

Journalism is a public good



WORLD TRENDS IN

Freedom of Expression and Media Development

GLOBAL REPORT 2021/2022

> HIGHLIGHTS

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Foreword



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

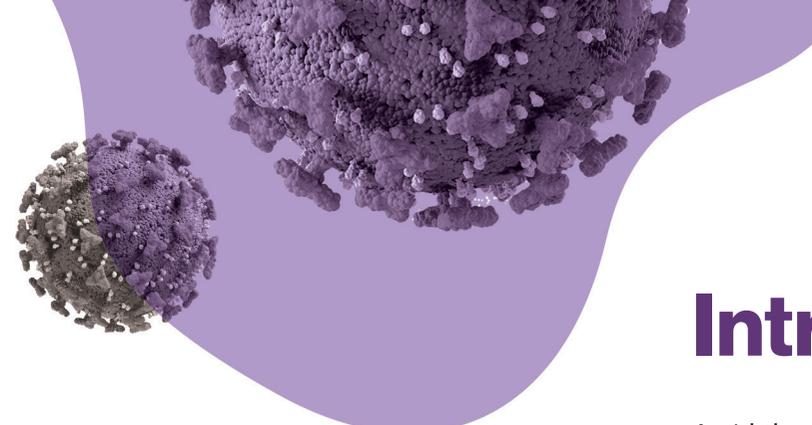
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Audrey Azoulay". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a horizontal line.

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO



With the support of the
UNESCO Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of
Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP)





Introduction

“The ability to cause large-scale disinformation and undermine scientifically established facts is an existential risk to humanity.”

António Guterres

United Nations Secretary-General

audiences instead found disinformation: myths, rumours, and outright lies, and in such quantities as to be dubbed a “disinfodemic”, a pandemic of non-verified or misleading information. Such falsehoods—spread intentionally or not—sowed confusion, division, and discord, impacting lives and livelihoods around the world.

“The ability to cause large-scale disinformation and undermine scientifically established facts is an existential risk to humanity,” noted United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in his report *Our Common Agenda*. “While vigorously defending the right to freedom of expression everywhere, we must equally encourage societies to develop a common, empirically backed consensus on the public good of facts, science, and knowledge.”¹

False content related to the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly on social media, at times amplified by unscrupulous or misguided public figures. In September 2020, for instance, over 1 million posts were circulating on Twitter with inaccurate, unreliable, or misleading information related to the pandemic.² Facebook also reported that, from the start of the pandemic to August 2021, it had removed over 20 million posts on Facebook and Instagram for promoting COVID-19-related misinformation.³ These waves of mis- and disinformation were also often accompanied by high volumes of hate speech.

In this context, journalism provided an essential—and life-saving—frontline service throughout the pandemic by informing the public, holding duty bearers to account, and debunking the onslaught of disinformation. For example, in March and April 2020, a network of more than 100 fact-checking organizations and news outlets around the world were busy debunking as many as 1,700 false claims per month related to COVID-19.⁴ The life-and-death consequences of COVID-19 disinformation

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

Not everyone found the information they needed. Often, news media struggled to keep up with the demand—a task made all the more difficult by accelerated declines in revenue and limited capacity, especially for local newspapers and outlets in the Global South. Some media failed to live up to professional quality standards. And some



In September 2020, researchers identified over

1 million tweets

with inaccurate, unreliable, or misleading information related to the pandemic

Covid19 Infodemics Observatory

¹ UN (United Nations). 2021. *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General*. New York, UN, p. 27.

https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf.

² Covid19 Infodemics Observatory. 2021. Social media indices. <https://covid19obs.fbkc.eu/#/>. Data analysed by Data-Pop Alliance for this Report.

³ Rosen, G. 2021. Community Standards Enforcement Report, Second Quarter 2021. Facebook, 18 August.

<https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/community-standards-enforcement-report-q2-2021/>.

⁴ Poynter Institute. 2021. Fighting the Infodemic: The #CoronaVirusFacts Alliance. <https://www.poynter.org/coronavirusfactsalliance/>.

Data provided to and analysed by Data-Pop Alliance for this Report.



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Poynter Institute

In this context, the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022* (World Trends Report) compiles the grim evidence that the current supply of journalism—which was already insufficient to meet the need in many societies (and often existing against huge odds)—can no longer be taken for granted. The findings are grounded in data-driven analysis, conducted by UNESCO in partnership with the Data-Pop Alliance, of trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, and the safety of journalists, and supplemented by original research by Economist Impact commissioned for this Report.

With a special focus on journalism as a public good, the 2021/2022 World Trends Report is designed to serve as a key resource for UNESCO Member States, international organizations, civil society, media, and academics.

provided a reminder that the resilience of our societies depends upon quality journalism, access to information, and media and information literacy. These principles have been recognized through the 2020 *Seoul Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Everyone and by Everyone: A Defence against Disinfodemics* and many other statements marking commemorations of World Press Freedom Day and the International Day for Universal Access to Information.

A free, pluralistic, and independent media, a global normative standard since the early 1990s, has remained as relevant as ever. These principles were connected to additional imperatives in the 2021 Windhoek+30 Declaration on information as a public good. This initiative recognised the urgent need to address both the economic viability of media outlets whose sustainability is under great stress and the transparency of internet companies about how they treat content on their services.

