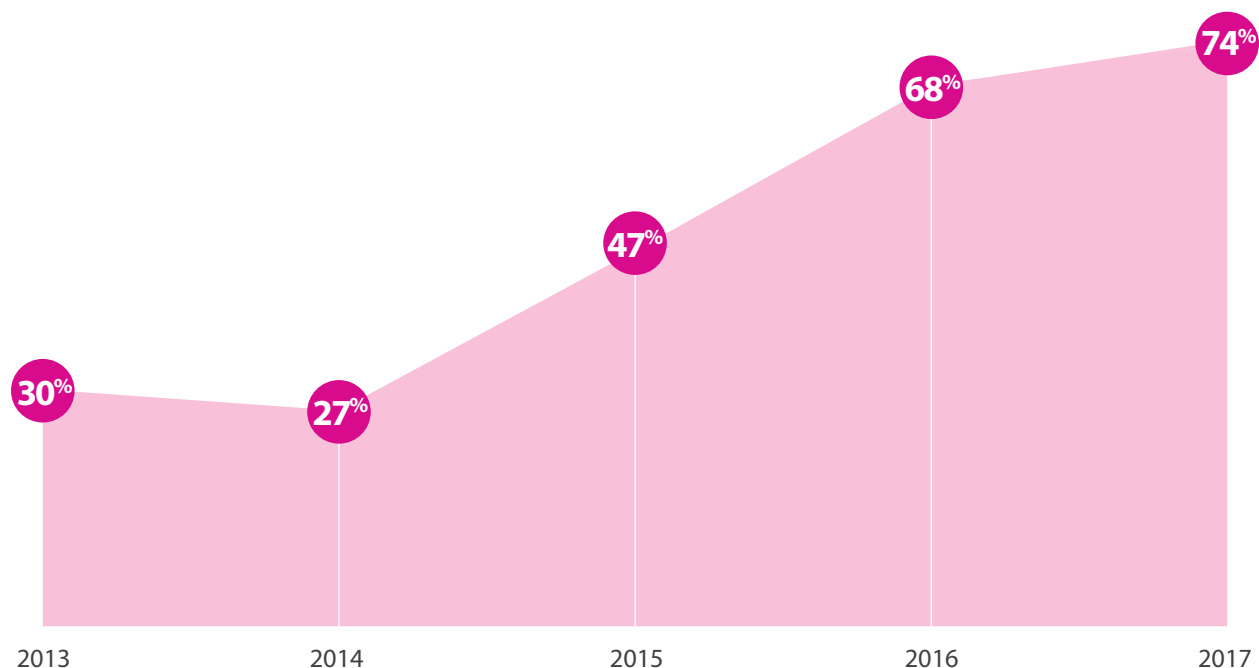
**Figure 4-11: Member State responses to the Director-General's request for information on the status of judicial inquiry, 2017**

Afghanistan	●
Angola	
Bahrain	✓
Bangladesh	✓
Brazil	✓
Bulgaria	✓
Burkina Faso	✓
Burundi	
Cambodia	✓
Cameroon	●
Central Africa Republic	
Colombia	✓
Republic of Congo	
Democratic Republic of Congo	●
Dominican Republic	
Ecuador	✓
Egypt	
El Salvador	✓
Eritrea	
Finland	✓
Georgia	✓
Greece	✓
Guatemala	✓
Guinea	✓
Republic of Guyana	
Haiti	●
Honduras	✓
India	
Indonesia	✓
Iraq	✓
Jordan	✓
Kenya	✓
Kyrgyzstan	
Lebanon	✓
Libya	
Mali	
Mexico	✓
Mozambique	✓
Myanmar	●
Nepal	✓
Nigeria	✓
Pakistan	✓
Palestine	✓
Paraguay	✓
Peru	✓
Philippines	✓
Poland	✓
Russian Federation	✓
Rwanda	✓
Serbia	✓
Somalia	✓
South Sudan	
Sri Lanka	✓
Syrian Arab Republic	
Tanzania	✓
Thailand	✓
Turkey	✓
Uganda	
Ukraine	✓
United States of America	✓
Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela	✓
Yemen	

✓ Received

● Acknowledgement

**Figure 4-12: Percentage of Member States that responded to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial inquiry, 2013-2017**



These numbers confirm a steady increase in the level of recognition among Member States of UNESCO's monitoring and reporting mechanism: in 2016, the response rate was 68 per cent,<sup>15</sup> in 2015, it was 47 per cent, and in 2014, just 27 per cent (see Figure 4-12). In 2017, Member States were also for the first time invited to submit information on positive measures taken to promote the safety of journalists and combat impunity, and 10 Member States provided such information.<sup>16</sup>

The last five years have seen notable efforts to raise international awareness about the issue of impunity. In recognition of the effect that impunity has on both the safety of journalists and on the broader right to freedom of expression,

the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/68/163 at its 68th session in 2013, proclaiming 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The day acts to promote understanding of the broader issues that accompany impunity and to strengthen international commitment to ensuring a safe and enabling environment for journalists. Since 2013, over 20 commemorations of the Day have taken place annually around the world. Since 2014, to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, UNESCO has also worked in partnership with regional human rights courts to convene an annual seminar that brings together judges and other key stakeholders from a number of regions. Through facilitating the sharing of good practices,

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO received the 2016 responses from three additional Member States after the deadline. These responses were not included in the 2016 Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity, but have been included here.

<sup>16</sup> Afghanistan, Finland, Guatemala, Iraq, Mexico, Myanmar, the Philippines, Poland, Somalia and the United States of America provided information on positive measures taken to promote the safety of journalists and combat impunity.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

the annual seminar has helped strengthen and extend legal frameworks to ensure protections for freedom of expression worldwide, in particular the safety of journalists and the fight against impunity.

The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity has also increasingly provided a useful framework to counter impunity and promote journalists' safety. The Plan has helped facilitate the implementation of proactive initiatives such as judicial capacity building and the development of emergency response mechanisms, with new forward-looking options for actions proposed at a multistakeholder consultation meeting that took place in June 2017 in Geneva (see discussion further below).<sup>17</sup>

### Other attacks on the safe practice of journalism

While killings represent the ultimate form of censorship, as recognized in SDG indicator 16.10.1, other types of attacks against journalists, including kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture, also restrict the exercise of fundamental freedoms and access to information.

As stated in the first *World Trends Report*, imprisonment of journalists for their legitimate work not only fosters a culture of self-censorship but also impinges on the broader rights of society to obtain information.<sup>18</sup> According to data

compiled by CPJ, the imprisonment of journalists on charges relating to anti-state activities, criminal defamation, blasphemy, retaliation or on no charge at all, has reportedly continued to rise. In 2016, CPJ reported that as of 1 December 2016, 259 journalists were imprisoned worldwide on a range of charges, the highest number since the NGO began keeping records in 1990.<sup>19</sup> Comparatively, Reporters without Borders (RSF)—which tracks the imprisonment of citizen journalists, netizens and media contributors, along with professional journalists—reported that 348 journalists were detained as of 1 December 2016 on a range of charges, an increase of six per cent on 2015 figures.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, 2016 reportedly saw the proportion of women journalists detained more than double, with nearly half of those detained located in the Asia-Pacific region. The Western Europe and North America region overwhelmingly has the highest number of journalists imprisoned, holding 34 per cent of imprisoned journalists worldwide, mainly due to the situation in one State.<sup>21</sup>

There has also been a rise in journalists reported as kidnapped, disappeared or taken hostage. RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire has stated that 'a full-blown hostage industry has developed in certain conflict zones', with a 35 per cent increase in 2015 compared to the previous year of the number of media hostages held worldwide.<sup>22</sup> Insurgent groups have kidnapped, tortured, repeatedly subjected to false executions and in extreme cases, publicly executed journalists, with

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<sup>17</sup> UNESCO 2017c.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO 2014, 90.

