

Supporting freedom of expression, access to information and the safety of journalists



| Key challenges

The crucial work of journalists in providing reliable information to citizens is undermined by increasing restrictions on freedom of expression and by persistent online and physical attacks. Women journalists are particularly subject to harassment and threats, especially online.

Crimes committed against journalists go largely unpunished: more than 880 killings of journalists were recorded by UNESCO in the last ten years and 90% of these cases remain unsolved.

At the same time, the use of digital technologies for content personalization and moderation can impact freedom of expression and facilitate the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Misleading or false information undermines societal trust and imperils access to reliable and verified information. This, in turn, risks distorting citizens' understanding of critically important issues as well as disrupting democratic processes, such as elections.

The increased use of digital platforms in the absence of inclusive, global Internet governance frameworks has also led to the spread of hate speech, which fuels online and offline discrimination, hostility and violence.

Addressing these challenges calls for the protection and promotion of information as a common good that is available to all and that contributes to the achievement of peace and sustainable development.



With your support, UNESCO aims to...

- Increase awareness and advocacy to safeguard freedom of expression worldwide. UNESCO leads the global commemorations of the World Press Freedom Day (WPDF), the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI).
- Build international, regional and national networks and partnerships to consolidate global action to protect and promote freedom of expression.
- Spearhead the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and promote integration of international standards in national and regional media reforms and regulations.
- Promote the development of monitoring and reporting systems designed to track crimes against journalists, using the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists to track journalist killings and the responses received from concerned Member States regarding judicial follow-up of these crimes.
- Increase the focus on the safety of women journalists and the threats they face.
- Develop knowledge resources on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, including the UNESCO World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development report and the UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity.
- Build and develop the capacities of the judiciary and security forces to support their role in protecting freedom of expression, access to information and other fundamental freedoms.
- Advocate for the increased transparency and accountability of online platforms and support global policy development to address related challenges, such as false information and hate speech online.
- Strengthen the capacity of electoral authorities to deal with misinformation and disinformation during democratic processes.

"Journalists are essential in preserving the fundamental right to freedom of expression. When [they] are attacked with impunity, there is a breakdown in security and judicial systems for all." — Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO

Recent UNESCO achievements include...

- Contributing to the liberation of imprisoned journalists - the 2016, 2017 and 2018 laureates of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, which acknowledges outstanding contributions to the defence and promotion of press freedom, were released after having received the award.
- Training more than 17,000 judicial actors from over 60 countries and 3,400 law enforcement agents from over 17 countries on freedom of expression, access to information and the safety of journalists, through UNESCO programmes such as the Judges Initiative.
- Supporting media policy reform on national and regional levels in more than 10 countries and two regions to align with international standards and gender-sensitive perspectives, through UNESCO's Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP).
- Strengthening media protection and improving journalists' access to specialized legal assistance through administering the Global Media Defence Fund which supports civil society initiatives for media freedom. All 44 preselected projects from the 2020 call mainstreamed gender equality, 17 benefitted Africa and a majority were submitted from the Global South.
- Organizing capacity-building activities for women journalists and media managers on ensuring their safety and launching a global study on violence against women journalists.
- Rallying support of top newspapers, media outlets and influential journalists around the world to disseminate UNESCO's awareness-raising campaigns for World Press Freedom Day and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. As an example, in celebration of World Press Freedom Day 2020, UNESCO highlighted the critical role of journalism in the context of the COVID-19 crisis through the widely disseminated FACTS media campaign.
- Developing, in cooperation with the World Health Organization and the Knight Center for Journalism, a multilingual online training course on how to professionally, and safely, cover and ensure the dissemination of reliable pandemic-related information. So far over 9,000 media professionals from over 160 countries have been trained through this course.



17,000 +
judicial actors



3,400 +
law enforcement agents

Trained on freedom of expression, access to information and the safety of journalists.

Partner with UNESCO

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More information: [Fostering Freedom of Expression](#), [UNESCO's Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists](#)