While trusted news sources saw a surge in readership and viewership during the global crisis, in many ways, journalism has emerged weaker. The pandemic delivered a massive blow to the already shaky economic foundations of the news media industry, intensifying a trend in declining advertising revenue, job losses, and newsroom closures. It also provided cover for press freedom violations. Research by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute finds that COVID-19 measures have justified significant press freedom violations in every region of the world, including in 96 out of the 144 countries in its 2021 study.⁵

**COVID-19 measures
have been used to justify
significant press freedom
violations in every region of
the world**

Varieties of Democracy Institute

⁵Kolvani, P., Lundstedt, M., Edgell, A., and Lachapell, J. 2021. *Pandemic backsliding: A year of violations and advances in response to COVID-19*. V-Dem Institute, Policy Brief No. 32. https://www.v-dem.net/media/finder_public/35/13/35133a44-9a22-435a-b1bf-ced1b05a2b69/pb_32.pdf.



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

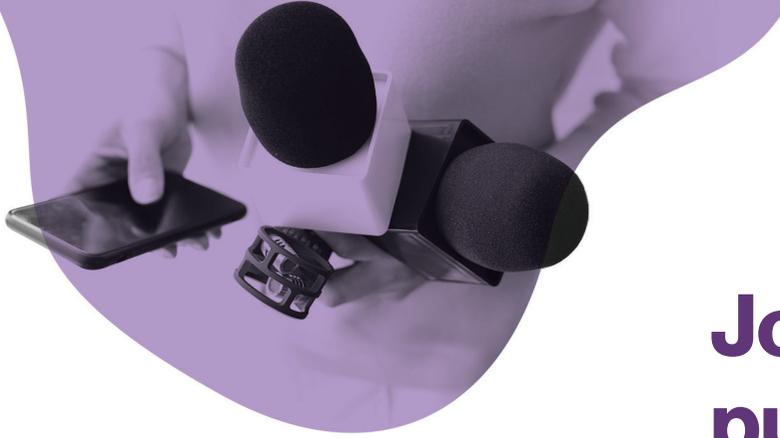
Thirty years ago, the 1991 Windhoek Declaration, adopted by journalists from across the African continent at a seminar organized by UNESCO, marked the beginning of a remarkable expansion of freedom, pluralism, and independence in news. That expansion owed much to the liberalization of media markets. However imperfectly, the fuel of advertising, copy sales, and subscriptions furnished many outlets around the world with the resources and independence they needed to bring audiences trustworthy information. Today, that blueprint is in tatters.

These norms in favour of freedom, pluralism, and independence for media are still essential—but alone they do not address the current challenges of mis- and disinformation, journalism's failing business model, or growing digital tactics that suppress independent journalism and democratic dissent online. Without viability, media freedom is hollow, independence can be easily compromised, and pluralism becomes a shadow of what it should be. Without transparency of internet gatekeepers, their role in communications cannot be assessed and brought into better alignment with international freedom of expression standards. And without media and information literate citizens, who can discern, cherish, and demand quality journalism, the risks are high of being overrun by other kinds of content.

Without viability, media freedom is hollow, independence can be easily compromised, and pluralism becomes a shadow of what it should be.

How our societies cope with this moment of crisis and transformation should be judged by how well we are delivering on the “establishment, maintenance, and fostering of an independent, pluralistic, and free press” under these new conditions. Action is needed if our future is to trend towards what the Windhoek+30 Declaration recognises as a world in which “information empowers citizens to exercise their fundamental rights, supports gender equality, and allows for participation and trust in democratic governance and sustainable development, leaving no one behind”⁶

⁶ UNESCO. 2021. *Windhoek+30 Declaration*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378158>



Journalism is a public good

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

It calls attention to the essential role of free and professional journalists in producing and disseminating this information, by tackling misinformation and other harmful content.”⁷

Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO

Within information as a public good, journalism is central. As verified news in the public interest, journalism itself can be characterised as a public good. Public goods are generally defined as essential services or commodities—such as schools, roads, street lighting, and parks—available to everyone in society without exclusion. Because these goods are frequently expensive to produce while offering little financial return, states often play a role, directly through funding or indirectly through regulation, in ensuring their provision.

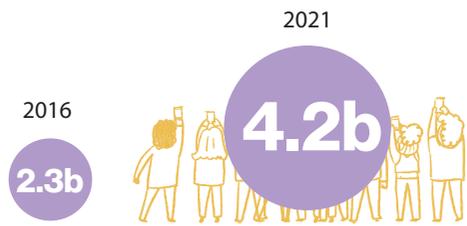
Like other public goods, journalism plays a critical role in promoting a healthy civic space. It does so by providing citizens with trusted and fact-based information that they need to participate in a free and open society. Journalism simultaneously acts as an independent watchdog and agenda-setter. But for journalism to function as a public good, it needs to operate under politically and economically viable conditions so that it can produce independent, high-quality, and trustworthy news and analysis.

In countries with high-quality public service media—distinct from state-controlled broadcasting—journalism is explicitly provided as a public good. Taxation, license fees, or other subsidies support these news outlets with a mandate to provide quality information to the general public. Genuine public service media, however, are invariably under pressure to serve governments or business interests, and particularly vulnerable to capture. Further, public service media are not in themselves sufficient for achieving media pluralism, which requires a diversity of funding models as well as both competing and complementary media institutions, including commercial and community media. Even so, genuine public service media remains a key way for journalism to serve as an essential public good.