<sup>19</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists 2016. Some governments have argued that imprisonment in certain cases was not for reasons of journalism, and data available to UNESCO did not provide this distinction.

<sup>20</sup> RSF 2016. In its monitoring of imprisonment, RSF also includes citizen journalists, netizens and media contributors in its figures, resulting in a higher figure than that reported by CPJ. As with the figures cited from CPJ above, data available to UNESCO did not provide the distinction on whether the imprisonment was related to journalistic work or for other reasons.

<sup>21</sup> As indicated in the first *World Trends Report*, many governments have maintained that journalists have not been jailed for their journalism but for other reasons. UNESCO does not have sufficient information to assess which imprisonments are arbitrary or otherwise. As the first Report noted, however, "incarceration for legitimate journalism work is unnecessary and disproportionate in terms of international standards."

<sup>22</sup> RSF, 2015.

video footage subsequently being broadcast online for propaganda purposes. As of 2016, 52 journalists were reportedly being held hostage around the world, all held by insurgent groups in three countries undergoing violent conflict in the Arab region. In 2016, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information noted the disappearance of one journalist in the African region, the only noted case globally, down from eight reportedly missing worldwide in 2015.<sup>23</sup>

Although systematic data is not available on the incidence of torture of journalists, human rights commissions, news outlets and civil society groups have documented a number of cases and called for those responsible to be brought to justice. The African Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information has called upon States to investigate and punish perpetrators of murder, kidnapping, torture, harassment and intimidation of journalists, in accordance with the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.<sup>24</sup> Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur has documented cases of torture.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has reported instances of torture of journalists throughout Africa, Arab States and Asia and the Pacific regions.<sup>26</sup>

Journalists are at risk from criminal gangs and insurgent groups, but also, at times, government-backed forces.

Assault, harassment and threats of intimidation remain widespread globally. Within the Africa region, the Media Institute of Southern Africa has documented incidents of intimidation such as the torching of vehicles, physical assault and death threats.<sup>27</sup> In parts of the Arab region, journalists and prominent writers have reportedly suffered death threats, been severely beaten and had travel restrictions imposed upon them.<sup>28</sup> In the Asia Pacific region, the Southeast Asian Press Alliance has noted that in some insecure contexts, physical insecurity is reportedly so tenuous that some journalists have chosen to arm themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Threats and actual cases of violence and imprisonment, as well as harassment, are reported to have forced a large number of local journalists into exile each year. Between 1 June 2012 and 31 May 2015, at least 272 journalists reportedly went into exile for work-related persecution worldwide.<sup>30</sup> The majority of these cases were from the Arab and Africa regions.

A 2017 survey conducted by the Council of Europe of 940 journalists throughout 47 Member States found that in the face of physical violence or coercion, 15 per cent of journalists abandon covering sensitive, critical stories, while 31 per cent tone down their coverage and 23 per cent opt to withhold information.<sup>31</sup> The insidious nature of

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<sup>23</sup> RSF, *ibid.*; Tlakula 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Tlakula 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Lanza 2016a.

<sup>26</sup> Mendez 2017.

<sup>27</sup> MISA, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Gulf Center for Human Rights 2017; Zayadin 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Lynn 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists n.d.

<sup>31</sup> Clark and Grech 2017.

self-censorship can have dramatic implications for freedom of expression and the publication on sensitive topics in the public interest.

The ramifications of violence bear not only physical but also psychological consequences. Dependent on their beat and time in the field, journalists are exposed to scenes and images of trauma that can have profound implications for their psychological health. For example, studies have noted prolonged substance abuse among some war correspondents and journalists working with user-generated content, who frequently witness images of graphic violence.<sup>32</sup> Those journalists covering drug-related conflict and war correspondents are most at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychiatric symptoms as a direct result of their work.<sup>33</sup> Professional stigma, fears of being judged by their peers and lack of awareness often prevent journalists—particularly those who experience a lack of job security or who work in insecure contexts—from seeking support from their editors or healthcare professionals.<sup>34</sup> However, there is growing recognition of this issue and new programmes have begun to arise that address the needs of news professionals reporting on conflict and trauma. A recent example is the establishment by the University of Peshawar (Pakistan) in collaboration with DW Akademie, of the Competence and Trauma Center for Journalists, which offers free counselling for journalists working in the region.

## Digital safety for journalists

The advent of the digital sphere has brought unprecedented opportunities for freedom of expression and the practice of journalism more broadly. Yet, the digital sphere is evolving and surveillance, data storage capabilities and digital attack technologies are becoming more sophisticated, less expensive and more pervasive, making journalists increasingly vulnerable to digital attacks from both state and non-state actors (see Figure 4-13). Educating journalists about digital security measures is essential for their own safety and for safeguarding freedom of expression.

A continuing trend at the state-level is the use of legislative resources in the name of national-

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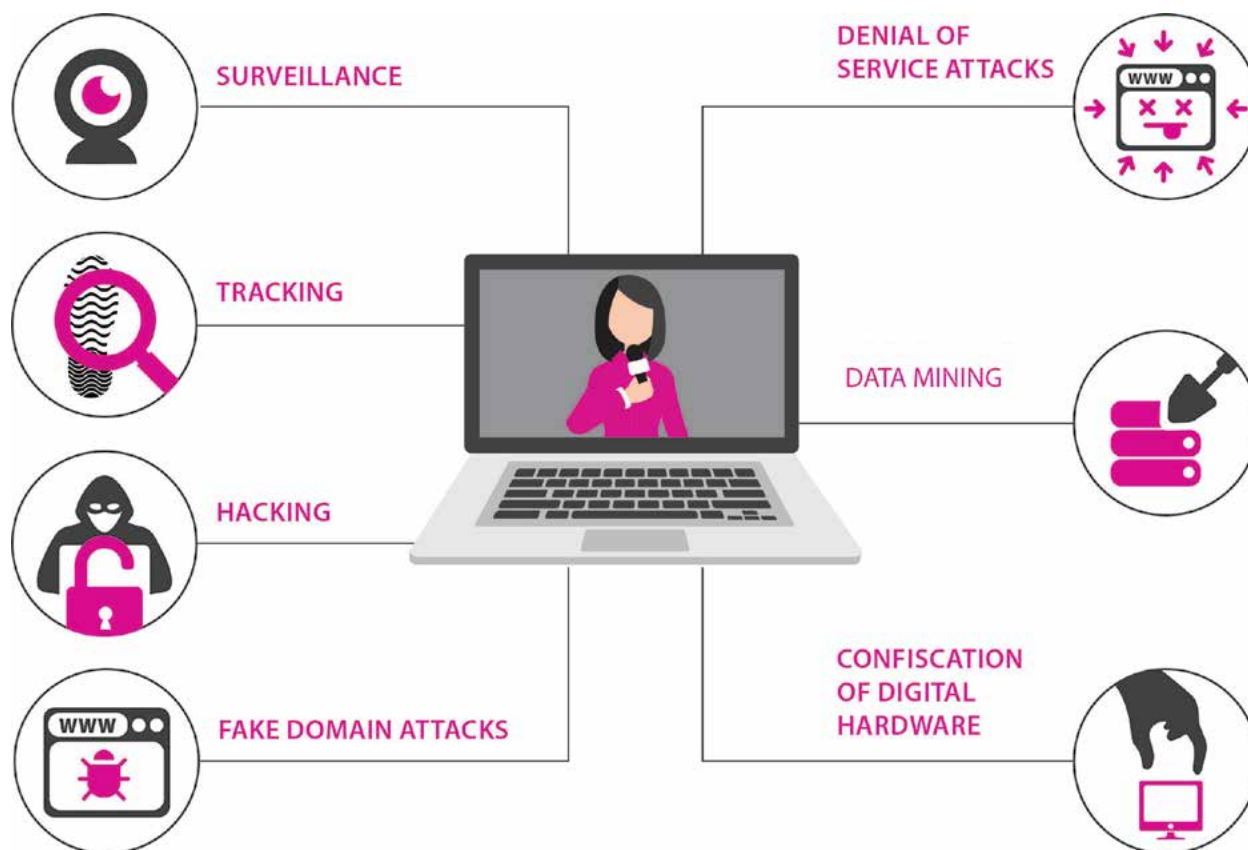
**Educating journalists about digital security measures is essential for their own safety and for safeguarding freedom of expression.**

<sup>32</sup> Feinstein, Audet, and Waknine 2014; Feinstein, Owen, and Blair 2002; Morris 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, Newman, and Drevo 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Khan 2016.

