



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists

Pakistan

Building up the defenses to protect freedom of expression

Background

Pakistan has made significant progress on advancing its citizens' right to access information. Three of the country's provinces have adopted progressive Right to Information laws, thereby reinforcing the country's commitment to achieve SDG16.10. However, legal frameworks on freedom of expression need to be strengthened, in particular internet governance as new social media regulations introduced by the government without prior consultation with stakeholders have raised concerns. More support is also needed to implement existing laws at the provincial level. As a pilot country of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, there is a pressing need for making functional the established mechanisms for prevention, protection and prosecution of attacks against journalists. Many journalists continue to be threatened and killed in the line of duty. A pending draft bill on journalists' safety delays the measures to address the high levels of impunity that afflict the country.

What we are doing

- Providing policy advice and supporting advocacy on press freedom, access to information and the issue of impunity.

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What we could further do with your support

- Multiply high-level advocacy efforts towards parliamentarians and policy makers for legal and policy reform on journalists' safety and freedom of expression.
- Reinforce support to the Right to Information Commissions in the provinces in order to effectively implement the laws; Build capacity of judges and lawyers on providing legal aid on freedom of expression and access to information in online spaces.
- Awareness raising on the Freedom of expression, data protection, right to privacy and digital rights.

Actions in Pakistan fall under the following outputs of the Multi-Donor Programme (MPD):

Output 1:

Awareness-raising and advocacy

Output 3:

Enhancing the safety of journalists

Output 4:

Policy advice and reinforcement of duty bearers' capacities

Key Achievements

- Awareness raising actions and advocacy continue to reinforce UNESCO's work in Pakistan, especially in relation to challenges to press freedom, access to information, and the issue of impunity. Recent actions have managed to reach over **600 media stakeholders** including government representatives.
- **A Memorandum of Understanding to ensure commitment towards the safety of journalists** was signed between UNESCO's implementing partner, the Peace and Justice Network, the Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights, and the Parliamentary Taskforce on Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Nominated officers throughout the country have been assigned to report on crimes against journalists** in all provincial and federal police departments, by the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) of Pakistan.
- **Capacities of 20 government departments, 3 ministries and 2 parliamentary groups were enhanced** through UNESCO-supported activities to support the operation of a national safety reporting mechanism.



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Protect Journalists and Freedom of Expression

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“Journalists are the frontline human rights defenders. They need special protection through law. This can be achieved by building capacity of duty bearers to produce and use credible data for policy making.”

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Chaudhry Muhammad Shafique

*Member of the Pakistan's National
Commission for Human Rights*

Building the capacities of duty bearers

In 2016, Pakistan stepped up its commitment to protect freedom of expression and access to information after including Sustainable Development Goal 16 and its target 10 (SDG 16.10) in its development agenda. This was a bold action because in order to achieve its global goal, Pakistan will need to track and react to verified cases of attacks against journalists, as well as enact and implement Right to Information laws.

UNESCO has supported Pakistan to attain SDG 16.10 since then, firstly by backing the creation of a mechanism to monitor attacks against journalists at the federal and provincial levels. UNESCO helped to convene early discussions with all interested actors such as government, state institutions, civil society organizations and journalists.

The monitoring mechanism was created at the behest of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR). It is the first concerted effort to centralize and consistently collect data on journalists' attacks through designated focal points in all provincial and federal police departments.

Thanks to the monitoring mechanism, media stakeholders were able to improve their understanding of the extent and nature of the attacks, a previously challenging task given the different monitoring systems used by national and international organisations.

UNESCO has also supported Pakistan to effectively implement its Right to Information Law at national and provincial levels.

In Baluchistan, a province which lacks a Right to Information Commission, UNESCO supported the establishment of a multi-stakeholder committee in order to expedite the implementation of the law, serve as a consultative organ to address the law's weaknesses and harmonize it with international standards.

Among other results, the committee helped to flag threats to freedom of expression, such as the misuse of Pakistan's Electronic Crime Prevention Act (PECA). Some of the Act's sections or new definitions were left unaddressed for self-interpretation, which were used for detaining journalists under allegations of cyber-terrorism or hate speech.

Thanks to the Committee's recommendations, members of the National Assembly, the government and other media stakeholders can be more prepared to act against potential threats that curb citizens' right to access information.

UNESCO will continue working with parliamentarians, policy makers and other relevant actors in order to develop synergies and garner maximum support for press freedom and safety of journalists.

Read more about our work, visit:

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression/mdp>



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