However, in the increasingly crowded attention economy, the traditional business models of many media institutions across the spectrum are in crisis. Globally, newspaper sales continue to decline. News outlets struggle to get the “clicks” that determine advertising revenue, and many find themselves further squeezed out by the proliferation of new voices in the online space and the algorithms of digital intermediaries. The digital ecosystem has unleashed a flood of competing content and turned large internet companies into the new gatekeepers. The number of social media users nearly doubled from 2.3 billion in 2016 to 4.2 billion in 2021, allowing for greater access to content and more voices—but not necessarily that with the distinctive value-add of journalistic content.⁸

⁷ UNESCO. 2021. World Press Freedom Day 3 May 2021, “Information as a Public Good”. <https://en.unesco.org/news/world-press-freedom-day-3-may-2021-information-public-good>.

⁸ Kemp, S. 2021. *Digital 2021: Global Overview Report*. Kepios, 27 January. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>.



According to Kepios,

the number of social media users nearly doubled from 2016 to 2021

In the face of these trends, journalists and their allies are experimenting with innovative ideas, techniques, and operational models for sustaining the viability and independence of news. From tax credits and direct subsidies to philanthropic funding and non-profit models (also building upon the experiences of community radio), innovative funding models are already emerging, including for supporting public interest media. Some outlets have also placed greater focus on subscription or membership models to collect revenue directly from their audiences. Networks such as the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, and Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism are finding ways to work more efficiently (and safely) together. Several efforts are underway to develop online trust-verification tools for readers, platforms, and advertisers to better identify and privilege trustworthy sources. Emergency support to the media was availed under the pandemic in a number of countries.

While no single blueprint or solution will suffice in every context, a number of approaches and options can be considered. To safeguard journalism’s function as a public good, urgent action is required from governments, civil society, and the private sector to bolster trustworthy journalism and create a better enabling environment for media viability while respecting standards of editorial independence and freedom of expression. Without this, it will not be possible to ensure—and expand—the supply of journalism as a public good within the ever-burgeoning communications mix.



According to data from Zenith,

in the last five years, global newspaper advertising revenue dropped by half

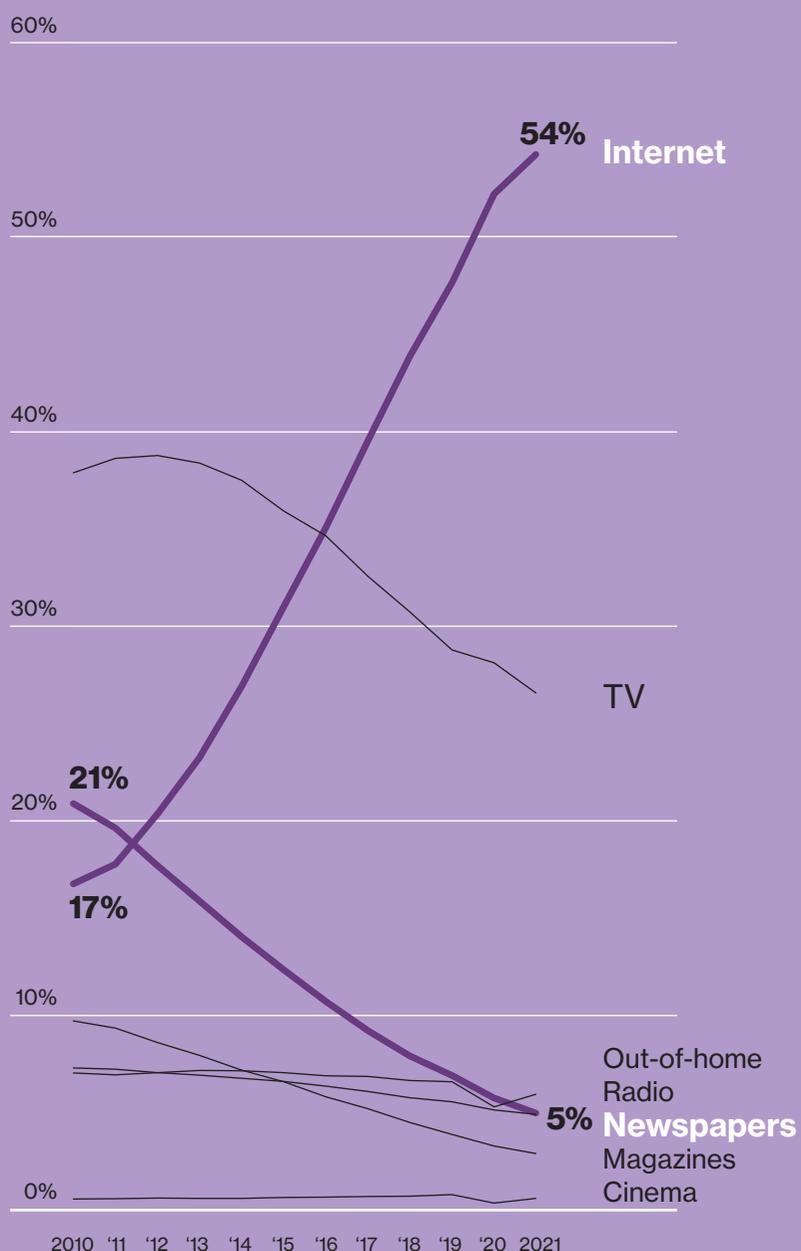
The picture is one where advertising revenues have shifted rapidly toward internet companies and away from news outlets. Two companies, Google and Facebook (recently rebranded as Meta), now receive approximately half of all global digital advertising spending.⁹ According to data from Zenith, in the last five years, global newspaper advertising revenue dropped by half; when analysed over the past ten years, that loss is a staggering two-thirds.¹⁰ This has had heavy implications for audiences worldwide in search of trustworthy local news sources who have been left in “news deserts”. When communities lose their local news sources, levels of civic engagement suffer.