**Figure 4-13: Types of threats to the digital safety of journalism**



security and anti-terrorism initiatives, which have been seen by some to erode protections for freedom of expression. In a number of states across multiple regions, broadly defined legislative acts have been seen by some as working to silence digital dissent, prosecute whistle blowers and expand arbitrary surveillance across multiple digital platforms. Across all regions, this trend that grants security forces greater powers of surveillance and tracking appears to be strengthening, raising questions of independent oversight and proportionate actions vis-à-vis the surveillance of journalists and their sources.

Digital security is imperative for not only individual journalists themselves, but also for the protection

of their sources and their colleagues in the field. This is particularly critical for citizen-journalists, journalists in distress, freelancers and those less aware of the digital threats to privacy and source protection. The period has seen a continuation of the trend in the arbitrary use of surveillance malware to track and spy on journalists and their sources. There have been numerous cases across all regions, and throughout democratic and other societies, of both state and non-state actors using malware to spy on journalists and activists.<sup>35</sup> This trend has been facilitated by the rise of inexpensive surveillance technologies that are readily available for purchase by both state and non-state actors alike.

<sup>35</sup> Marquis-Boire 2015.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

This violation of privacy has become a form of intimidation and deterrence for journalists, while also putting the confidentiality of sources and journalists at risk. One survey conducted by PEN America of over 520 writers found that the majority reported concerns about government surveillance, which led to a reluctance to write, research or speak about certain topics.<sup>36</sup> Almost a quarter of the writers had deliberately avoided certain topics in phone and email conversations, while 16 per cent had avoided writing or speaking about a certain topic and another 11 per cent had seriously considered it.<sup>37</sup> The surveyed writers also expressed a reluctance to communicate with sources, for fear that they would endanger their lives in the process.

Journalists facing threats to their physical safety have been found to be particularly vulnerable to digital threats, and they are often unable or unwilling to take steps to mitigate digital risks. One survey found that of those journalists facing threats because of their work, only 18 per cent use email encryption, and 41 per cent of respondents report not knowing what it is.<sup>38</sup> The data also indicated that even when journalists are aware of risks to their digital security, digital security tools are often overly technical, leading few journalists to implement the tools correctly, if at all.<sup>39</sup> Material resources, especially for freelancers and bloggers, are also often insufficient to purchase relevant software or multiple devices to mitigate security risks.

There are a number of steps journalists can take to ensure their digital security, and several civil society organizations have begun to address this issue by researching current tools used by

journalists and providing in-depth security guides and training on how to reinforce digital security. Civil society organizations have taken greater steps to document attacks against journalists in the digital sphere. Educating journalists and media professionals on the fundamentals of digital safety, such as end-to-end encryption, virtual private networks (VPNs) and malware detection and avoidance, has become a greater priority for civil society and media professionals. There are also many more examples of journalism schools and media faculties incorporating digital safety training into their curricula.

In recent cases, journalists have had their social media accounts, such as Twitter, hacked and their private messages exposed to the public or experienced 'doxing,' the practice of obtaining and publishing private and identifiable information about individuals, usually with malicious intent. Journalists across the globe have reported digitally-mediated threats of death, bombing, violence against themselves and family members, rape, abuse and insult. In most cases, this abuse occurs with impunity. In one case, when a journalist contacted local law enforcement officers after receiving graphic death threats via Twitter, she was reportedly asked 'what's Twitter?' in response to her statement.<sup>40</sup>

Although comprehensive data on the online harassment of journalists are not available, new initiatives have begun to shed light on this growing phenomenon. In late 2016, the International Press Institute launched the OnTheLine database, a project that aims to systematically monitor online harassment of journalists as a response to their reporting. As of July 2017, the project had

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<sup>36</sup> Pen America 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Blanchard 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Henrichsen, Betz, and Lisosky 2015.



collected 1,065 instances of online harassment in the two countries (Turkey and Austria) in which the project collected data. In Pakistan, the Digital Rights Foundation has launched the country's first cyber harassment helpline for journalists, which aims to provide legal advice, digital security support, psychological counselling and a referral system to victims.<sup>41</sup> As of May 2017, the helpline handled a total of 563 cases since its launch six months earlier on 1 December 2016, with 63 per cent of calls received from women and 37 per cent from men.<sup>42</sup>

## Gender equality and the safety of journalists

Women journalists, whether they are working in an insecure context, or in a newsroom, face risks of physical assault, sexual harassment, sexual assault, rape and even murder. Women journalists are vulnerable to attacks not only from those attempting to silence their coverage, but also from sources, colleagues and others.<sup>43</sup> A 2014 global survey of nearly 1,000 journalists, initiated by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) in partnership with the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and with the support of UNESCO, found that nearly two-thirds of women who took part in the survey had experienced intimidation, threats or abuse in the workplace.<sup>44</sup> Yet, one of the most significant challenges in understanding attacks against women journalists is that many incidences are not reported, an indication of the persistence of professional, social or cultural stigmas. Young women and those in

the early stages of their career are particularly vulnerable and less likely to report an incident for fear of professional consequences. In contexts of political polarization, women journalists covering politics are finding themselves under serious threat, leading in at least one case to a leading employer providing a bodyguard to their woman political correspondent.

In the period from 2012 through 2016, UNESCO's Director-General denounced the killing of 38 women journalists, representing 7 per cent of all journalists killed, an increase of two percentage points from the last five-year period (see Figure 4-14). While the number of male journalists has fluctuated substantially over this five-year period, the rate of women journalists killed has increased overall, rising from five women killed in 2012, to a high of 10 women in 2016. By region, the majority of women journalists killed was in the Arab region, constituting just under a third (32 per cent), followed by the Africa region (24 per cent), Asia and the Pacific (21 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (16 per cent), and Western Europe and North America (8 per cent). No killings of women journalists were recorded in Central and Eastern Europe.

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...nearly two-thirds of women who took part in the survey had experienced intimidation, threats or abuse in the workplace.

<sup>40</sup> Hess 2014.