⁹ Cramer-Flood, E. 2021. Duopoly still rules the global digital ad market, but Alibaba and Amazon are on the prowl. eMarketer. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/duopoly-still-rules-global-digital-ad-market-alibaba-amazon-on-prowl>.

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

The pandemic has accelerated the decline of news media's financial viability

Share of global advertising expenditure by medium, 2010-2021



Source: Zenith, Advertising Expenditure Forecasts, December 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic had a drastic impact on global newspaper circulation, which declined by 13% between 2019 and 2020, compared with less than 3% between 2018 and 2019.

Daily print newspaper circulation continues to fall



Source: PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2021-2025

Based on a global survey of over 1,400 journalists, as a result of the pandemic:

Job security

Two-thirds of respondents felt less secure in their jobs



Austerity bites

Over one-fifth of journalists surveyed had experienced a salary cut



| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Less secure in their jobs | 65% |
| No less or more secure | 28% |
| More secure in their jobs | 6% |
| Did not answer | 1% |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Respondents whose salaries had been cut | 21% |
| Respondents who had lost their jobs | 6% |
| Respondents who had been furloughed | 6% |
| Respondents whose outlets had been closed temporarily | 4% |
| Respondents whose outlets had been closed permanently | 2% |

Source: International Center for Journalists



Trends in media freedom, pluralism, and independence



At least

160 countries
still have criminal defamation laws on the books

UNESCO

accessible digital ecosystem governed through multi-stakeholder participation). News services have been blocked online, journalists illegally spied upon, and media sites hacked.

Internet shutdowns—when governments restrict internet, mobile networks, or social media access for large swaths of territory—reached a peak of 213 unique incidents in 2019.¹¹ Some governments are also investing in their capacity to “filter” and “throttle” the internet, blocking certain kinds of content or slowing down access to discourage users from seeking information online. In the last five years, government requests for content removal on major internet platforms have doubled.¹²

Beyond the actions of governments, private internet companies are facing increased scrutiny into how they deal with speech that is not protected under freedom of expression standards, and how they use personal data to impact what users see in their search results, content feeds, and recommendations. As part of growing multi-stakeholder support for enhanced transparency as a means of increasing accountability, UNESCO has set out a selection of 26 high-level principles that can serve as a guide to companies, policymakers, and regulators.¹³

The financial crisis in the news industry has been compounded in the last decade by the erosion of press freedoms, which have declined measurably since 2012. According to UNESCO data, at least 160 countries still have criminal defamation laws on the books. These laws are finding new life through Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation and “libel tourism”, in which individuals take advantage of the legal system of a foreign country to more easily file a libel lawsuit against a journalist or a media company, for example. Additionally, at least 57 laws and regulations across 44 countries have been adopted or amended since 2016 that contain overly vague language or disproportionate punishments that threaten online freedom of expression and press freedom.

Beyond the new legal measures, the last five years have witnessed a rise in other actions that threaten global efforts to safeguard freedom of expression and internet universality (for a human rights-based, open, and



In 2019, internet shutdowns reached a peak of

213 unique incidents

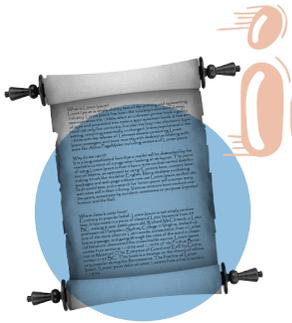
Access Now

¹¹ Access Now. 2021. *Shattered dreams and lost opportunities: A year in the fight to #KeptOn*.

https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/03/KeptOn-report-on-the-2020-data_Mar-2021_3.pdf.

¹² Data drawn from the transparency reports of Google, Facebook, and Twitter, and analysed by Data-Pop Alliance for this Report.

¹³ These principles are presented in: Puddephatt, A. 2021. *Letting the Sun Shine In: Transparency and Accountability in the Digital Age*. Issue brief in the *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* series. Paris, UNESCO. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377231>.



Through constitutional, statutory, and/or policy measures,

132 UN Member States

guarantee public access to information

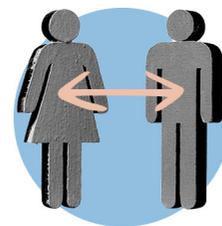
UNESCO

Highlighting a positive trend for information as a public good, at least 22 UN Member States have adopted constitutional, statutory, and/or policy guarantees for public access to information since the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, bringing the global total to 132 UN Member States as of August 2021. Owing to the efforts of civil society organizations around the world and the commitment of governments and international and regional bodies to the principle of openness, the number of countries with such laws has more than tripled in less than 20 years. Increasing numbers of countries are submitting data to UNESCO’s annual monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal Target 16 on “public access to information and fundamental freedoms”.