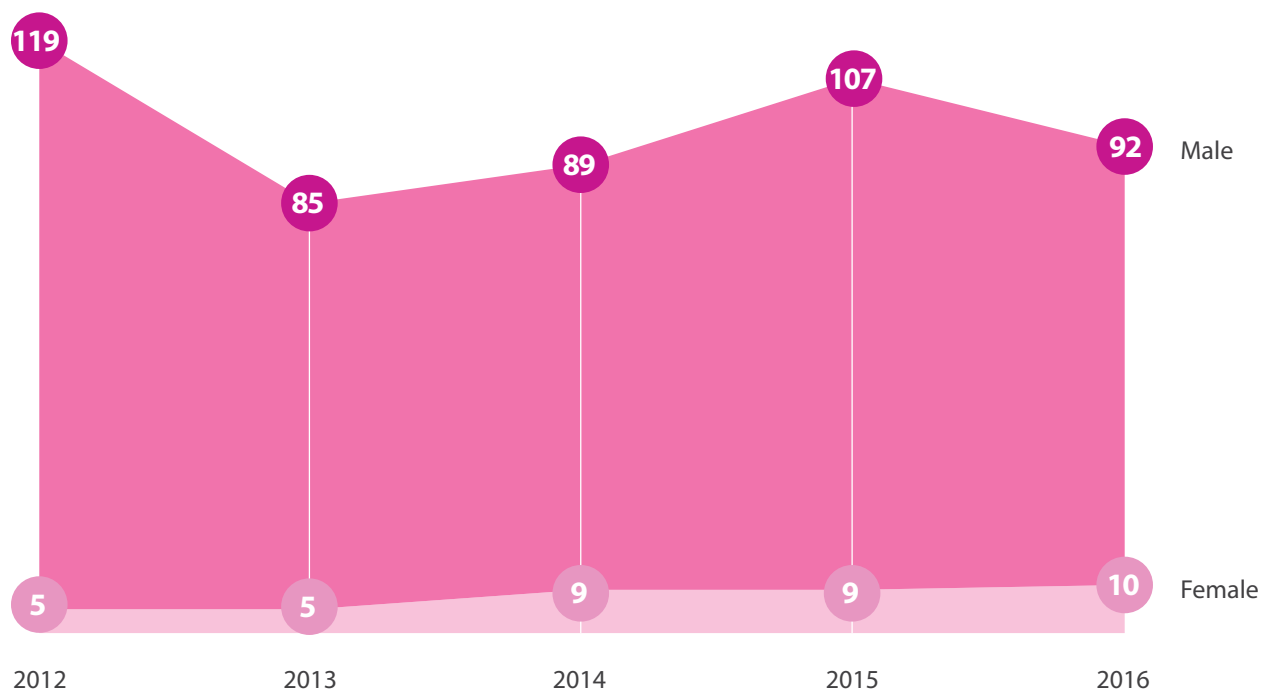
<sup>41</sup> Digital Rights Foundation n.d.

<sup>42</sup> Digital Rights Foundation 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Lanza 2017.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Figure 4-14: Sex of journalists killed, 2012-2016



The percentage of journalists killed who are women is significantly lower than their overall representation in the media workforce. This large gender gap is likely partly the result of the persistent underrepresentation of women reporting from warzones or insurgencies or on topics such as politics and crime. Recent research has suggested that women journalists working in conflict zones may not in reality face heightened risks of death due to their gender, but that prevailing stereotypes work to restrict the number of women journalists sent overseas as foreign correspondents in high-risk contexts.<sup>45</sup> A number of high-profile cases of sexual violence towards women journalists during the 2011

uprisings in the Arab region reinforced such perceptions.<sup>46</sup> Many women journalists have expressed fears about how these cases can affect them professionally, and this in turn has had a silencing effect on the number of journalists reporting sexual violence, with many citing fears of discrimination in the newsroom and from their editors as reasons for remaining silent.<sup>47</sup>

Reports from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression indicate that violence against women journalists has continued unabated across large parts of the Latin America and the Caribbean region.<sup>48</sup> The 2017 Report of the UN

<sup>44</sup> International Media Women's Foundation and International News Safety Institute 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Harris, Mosdell, and Griffiths 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Simon 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Lanza 2017.

Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, which has a special focus on the safety of women journalists, notes the physical, psychological and emotional effects of such attacks on women's voices, ultimately exacerbating the gender digital divide.<sup>49</sup>

The last five years have seen intergovernmental organizations and civil society groups take a more active role in countering stereotypes that discriminate against women journalists working on volatile beats or in conflict zones. Such groups have been working towards greater documentation of sexual violence and establishing mitigation strategies to minimize the risk, while acknowledging that it can never be fully overcome. The September 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General outlines a way forward for a gender-sensitive approach to strengthening the safety of women journalists.<sup>50</sup> In 2016, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, in particular noting the gender-specific threats that many journalists face and calling for urgent, resolute and systematic responses.<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, there has been a drive to deepen the media's understanding and approach to the particular safety issues that confront women journalists while providing important support mechanisms for women working in the field. In 2016, CPJ produced a special report on gender and media freedom worldwide, while the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom has encouraged women journalists to report instances of violence against them by establishing

a 'Women's Reporting Point'.<sup>52</sup> The service allows women to seek help and advice by reporting threats of violence via an encrypted messaging service, both providing women journalists an additional level of support and creating a greater level of visibility for attacks against women journalists. Civil society groups have also been instrumental in capacity building and preventative measures, such as providing gender-specific safety training that actively confronts the specific risks that women journalists face in the course of their work. In addition to UNESCO, several intergovernmental, civil society, academic and media organizations have begun to provide gender-specific safety training that confronts the specific risks that women journalists face in the course of their work.

### Online harassment of women journalists

Social media and digital technologies have become an indispensable tool for many journalists in following new leads, discovering stories, distributing news and interacting directly with audiences, leading many journalists to maintain a social media presence across multiple platforms. However, these new opportunities have also been accompanied with a rise in online abuse, particularly towards women journalists. The range of abuse is shown in Figure 4-15.

Research undertaken by Pew Research Center indicated that 73 per cent of adult internet users in the USA had seen someone be harassed in some way online and 40 per cent had personally experienced it, with young women being particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment

<sup>49</sup> UN General Assembly 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Council of Europe 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) 2016; European Centre for Press and Media Freedom n.d.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Figure 4-15: Online harassment of women journalists



and stalking.<sup>53</sup> Although this research did not uniquely survey journalists, it does give an indication of the prevalence of online harassment more generally. Journalists who routinely publish online—often on sensitive political or cultural issues—are rendered particularly vulnerable to online harassment and abuse. Harassment of women online is distinctly gendered, with

abusive comments often referencing a woman journalist's appearance, ethnicity, or sexuality or using uniquely gendered hate speech. In a survey of 100 journalists from the African region, 75 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced some form of online harassment, with a significant proportion experiencing 'double attacks', that is being targeted both for

<sup>53</sup> Duggan et al. 2014.

their published material and for being a woman or for their ethnic background.<sup>54</sup>

An analysis of more than two million tweets performed by the think tank Demos found that women journalists experienced approximately three times as many abusive comments as their male counterparts on Twitter, a finding that was reversed for the other categories studied (politicians, celebrities and musicians).<sup>55</sup>

The *Guardian* surveyed the 70 million comments recorded on its website between 1999 and 2016 (only 22,000 of which were recorded before 2006).<sup>56</sup> Of these comments, approximately 1.4 million (approximately two per cent) were blocked for abusive or disruptive behaviour. Notably, of the 10 staff journalists who received the highest levels of abuse and 'dismissive trolling', eight were women, and two were black men, with those articles written by women receiving the highest percentage of abusive comments. As the *Guardian* notes, abuse often extends beyond the website where their work was originally published.<sup>57</sup>

Internet 'trolls' have become a major occupational hazard on social networking sites and it is often difficult to filter or remove abusive content from such platforms leaving journalists vulnerable to a literal 'avalanche of abuse' across multiple platforms from anonymous sources.<sup>58</sup> In both the quantity and intensity of online abuse, women journalists have been disproportionately targeted.<sup>59</sup>

Women tend to receive more threats or comments of a sexual nature, both from readers

and sometimes from their peers in the media industry.<sup>60</sup> Threats of rape or violence towards journalists or their families appear to be more prevalent toward women media professionals. The INSI and IWMF survey cited above found that more than 25 per cent of 'verbal, written and/or physical intimidation including threats to family and friends' took place online.<sup>61</sup>

The level of abuse has had a silencing effect on women journalists, with some opting to withdraw from social media entirely to protect themselves psychologically from the scale of harassment.<sup>62</sup> Speaking to the BBC, Swedish TV anchor Jenny Alversjö, who has received death threats in relation to her work for TV4 Sweden, agreed that something has changed in the way people communicate with journalists. 'For almost 20 years, I have worked as a journalist and I have always been a target for other people's opinions,' she stated, '[but] four or five years ago something changed and the tone became much more aggressive and threatening.'<sup>63</sup>

This is particularly relevant for women who report on topics that have been traditionally covered mostly by men, such as sports, gaming, crime and politics. The level of abuse of women journalists in the digital sphere has serious implications for freedom of expression and equality in gender representation within the media. Digital violence against women journalists has often been psychological in nature, a trend also observed in the Western Europe and North America region in the incidence of successive bomb threats made via Twitter that were directed at a number of high-profile women journalists.<sup>64</sup> Following these

<sup>54</sup> ARTICLE 19 and Association of Media Women in Kenya 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Demos 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Gardiner et al. 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Mason 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Vogt 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Nazar 2017.

<sup>61</sup> Barton and Storm 2014.

<sup>62</sup> West 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Bell 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Sreberby 2014.

incidents, Twitter announced that it would include a button to report abuse. Countering online abuse is a significant challenge, and few legislative and policy frameworks exist on the international or national level to protect journalists from digital harassment.<sup>65</sup> A number of stakeholders have considered how to deal with the growing trend while respecting freedom of expression. The OSCE has advised against Member States drafting new laws to restrict abusive speech on the internet, as these steps may have a chilling effect on freedom of expression.<sup>66</sup> However, real investment needs to be made to promote social, legal and practical measures that both support journalists who are victims of online abuse, with a particular focus on the specific threats faced by women journalists, while also promoting a safe environment online.

There is some movement towards providing more systematic support to women journalists. The International Federation of Journalists and the South Asia Media Solidarity Network launched the Byte Back campaign to raise awareness and combat online harassment of women journalists in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, the OSCE organized an expert meeting titled 'New Challenges to Freedom of Expression: Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists' which produced a publication of the same title that includes the voices of journalists and academics on the realities of online abuse of women journalists and how it can be combatted.<sup>68</sup> See Box 4-3 for a case study.

## Actions taken to enhance the safety of journalists

To take stock of progress towards implementing the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which issued its fifth year of implementation in 2017, in June 2017 UNESCO organized a multi-stakeholder consultation conference in Geneva, Switzerland. Actions taken under the framework of the UN Plan by the UN system, UNESCO, Member States, academia and civil society were discussed and 30 options for possible future action put forward for consideration by Member States and other actors.<sup>69,70</sup>

One significant question put forward was how to translate the standard-setting framework of the UN Plan of Action into national policies and practices that would produce tangible progress for the safety of journalists on the ground. In response to this, the Outcome Document of the consultation highlighted potential for:

- The UN system to take steps through UNESCO, in cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and

<sup>65</sup> International Women's Media Foundation 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Mijatović 2016.

<sup>67</sup> International Federation of Journalists 2017.

<sup>68</sup> Mijatović 2016.

<sup>69</sup> UNESCO 2017c.

<sup>70</sup> Note also the report prepared by UNESCO for the meeting held on 29 June 2017 in Geneva, UNESCO 2017e.

**Box 4-3: Focus on Maria Ressa, refusing to be silenced in the face of online harassment**



Photo credit: Maria Ressa

***‘The biggest challenge is that you have no idea when an online threat becomes a real world physical threat.’***

*- Maria Ressa, journalist and founder of Rappler, the Philippines*

**M**aria Ressa has been a journalist for over 30 years. Throughout her career, she has worked as a war correspondent, investigated terrorist networks, headed CNN’s bureaus in Manila and Jakarta, and served as director of the news and current affairs department at the Philippines’ largest news group, ABS-CBN. In 2012, Ressa launched Rappler, an online news platform that has combined professional journalistic standards and ethics with innovative forms of audience engagement.

Yet, Ressa’s considerable experience did little to prepare her for the onslaught of online harassment she faced after reporting on politically trolling leading up to elections. ‘When I was younger, I worked in war zones, I was a conflict reporter, and in a strange way it was much easier to be a war zone correspondent than it was to deal with [online abuse]...because with an exponential numbers of threats, not knowing whether they’re real or not...you can be hammered into submission. It’s meant to intimidate—and my reaction to it is “I’m not going to be intimidated.”’

Since the 2016 presidential elections, Rappler has worked proactively to counter propaganda, ‘fake news’ and social media accounts, and paid political trolls. Its role as an independent and investigative news platform has made Rappler’s staff a target for partisan attacks and online abuse: ‘I got as much as 90 hate messages per hour...and when you get that much, at first I thought, “Wow, maybe they’re right”, and I began to look over some of the things they said. But then I realized that they weren’t actually taking apart points of the story, they were just attacking. These were ad hominem attacks. They were attacks that are meant to intimidate, that are meant to make you doubt yourself. It took me roughly two weeks to deal with it and realize that they want me to stop. And at that point that’s when I said, “We are not stopping. This means we’re on the right track.”’

Ressa’s experience is not unique. Journalists who reveal uncomfortable truths are often subjected to a wave of coordinated harassment. Women journalists, in particular, often suffer the most abuse. Under Ressa’s direction, Rappler’s response has been proactive, reinforcing security and providing professional psychological support to help its journalists resist these growing attacks.

Source: Posetti, 2017b.

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the UN Secretary-General's designated focal point on safety of journalists, to help ensure greater co-ordination and implementation by UN actors of the UN Plan;

- Member States to report on safety and impunity and to consider mechanisms to prevent, protect against, monitor and prosecute attacks against journalists;
- Media to instil a greater culture of safety and to pool efforts through industry-wide cooperation;
- Internet intermediaries to elaborate more consistent and increased engagement with UN Plan stakeholders;
- Academia to promote closer engagement and joint research initiatives;
- All stakeholders to continue and heighten awareness of the UN Plan and make use of innovative and creative communications.

The need to respond effectively to growing threats such as online harassment of women journalists and digital security was also highlighted.

## United Nations

The safety of journalists and their role in promoting inclusive and sustainable societies has also been recognized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, Goal 16, which outlines the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective and inclusive institutions at all levels. Target 16.10 aims to ensure public access to information and one of its two corresponding indicators, indicator 16.10.1, measures this in instances of killings, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture against journalists, associated media personnel, human rights activists and trade unionists in a twelve-month period. UNESCO played a key role, together with the GFMD and OHCHR, in advocating for the





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inclusion of indicator 16.10.1 and in developing its methodology. UNESCO serves as a contributing agency for reporting on the indicator, collecting data related to the safety of journalists and media personnel to the custodian agency, OHCHR.

In the past five years, the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Security Council, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) and UNESCO have all passed resolutions explicitly condemning attacks and violence against journalists and the prevailing impunity. (see Figures 4-16, 4-17)

In December 2015, Resolution A/70/125 of the General Assembly recognised serious threats to freedom of expression in the context of reviewing progress since the 2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). The Resolution called for the protection of journalists and media workers.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to the SDG indicators, UNESCO continues to monitor the killings of journalists and the status of investigations through the biennial Director-General Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (DG Report) to the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC. In November 2016, the DG Report provided a comprehensive analysis of the killing of journalists, media workers and social media produces during the ten-year period between 2006 and 2015, as well as covering killings from 2014 and 2015.<sup>72</sup>

In February 2017, the UN Secretary-General

António Guterres established a direct and continuing channel of communication with the civil society groups on the issue of the safety of journalists. This followed calls for the of a Special Representative of the Secretary General on the safety of journalists, led by RSF, CPJ and WAN-IFRA through the #ProtectJournalists campaign. The UN Secretary General also produced reports on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in both 2014 and 2015 (A/69/268 and A/HRC/30/68 respectively).

## Member States

### *Joint action*

One of the most significant achievements of the past five years has been the establishment of an informal 'Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists' by Member States at UN Headquarters in New York, at the UN in Geneva and at UNESCO in Paris.<sup>73</sup> The role of the 'Group of Friends' is to bring together states that share a commitment to the strengthening of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and its implementation at the national level.

The regional level has been a notable space of joint action among States. Intergovernmental cooperation within Europe has seen significant efforts to promote and secure the safety of journalists. In May 2014, the Council of the European Union adopted the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Freedom of Expression Online and Offline, which stated that the EU would 'take all

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<sup>71</sup> UN General Assembly 2015a

<sup>72</sup> UNESCO Director-General 2016.