Access to information is increasingly synonymous with access to the internet. In Target 9.C, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to significantly increase access to information and communication technologies and strives to provide universal and affordable access to internet in least developed countries.¹⁴ Through this and other international commitments, access to the internet has indeed expanded rapidly, from approximately 30 percent of the world’s population in 2010 to over 50 percent in 2019.¹⁵ Over the last five years, however, the growth of internet access has slowed as markets struggle to provide service to the world’s poorest populations and amid enduring digital divides in some regions, evident in disparities based on issues such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and urban-rural divides, among others.

For the achievement of equality envisioned by the Sustainable Development Goals, the full participation of women in the public sphere is imperative, which in turn implicates gender issues in the supply, character, and access to information. Unfortunately, by many measures, progress towards gender equality within news media has continued to stagnate in the last five years. The Global Media Monitoring Project, which has tracked women’s marginalization in news media every five years since 1995, estimates that at current pace, it will take another 67 years to close the average gender equality gap in traditional news media.¹⁶

Pluralism of the media is also increasingly threatened by the deterioration of journalism’s traditional business models, which has made newsrooms more vulnerable to pressures from both external actors and outlet owners and executives. This form of media capture—when news media are ostensibly free yet compromised in terms of independence—continues to be a growing threat. For instance, a recent study by the Center for Media, Data, and Society of 546 state-administered media entities in 151 countries found that nearly 80 percent of them lacked editorial independence.¹⁷



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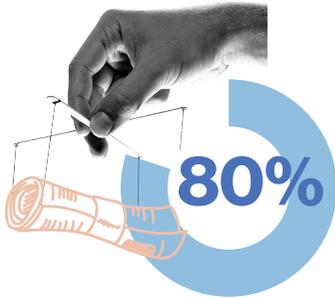
The Global Media Monitoring Project

¹⁴ UN General Assembly. 2017. *Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. A/RES/71/313. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>.

¹⁵ ITU (International Telecommunication Union). 2020. *Measuring digital development: Facts and figures 2020*. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx>.

¹⁶ GMMP (Global Media Monitoring Project). 2021. *Who makes the news?* https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁷ Dragomir, M. and Söderström, A. 2021. *The state of the media: A global analysis of the editorial independence of state media and an introduction of a new state media typology*. Budapest, Center for Media, Data, and Society. <https://cmds.ceu.edu/sites/cmcs.ceu.hu/files/attachment/article/2091/thestateofstatemedia.pdf>.



of state-administered media entities in one study lacked editorial independence

Center for Media, Data, and Society

found that falsehoods on that platform “diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth”.¹⁸ And in a poll conducted by Gallup in 142 countries in 2020, 57 percent of internet users said they were worried about receiving false information.¹⁹ In June 2020, more than 130 UN Member States and permanent observers, acknowledging such risks, called for new human rights-based measures to counter the spread of disinformation.²⁰

While more action is needed to contend with disinformation, caution is in order. As underlined in the ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development report entitled *Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation while respecting Freedom of Expression*, it is of vital importance that such responses respect norms and international frameworks for freedom of expression and promote an enabling environment for a free press to operate without restrictions.²¹

The issues of disinformation and media capture have contributed to patterns of declining trust in news media so widespread as to stoke concerns of a “post-truth era” in which citizens eschew facts for content that instead appeals to their emotions or political beliefs. This bodes poorly for the sustainability of mainstream media and for democratic politics, which depend upon some common ground of shared facts among competing interests. Growing concerns over these trends, however, have also bolstered international awareness of and commitment to media independence and of media and information literacy as a tool to address negative trends related to disinformation, hate speech, and other harmful content.

Meanwhile, mis- and disinformation have become a major threat to information as a public good, with internet companies serving as vectors and even accelerants. A study conducted by Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers using Twitter data



Falsehoods shared on Twitter “diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth”

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

¹⁸ Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., and Aral, S. 2018. The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, Vol. 359, No. 6380, pp. 1146–1151. <https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.aap9559>.

¹⁹ Lloyd’s Register Foundation. 2020. ‘Fake news’ is the number one worry for internet users worldwide. Lloyd’s Register Foundation, 6 October. <https://wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk/news-pictures/news/fake-news-number-one-worry/>.

²⁰ UN Affairs. 2020. Pause before sharing, to help stop viral spread of COVID-19 misinformation. UN News, 30 June. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1067422>.

²¹ Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development. 2020. *Balancing act: Countering digital disinformation while respecting freedom of expression*. Geneva/Paris, ITU/UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/publications/balanceact>.

Trends in press freedom

Press freedoms continued to decline in the past five years

Over the last five years, approximately



of the world's population have experienced a decline in press freedom in their country

Source: Analysis by Data-Pop Alliance, based on data from V-Dem Institute and the World Bank

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

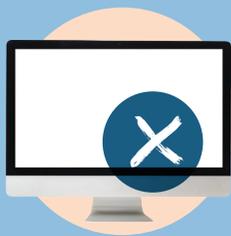
at least

57 laws across **44** countries

have been adopted or amended since 2016 that contain overly vague language or disproportionate punishments that threaten online freedom of expression and press freedom

Source: Compiled by UNESCO with input from the Centro de Estudios en Libertad de Expresión y Acceso a la Información, Centre for Law and Democracy, Poynter Institute, University of Westminster, International Press Institute, and Cyrilla

Governments worldwide are using internet shutdowns and other tools to silence online speech