<sup>73</sup> As of June 2017:

The Group of Friends at the UN in New York was comprised of Argentina; Austria; Brazil; Bulgaria; Chile; Costa Rica; France; Greece; Jordan; Latvia; Lebanon; Lithuania; Sweden; Republic of Korea; Tunisia; Uruguay; and the United States of America.

The Group of Friends at UNESCO in Paris was comprised of Albania; Argentina; Australia; Austria; Brazil; Canada; Denmark; Finland; France; Ghana; Greece; Japan; Kenya; Kuwait; Latvia; Lebanon; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Morocco; Netherlands; Nigeria; Paraguay; Pakistan; Poland; Republic of Korea; Senegal; Slovenia; Sweden; Tunisia; and the United States of America.

The list of countries in the Group of Friends at the UN in Geneva was in the process of finalization.

appropriate steps to ensure the protection of journalists, both in terms of preventive measures and by urging effective investigations when violations occur’.

The Council of Europe has been particularly active in recognising the importance of journalists’ safety and monitoring violations within Member States. In April 2014, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers adopted a resolution on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, which called for concerted international efforts and led to the creation of an online platform for monitoring infringements of freedom of expression. In 2016, this was followed by the adoption of a set of guidelines that urged Member States to review their national legislation in relation to media freedom and outlined specific measures to be taken by Member States to prevent violations of media freedom and provide protection for journalists.<sup>74</sup> In 2015, the Council of Europe launched a platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists, which monitors and provides early warning and rapid response to threats to media freedom and the safety of journalists across 47 Member States. A tool for monitoring freedom of expression, the platform also provides a model that could potentially be established for other regions or globally.

Further, the Organization of American States (OAS) has played a proactive role in promoting the safety of journalists. In June 2017, the General

Assembly of the OAS passed Resolution R86/17, which urged States ‘to implement comprehensive measures for prevention, protection, investigation and punishment of those responsible, as well as to put into action strategies to end impunity for crimes against journalists and share good practices.’<sup>75</sup>

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media performs an early warning function and provides rapid response to serious non-compliance with regard to free media and free expression. The Representative maintains direct contacts with authorities, media and civil society representatives and other parties and shares his/her observations and recommendations with the OSCE participating States twice a year. Likewise, the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and the ACHPR’s Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information do important work that aligns with the UN Plan.

There are gaps concerning the existence of intergovernmental organizations in the Arab and Asia-Pacific regions that could take up the issue of safety and impunity.

Within the framework of the UN Plan of Action, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth has pledged support for the UN Plan of Action, working to promote journalist safety and institutional mechanisms that foster freedom of expression within Member States across different regions.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Council of Europe 2016.

<sup>75</sup> General Assembly of the Organization of American States 2017, vol. AG/doc.5580/17.

<sup>76</sup> UNESCO 2017a.

## Trends in the Safety of Journalists

### *Individual Member State action*

A number of individual Member States have made significant progress towards providing for and maintaining a safer environment for journalists. In response to the UN Plan of Action, some States have reported the implementation of new legislation and institutional mechanisms designed to enhance the safety of journalists.<sup>77</sup> Others have designated officials to be responsible for documenting and providing information on the issues of safety and impunity, including for purposes of cooperating with UNESCO's annual request for information and judicial follow-up to killings.<sup>78</sup> National prevention, protection and prosecution mechanisms for the safety of journalists, the most established example of which exists in Colombia, can be seen as good practice, and potentially adaptable to other countries and contexts.

Several Member States are becoming increasingly aware of the role the judiciary plays in ensuring the safety of journalists. There has been strong cooperation between Member States throughout the Latin America region in training judges and judicial officials in understanding the main issues surrounding freedom of expression, the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, including the training of more than 5,500 judicial official through a series of massive open online courses developed by UNESCO. The Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in an analysis of case law across 10 States in Latin America and the Caribbean and North America, has found significant regulatory progress throughout the

region. High courts in the 10 Member States had enriched and developed the emerging judicial discourse, as laid down by the bodies of the Inter-American Human Rights System, concerning freedom of expression.<sup>79</sup>

Building on the lessons learned in Latin America, UNESCO launched a similar training programme on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in 2017 in Africa, in partnership with the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The project, led by UNESCO and the University of Pretoria, combines massive open online courses for judges and other legal professionals with a series of face-to-face trainings with judges from supreme courts from across Africa.

Across more than a dozen countries in the Arab region, Africa and Latin America, UNESCO and its partners have worked with Member States to train security forces to contribute to the protection of journalists. These trainings created dialogue between journalists and security forces, lowered tensions and reduced incidents of violence against journalists.

### **Academia, civil society and media**

Academia continues to be a space for collaboration and advanced research on the subject of the safety of journalists. UNESCO has taken an active role in encouraging greater academic collaboration and exchange by developing a research agenda on the safety of journalists. At an academic conference held in 2016 alongside

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<sup>77</sup> Mendel 2016.

<sup>78</sup> UNESCO 2017b.

the international celebration of World Press Freedom Day in Finland, the Centre for Freedom of the Media at the University of Sheffield, with the support of UNESCO, launched the Journalists' Safety Research Network (JSRN). The JSRN contributes to advancing academic cooperation on the safety of journalists by increasing research capacity, collaboration and knowledge sharing within the academic community.

In 2014, Columbia University, U.S., established Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, which brings together international experts and activists with the university's faculty and students, in order to 'survey, document and strengthen free expression'. Notably, this project provides a database of case law, also made available in Spanish through a collaboration with the UNESCO Office in Montevideo and with Dejusticia.<sup>80</sup>

Civil society groups continue to be at the forefront of monitoring, documenting and advocacy efforts, leading a number of campaigns that have raised awareness about the importance of journalists' safety and have advocated for legislative and material change within the field. Civil society groups have used the framework of the UN Plan of Action to engage the media sector more deeply, increase coordination and collaboration amongst civil society groups and identify good practices within the field.

Furthermore, civil society groups have worked collectively to increase the prominence of the safety of journalists within a number of UN bodies, from the UNHRC to the UN Security Council. An example is the success of the #ProtectJournalists

campaign. In addition, civil society organizations have been actively involved in building the capacity of stakeholders, particularly on journalists' security. Certain groups have been instrumental in promoting the necessity of a more holistic training curriculum that incorporates aspects of digital and psychological security, in addition to increasing awareness, knowledge and resources for journalists on the issue of digital safety and the steps that they can take to increase their own security.

In 2015, the International Press Institute, Al Jazeera Media Network, Geneva Global Media and the Geneva Press Club presented the International Declaration and Best Practices on the Promotion of Journalists Safety. The declaration aims to reinforce and promote existing international obligations and mechanisms associated with the safety of journalists and contribute to the protection of their rights.<sup>81</sup> The same year, news media organizations joined forces with press freedom NGOs and journalists to launch the A Culture of Safety (ACOS) Alliance. The ACOS Alliance's Freelance Journalist Safety Principles, a set of practices for newsrooms and journalists on dangerous assignments, have been endorsed by 90 organizations around the world. In addition, a network of safety officers in media companies expanded following the meeting 'Media Organizations Standing Up for the Safety of Journalists' held at UNESCO in February 2016.

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<sup>79</sup> Lanza 2016b.

<sup>80</sup> Columbia Global Freedom of Expression n.d.

<sup>81</sup> International Press Institute 2015.

Figure 4-16: UN resolutions on the safety of journalists adopted since 2012

2012

### **UN Human Rights Council Resolution 21/12 on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/RES/21/12)**

This Resolution calls upon States to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists and invites further cooperation on the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, elaborated by UNESCO and endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board. The Resolution further calls upon Member States to consider a number of actions, such as the introduction of legislative measures, monitoring and reporting violence against journalists, and issuing public condemnations of such attacks. The Resolution also calls upon States to ensure accountability by conducting impartial, speedy and effective investigations and to bring to justice those responsible.