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

Source: Data from Google, Facebook, and Twitter, analysed by Data-Pop Alliance

Internet shutdowns



Source: Access Now

The pandemic provided cover for press freedom violations



102

access to info restrictions



215

arrests or charges



95

cases of censorship

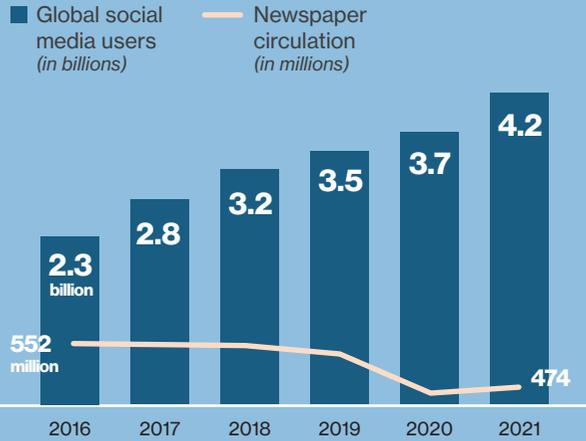


238

verbal or physical attacks

Source: International Press Institute

Social media feast, news famine



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

Progress on the passage of access to information laws

• Number of UN Member States



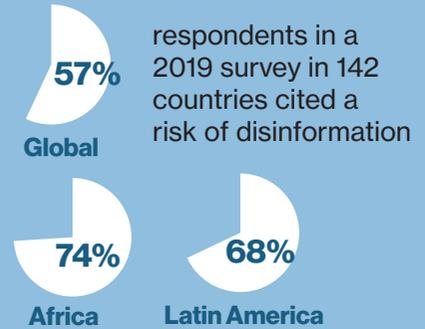
Source: UNESCO

As disinformation explodes, fact-checking initiatives expand



Source: Duke Reporters' Lab

Risk of disinformation



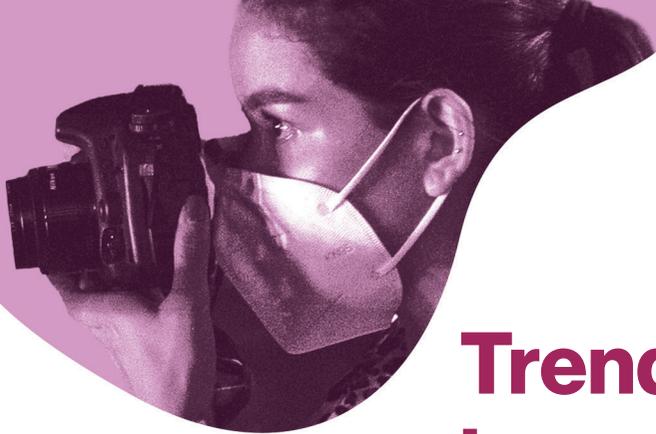
are the regions where fear of disinformation is highest

Source: Lloyd's Register Foundation

Trust in information sources continues to decline



Source: Edelman Trust Barometer



Trends in the safety of journalists



400 journalists

were killed for their work or while on the job between 2016 and the end of 2020

UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists

International organizations, civil society, and researchers have also given greater attention recently to threats, including various forms of online violence, which inordinately affect women journalists and those who represent minority groups. A 2020 survey of 714 women-identifying journalists from 125 countries, conducted by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), found that 73 percent had experienced online violence in the course of their work.²³ The last few years have also seen numerous expulsions of foreign correspondents and attacks on journalists covering protests. From January to August 2021, UNESCO registered attacks against journalists in connection with the coverage of protests, demonstrations, and riots in at least 60 countries in all world regions. Since 2015, at least 13 journalists have been killed while covering protests.

Impunity for killings of journalists remains a serious concern: only 13 percent of cases recorded by UNESCO since 2006, or approximately one in ten, are currently considered judicially resolved. UNESCO research conducted for the Report further confirms that where the number of journalist killings is high, so too is impunity for these killings, threatening a continued cycle of violence as lethal crimes against journalists often go unpunished.

Hostile actors continue to threaten journalists with killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture—simply for doing their jobs. From 2016 to the end of 2020, 400 journalists were killed for their work or while on the job. Though this is a slight decrease compared to the previous five-year period, during which 491 journalists were killed, recent years have shown the importance of considering threats against journalists in a holistic sense. Other repression methods appear to be rising at record levels, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment and threats of violence online and off-line. According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists, 274 journalists were imprisoned in 2020, the highest yearly total in three decades.²² Additionally, over the past five years, out of all killings of journalists, the proportion that occurred outside of countries experiencing armed conflict has been steadily rising, from 50 percent in 2016 to 61 percent in 2020.



73% of women journalists surveyed experienced online violence in the course of their work

UNESCO/ICFJ survey

²² CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists). 2020. 274 Journalists Imprisoned. <https://cpj.org/data/imprisoned/2020/>.

²³ Posetti, J., Shabbir, N., Maynard, D., Bontcheva, K., and Aboulez, N. 2021. *The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists*. Paris, UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/publications/thechilling>.



**of cases recorded
by UNESCO since
2006 are currently
considered judicially
resolved**

The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for the safety of journalists and exacerbated existing ones. Even as journalists were broadly recognized as essential workers during the crisis, they faced increased harassment, psychological stress and trauma, and an elevated risk of contracting the virus. According to the non-governmental organization Press Emblem Campaign, at least 1,846 journalists died after contracting COVID-19 between 1 March 2020 and 1 November 2021.²⁴

In response to these myriad challenges, UNESCO and others have worked to raise awareness of the threats to journalists and led numerous efforts to protect them over the past five years. Between 2016 and 2021, 28 resolutions and decisions on journalists' safety have been adopted by the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO's governing bodies, and regional bodies. An indicator on the safety of journalists (SDG indicator 16.10.1) has also been established to measure achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UNESCO has also strengthened the capacities of over 23,000 judicial actors and 8,500 members of security forces around the world on freedom of expression, access to information, and safety of journalists, and published numerous vital resources and safety guides in cooperation with Reporters Without Borders, the International Federation of Journalists, and others. The past five years have also witnessed a proliferation of efforts in response to the gender dimension of journalists' safety, including civil society initiatives such as the Coalition Against Online Violence, UNESCO's #JournalistsToo campaign, and growing attention to national-level support mechanisms for women journalists.

National protection mechanisms for the safety of journalists are being implemented in numerous countries, while existing protection mechanisms have also been continuously updated, particularly to better address gender-based threats. Other Member States have also launched national action plans on the safety of journalists, including gender-based and digital threats.

²⁴ PEC (Press Emblem Campaign). 2021. Countries with the most Covid-19 related journalist deaths. <https://www.pressemblesm.ch/-1.shtml>.

Trends in the safety of journalists

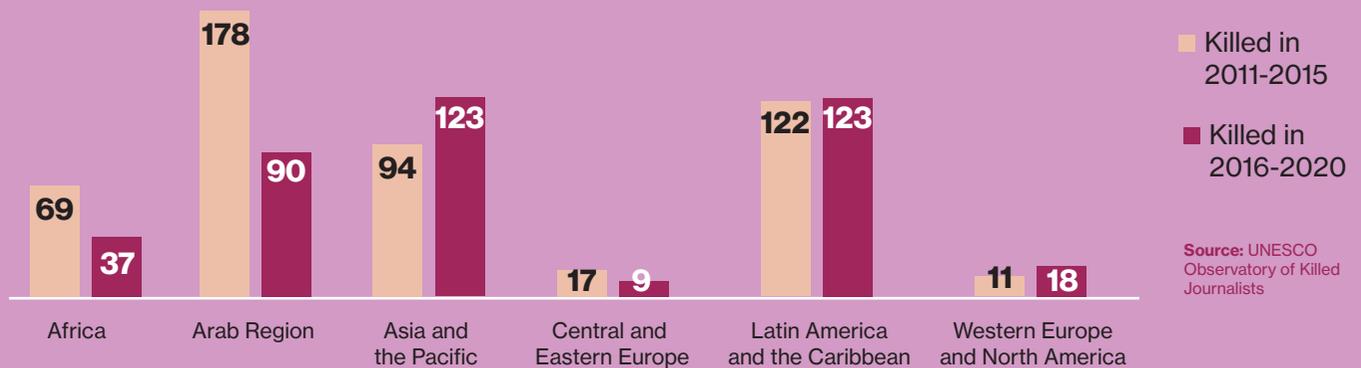


While journalist killings have declined in the past five years, imprisonment has reached a record high

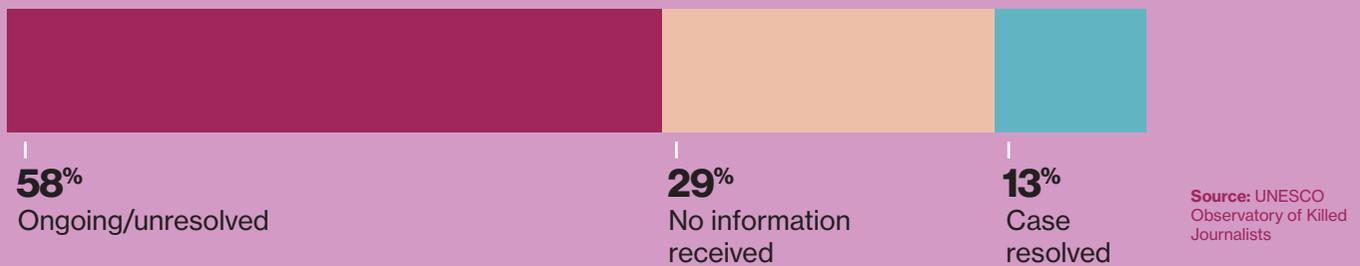


Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists and Committee to Protect Journalists

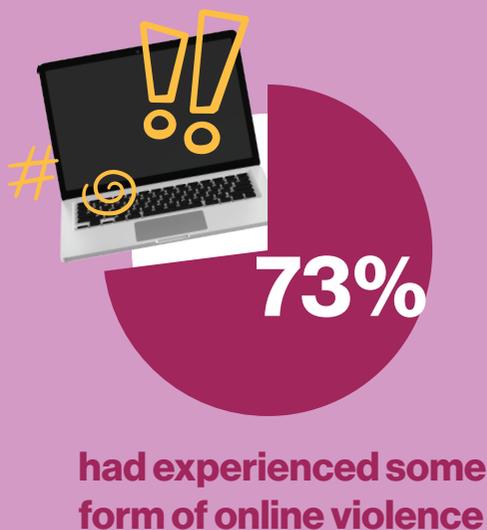
Journalist killings have nearly halved in some regions, but increased in others