2013

### **UN General Assembly Resolution 68/163 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (A/RES/68/163)**

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists. It urges Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability through the conduct of impartial, speedy and effective investigations and to bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice. The Resolution also proclaims 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

2014

### **UN Human Rights Council Resolution 27/5 on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/RES/27/5)**

This Resolution builds upon and strengthens the Human Rights Council's 2012 Resolution by urging Member States to bring perpetrators of violence against journalists including, inter alia, those who command, conspire to commit, aid and abet or cover up such crimes, to justice, and to ensure that victims and their families have access to appropriate remedies. The Resolution calls upon States to implement a number of strategies to counter impunity, such as the formation of special investigative units or independent commissions, the appointment of special prosecutors and the adoption of specific protocols and methods of investigation.

2015

### **UN General Assembly Resolution 70/162 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (A/RES/70/162)**

This Resolution calls upon States to implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and media workers in order to combat prevailing impunity for attacks and violence against journalists. It also stresses the need to ensure better cooperation and coordination at the international and regional levels, including through technical assistance and capacity building, with regard to helping to improve the safety of journalists at the national and local levels.

### **UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (S/Res/2222)**

This Resolution urges all parties involved in armed conflict to respect the professional independence and rights of journalists and media professionals and to take appropriate steps to ensure accountability for crimes committed against journalists working in these situations. The Resolution also affirms that UN peacekeeping operations should report on specific acts of violence against journalists in situation of armed conflict.

### **UNESCO 196th Executive Board Decision on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (196 EX/31)**

This Decision strongly encourages Member States to actively provide information, on a voluntary basis, concerning the judicial investigations of killings of journalists to UNESCO. It also requests the UNESCO Director-General to report on the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. This includes through strengthening cooperation and information sharing with professional organizations, civil society groups and other actors, facilitating capacity building in Member States and further developing the Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media and the Journalist Safety Indicators.

### **UN General Assembly Resolution 69/185 on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (A/RES/69/185)**

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists and strongly condemns the prevailing impunity for such attacks. It urges States to do their utmost to prevent violence, threats and attacks against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability through the conduct of impartial, speedy, thorough, independent and effective investigations into all alleged violence and calls upon States to create and maintain in law and practice an enabling environment for journalists.

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.

2017

### **UNESCO 201st Executive Board Decision on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (201 EX/SR.10)**

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.

### **UNESCO 202nd Executive Board Decision on the progress report on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity (202 EX/50)**

This Decision takes note with interest 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.

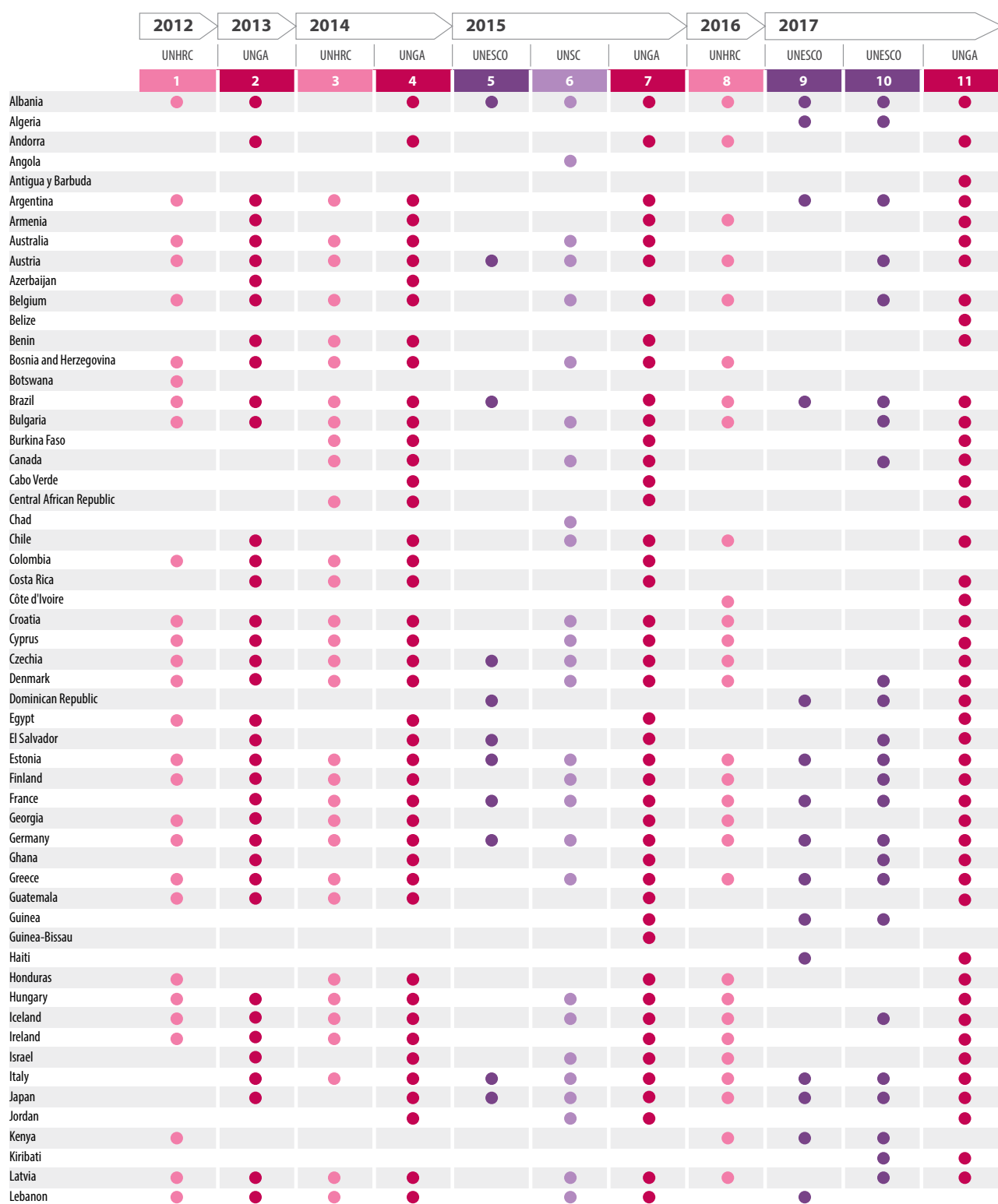
### **UNESCO 39th General Conference Resolution on strengthening UNESCO's leadership in the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (39 C/61)**

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.

### **UN General Assembly Resolution 75/152 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.

**Figure 4-17: Member States sponsoring UN resolutions on the safety of journalists since 2012**



- 1** UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION 21/12: SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS
- 2** UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 68/163: THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY
- 3** UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION 27/5: THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS
- 4** UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 69/185: THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY
- 5** UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION 196 EX/31: SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY
- 6** UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 2222



	2012		2013		2014		2015			2016	2017		
	UNHRC	UNGA	UNHRC	UNGA	UNHRC	UNGA	UNESCO	UNSC	UNGA	UNHRC	UNESCO	UNESCO	UNGA
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		
Lesotho													
Liberia		●											●
Libya	●			●									●
Liechtenstein	●	●	●	●		●			●				●
Lithuania	●	●	●	●		●			●		●		●
Luxembourg	●	●	●	●		●			●		●		●
Malawi					●								
Malaysia						●							
Maldives		●	●	●									●
Mali		●		●						●			●
Malta		●		●									●
Mexico	●	●	●	●								●	●
Monaco		●		●						●			●
Mongolia		●		●									●
Montenegro	●	●	●	●		●				●			●
Morocco	●	●	●	●	●				●		●		●
Netherlands	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●
New Zealand		●	●	●		●							
Niger													●
Nigeria	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●
Norway	●	●	●	●		●						●	●
Palau						●							
Palestine	●		●										
Panama		●		●						●			●
Paraguay		●	●	●						●	●		●
Peru	●	●	●	●						●			●
Poland	●	●	●	●		●						●	●
Portugal	●	●	●	●						●			●
Qatar	●	●	●	●						●			●
Republic of Korea		●		●	●						●		●
Republic of Moldova	●	●	●	●		●				●			●
Romania	●	●	●	●		●				●			●
Saint Kitts and Nevis			●		●					●	●		
San Marino		●		●									●
Senegal										●	●		
Serbia	●	●	●	●		●				●			●
Slovakia		●	●	●		●					●		●
Slovenia	●	●	●	●		●				●	●		●
Somalia				●									
Spain		●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●
Sri Lanka													●
Sweden	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●
Switzerland	●	●	●	●						●			●
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia		●	●	●		●							●
Timor-Leste										●			
Trinidad and Tobago					●								
Tunisia	●	●	●	●	●					●		●	●
Turkey	●	●	●	●						●			●
Ukraine		●		●		●					●	●	●
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●
United States of America		●	●	●	●	●				●	●		●
Uruguay		●		●						●			●
Vanuatu													●
Yemen			●										