In the past 15 years, 87 percent of cases of killed journalists remain unresolved or unreported



A 2020 UNESCO/ICFJ survey found that, of 625 woman-identifying journalists:





Future directions in press freedom



Since 2013, UNESCO's Judges' Initiative has

**trained over
23,000
judicial
actors**

on these issues

While accounting for the grim tally of setbacks, this World Trends Report highlights a groundswell of efforts to preserve press freedom and to protect the safety of journalists around the world. In 2019, the United Kingdom and Canadian governments launched the Media Freedom Campaign, triggering the creation of a coalition of governments and working in partnership with civil society organizations. High-level representation at two conferences has yielded new pledges, including the creation of the Global Media Defence Fund. In the 2020 Hague Commitment to Increase the Safety of Journalists, almost 60 signatories committed to implementing the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. The Forum on Information and Democracy has garnered 43 state endorsements of a declaration calling for sweeping reforms to provide a "New Deal" for journalism. A newly created International Fund for Public Interest Media further underscores how the media sector has become a growing priority for bilateral, multilateral, and private donors.

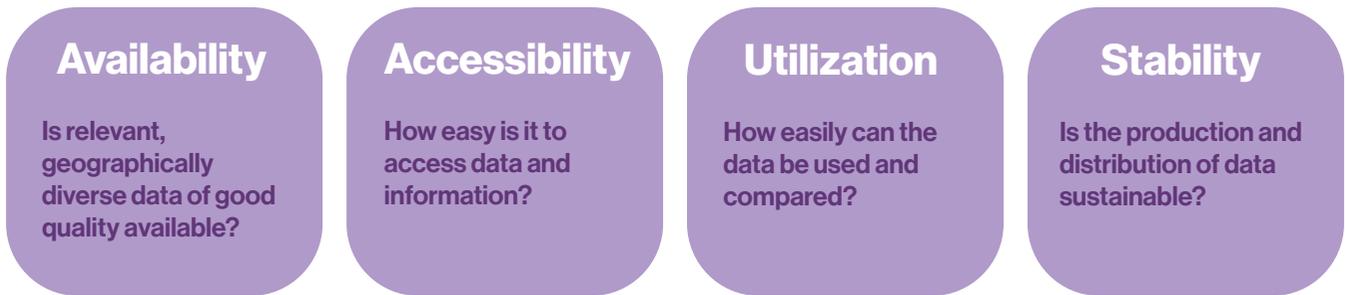
The informal Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists have continued to bring together Member States that share a commitment to the strengthening of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and its implementation at the national level. On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2021, the Groups issued a Joint Statement stressing the critical role of Member States in supporting a free press.²⁵ The Freedom Online Coalition, a partnership of 33 governments, has recently rekindled its efforts to support internet freedom and protect human rights online. Additionally, since 2013, UNESCO's Judges' Initiative has raised the capacities of judicial actors on international and regional standards on freedom of expression, access to information, and the safety of journalists in regions across the world. Over 23,000 judicial actors, including judges, prosecutors, and lawyers, have been trained on these issues, notably through a series of massive open online courses (MOOCs), on-the-ground training and workshops, and the publication of a number of toolkits and guidelines.

At the national level, the impact of these international efforts may remain geographically skewed. In countries with large advertising markets, institutionalized forms of public service media, well-established traditions of press freedom, and political influence over the governance of internet platforms, among other factors, such efforts are more likely to succeed. In poorer countries and at the local level, the news crisis will be more difficult to address without a new concerted push with international support.

²⁵ UNESCO. 2021. Groups of Friends on the Safety of Journalists issue a Joint Statement on Press Freedom. UNESCO, 10 May. <https://en.unesco.org/news/groups-friends-safety-journalists-issue-joint-statement-press-freedom>.

A major impediment to those contextually specific solutions for journalism, however, remains in the form of significant data gaps. In the countries and communities where journalism remains the most beleaguered, the health of the news system can be a black box. Efforts to fill the data gaps are important first steps toward more inclusive solutions.

Indeed, those working to promote freedom of expression and media development are already innovating their work through the use of data, in both new and old forms, but much remains to be done. Following a mapping of more than 150 data sources from 120 organizations, the Report identifies priority data gaps and presents a framework focused on the following four dimensions:



The full global edition of the World Trends Report puts forward recommendations for how these gaps can be filled through collaborations among governments, civil society, and the private sector. Greater commitments to transparency by the major internet companies will be a key element for designing evidence-based policies that enhance the enabling environment for the funding and dissemination of journalism.

A call for action

The troubling trends in media freedom, pluralism, independence, viability, gender equality, and safety of journalists highlighted in this Report should be a call to redouble efforts.

Without urgent action by governments, civil society, and private companies, trustworthy journalism will remain under threat, and information as a public good severely under-nourished.

Without media and information literacy and internet transparency, humanity may be diverted away from addressing the real problems of sustainable development and securing human rights more broadly.

New forms of self-regulation by news producers, new regulations for social media platforms, state subsidies to trustworthy news outlets and greater support for public service media, increased media development assistance, a redoubling of philanthropic investments, all while steadfastly guarding standards of editorial independence and freedom of expression: these are just a few of the measures that may be required to ensure that journalism can continue to function as a necessary public good.

WORLD TRENDS IN

Freedom of Expression and Media Development

GLOBAL REPORT 2021/2022

Journalism is a public good



> HIGHLIGHTS

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

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

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