**7**  
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
RESOLUTION 70/162: THE  
SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS  
AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY

**8**  
UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
RESOLUTION 33/2: THE  
SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

**9**  
UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD  
DECISION 201 EX/SR.10:  
SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS  
AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY

**10**  
UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD  
DECISION 202 EX/50: SAFETY  
OF JOURNALISTS

**11**  
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
RESOLUTION 72/175: THE  
SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS  
AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY

# Conclusion

Journalists' safety remains an urgent concern across all regions. According to UNESCO figures, the number of journalists killed in a five-year period increased substantially (216 journalists were killed in 2007-2011 in comparison to 530 journalists in 2012-2016). At the same time, trends in arbitrary detention, abduction and torture are reportedly growing in some regions. The digital safety of journalists continues to be undermined by surveillance and hacking from state and non-state actors, while online harassment—especially of women journalists—has been increasingly reported.

The trends presented in this chapter reveal significant challenges for freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. How key stakeholders respond to these challenges will prove pivotal for the shaping of trends in the years to come.

Nevertheless, progress is being made under the framework of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, with intergovernmental organizations, media, academia and civil society groups taking collective action. Such progress may prove in time to be an effective counter-trend to the growing threats facing journalists.





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# Regional groupings

## Group I. Western Europe and North America (27)

Andorra	Iceland	San Marino
Austria	Ireland	Spain
Belgium	Israel	Sweden
Canada	Italy	Switzerland
Cyprus	Luxembourg	Turkey
Denmark	Malta	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Finland	Monaco	United States of America
France	Netherlands	
Germany	Norway	
Greece	Portugal	

## Group II. Central and Eastern Europe (25)

Albania	Georgia	Serbia
Armenia	Hungary	Slovakia
Azerbaijan	Latvia	Slovenia
Belarus	Lithuania	Tajikistan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	
Bulgaria	Poland	
Croatia	Republic of Moldova	
Czech Republic	Romania	
Estonia	Ukraine	
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Uzbekistan	
	Russian Federation	

### Group III. Latin America and the Caribbean (33)

Antigua and Barbuda	Dominican Republic	Paraguay
Argentina	Ecuador	Peru
Bahamas	El Salvador	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Barbados	Grenada	Saint Lucia
Belize	Guatemala	Saint Vincent and ' the Grenadines
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Guyana	Suriname
Brazil	Haiti	Trinidad and Tobago
Chile	Honduras	Uruguay
Colombia	Jamaica	Venezuela
Costa Rica	Mexico	(Bolivarian Republic of)
Cuba	Nicaragua	
Dominica	Panama	

### Group IV. Asia and the Pacific (44)

Afghanistan	Kiribati	Malaysia
Australia	Kyrgyzstan	Maldives
Bangladesh	Lao People's Democratic Republic	Marshall Islands
Bhutan	Niue	Micronesia (Federated States of)
Brunei Darussalam	Pakistan	Mongolia
Cambodia	Palau	Myanmar
China	Papua New Guinea	Nauru
Cook Islands	Philippines	Nepal
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Republic of Korea	New Zealand
Fiji	Samoa	Tonga
India	Singapore	Turkmenistan
Indonesia	Solomon Islands	Tuvalu
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Sri Lanka	Vanuatu
Japan	Thailand	Viet Nam
Kazakhstan	Timor-Leste	

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### Group V. Africa (47)

Angola	Eritrea	Niger
Benin	Ethiopia	Nigeria
Botswana	Gabon	Rwanda
Burkina Faso	Gambia	Sao Tome and Principe
Burundi	Ghana	Senegal
Cameroon	Guinea	Seychelles
Cape Verde	Guinea-Bissau	Sierra Leone
Central African Republic	Kenya	Somalia
Chad	Lesotho	South Africa
Comoros	Liberia	South Sudan
Congo	Madagascar	Swaziland
Côte d'Ivoire	Malawi	Togo
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Mali	Uganda
Djibouti	Mauritius	United Republic of Tanzania
Equatorial Guinea	Mozambique	Zambia
	Namibia	Zimbabwe

### Group VI. Arab Region (19)

Algeria	Libya	Sudan
Bahrain	Mauritania	Syrian Arab Republic
Egypt	Morocco	Tunisia
Iraq	Oman	United Arab Emirates
Jordan	Palestine	Yemen
Kuwait	Qatar	
Lebanon	Saudi Arabia	

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ACHPR</b>	African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
<b>AP</b>	Associated Press
<b>ASBU</b>	Arab States Broadcasting Union
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>AWM</b>	Alliance for Women in Media
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CNN</b>	Cable News Network
<b>CPJ</b>	Committee to Protect Journalists
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>EFJ</b>	European Federation of Journalists
<b>EIGE</b>	European Institute for Gender Equality
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FOI</b>	Freedom of Information
<b>GAMAG</b>	Global Alliance for Media and Gender
<b>GAPMIL</b>	Global Alliance for Partnerships on Media and Information Literacy
<b>GMMP</b>	Global Media Monitoring Project
<b>GNI</b>	Global Network Initiative
<b>GSMI</b>	Gender Sensitive Indicators for the Media
<b>ICANN</b>	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>IGF</b>	Internet Governance Forum
<b>IFJ</b>	International Federation of Journalists
<b>INSI</b>	International News Safety Institute
<b>IP</b>	Intellectual Property
<b>IPDC</b>	International Programme for the Development of Communication
<b>ISP</b>	Internet Service Provider
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union
<b>IWMF</b>	International Women's Media Foundation
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
<b>MIL</b>	Media and Information Literacy
<b>MISA</b>	Media Institute of Southern Africa

## Appendices

<b>MOOC</b>	Massive Open Online Courses
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OGP</b>	Open Government Partnership
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>ONO</b>	Organization of News Ombudsmen
<b>OONI</b>	Open Observatory of Network Interference
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>ROAM</b>	Human Rights-based, Open, Accessible to All, Multi-stakeholder
<b>RSF</b>	Reporters Sans Frontières
<b>SAARC</b>	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SEAPA</b>	Southeast Asian Press Alliance
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNHRC</b>	United Nations Human Rights Council
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>WAN-IFRA</b>	World Association of Newspapers and News Editors
<b>WSIS</b>	World Summit on the Information Society





**World Trends in**  
**Freedom**  
of **Expression**  
and **Media**  
**Development**

GLOBAL REPORT **2017/2018**

Across the world, journalism is under fire. While more individuals have access to content than ever before, the combination of political polarization and technological change has facilitated the rapid spread of hate speech, misogyny and unverified 'fake news', often leading to disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression. In an ever-growing number of countries, journalists face physical and verbal attacks that threaten their ability to report news and information to the public.

In the face of such challenges, this new volume in the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* series offers a critical analysis of new developments in media freedom, pluralism, independence and the safety of journalists. With a special focus on gender equality in the media, this study provides a global perspective that serves as an essential resource for UNESCO Member States, international organizations, civil society groups, academia and individuals seeking to understand the changing global media landscape.



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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

**Communication and  
Information Sector**

