

Exile Media

Mapping the challenges faced by
independent media in exile



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Introduction

Independent media in exile are a specific category of media organisations, which face specific challenges in additions to those faced by all independent media. This report seeks to provide a framework for understanding these challenges. It is based on our experience working with individual (exile) media partners, as well as a study interviewing 15 journalists working for other media organisations in exile. Media in exile deserve more recognition and support, to which we hope to contribute with this report.

Press Freedom under Pressure

Freedom of the press has been shrinking globally for at least the last ten years (Freedom House, 2019; Reporters without Borders, 2021). Independent journalism threatened both directly and indirectly, ranging from the killing or prosecution of journalists to various pressures to compromise editorial independence.

Freedom of the press is intrinsically linked to the preservation of democracies and society's freedom as such. Without the plurality of voices and access to independent information, people are deprived of the right to make free and informed choices and powerholders are not held to account. This report highlights the voices of those who resist repression and fight for access to reliable and independent information in countries where this right is threatened.

They were forced to leave their country because they were unable to report independently and safely in their home countries. They run news channels, conduct investigations, produce documentaries or publish news on various channels. The professional and personal challenges they face, even after leaving their countries are significant, and most of them aspire to return. Nevertheless, the situation in their home countries does not allow them to do so without putting their safety at risk.

Defining Independent Media in Exile

Exile media is defined as "a media outlet that can no longer function in the country relating to its content, and operates in either self-imposed removal or enforced removal, due to danger." (Cook, 2016, p. 1-2) Journalists in exile are forced to leave their home countries where they are no longer able to safely do their work – delivering objective information to their audience. In addition, some individuals become journalists after they were forced to leave their countries, for instance as a result of their political opinions or activism. In exile, they subsequently become acquainted with the standards that the journalistic profession requires. (Ristow, 2011)

It is crucial to make the distinction between media outlets in exile and journalists in exile. 'Media outlets in exile' are organisations forced to leave their country or outlets established in exile. These outlets can include journalists who did not have to flee themselves. In contrast, the term 'journalists in exile' refers to the individuals who had to leave their home countries. These distinctions have implications for the different challenges that media in exile face. This report focusses on the challenges faced by exile media organisations, and will explore the challenges of individual exiled journalists in this context.

The journalists in exile who were interviewed for this study

Independent Media in Exile in the World

In CIMA's landmark 2011 study on exile media, former director of Internews Eric Johnson provided an estimation of exile media outlets at the time, stating that there are "maybe 50 serious exile media [outlets], with an average of 10 journalists each, some paid, some not" (Ristow's, 2011, p. 13). Ten years later, in an interview for this report, Johnson stresses the increasing significance of independent bloggers, exiled journalists running their Telegram channels and other 'new' forms of exiled journalism. He estimates that next to the 50 serious exile media outlets, there are from 5 to 15 smaller-scale media or individual journalists for each country of origin of media in exile.



After facing increasing obstacles to independent reporting at home, direct threats to their security often are the catalyst to leave for independent journalists and media. Being in exile often means leaving family, friends, and professional recognition at home, without knowing whether and when it will be possible to return. But once in exile many journalists are still confronted with insecurity. Journalists may experience fear for their family, personal and professional isolation, and these challenges can impact their mental health. Journalism in exile entails significant psychosocial difficulties which should not be overlooked.

Media in exile also continue to face challenges to the effective operation of their organisation. Continuing efforts of governments of their home countries to mute journalists' voices, cyber-attacks, or online harassment are some of the problems that media in exile face in the digital environment – which is vital to spread their work and maintain contact with their audience and sources. Media in exile can also experience significant financial insecurity. Operating a media outlet in exile is costly and the options available for generating income are limited. Media in exile thus have to rely on donors. Yet, especially for new media, access to donors can be difficult, and the funds tend to be inconsistent, which hinders the outlet's ability to grow.

Approach of this report

At the core of this report is a study done by Anežka Hlinovská and Nesle de Schutter between February and June 2021. They conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, including both journalists in exile and journalists working for exile media outlets while still in their home country. Their study can be found in Free Press Unlimited's evidence base.¹ This has been supplemented by knowledge produced by Free Press Unlimited's internal Community of Practice on Exile Media between 2018 and 2020. These sources have been compiled and edited into the present publication by our Knowledge and Quality department.

This report aims to explore and offer a framework for understanding the challenges exile media currently face. Our experience working with individual (exile) media partners and facilitating collaboration, has been one of the inspirations for this report. The knowledge produced here will further inform and inspire our future activities, creating a positive loop where knowledge creation plays a critical role. Exile media perform a valuable role in providing information about and for some of the most repressive countries in the world. Their work deserves to be acknowledged and supported.

1. See here: <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/evidence/independent-media-in-exile-2/>



Safety

The safety of exiled journalists is a key issue. A worsening security situation is often the catalyst for a media organisation or individual journalist to leave their home country. But physical and especially digital safety threats can continue for media organisations in exile.

Physical safety

Most of the journalists interviewed told a similar story of gradual harassment that becomes life-threatening. For Wilf Mbanga, the founding director of the Zimbabwean newspaper Daily News, constant harassment eventually resulted in a six-month trial. While the case was acquitted, he would still be regularly followed in the streets, as a means to intimidate him. Humayra Bakhtiyar experienced a similar progression of intimidation in Tajikistan. After conducting investigations on political issues and corruption, harassment by government authorities gradually increased. She states that intelligence services would threaten her and her family to discourage her from investigating. She also became a victim of 'trolling campaigns', ran by individuals paid by the authorities to harass individuals who are critical of the regime online.

While this type of harassment and threats to physical security are a common reason for journalists to leave their home country, for many journalists they can continue to be a challenge while already in exile. Frequently, the tactic is to harass family members and friends who remained in the home country. Several journalists told us how intelligence services pressured members of his families to persuade him to return. Others have been told or have experienced that members of their family would be arrested if they did not return.

For some journalists, harassment can also perpetuate physical insecurity within the host country. "Living in

exile doesn't mean [being] safe. I have to keep my office and home addresses confidential to almost everyone," one interviewed journalist noted. Several journalists mention harassment and intimidation from people from their home countries. This can take the form of coordinated surveillance, likely directed by authorities from the home country.

After having left Zimbabwe, Mbanga reports on being notified by the police in the United Kingdom about a potential physical threat: "The police approached me once and said that they had picked up intelligence that the government was trying to harm me in the UK. They offered me protection." He adds: "it is a serious problem that our governments will pursue you even if you are outside the borders."

Physical insecurity is also an important challenge for the many exile media outlets that still operate with reporters inside the home country. Many in-country reporters confront two types of threats: police violence and detentions, and social media attacks which overlap with offline reality. One interviewee described an occasion when photos of their in-country reporters were shared on social media, with calls for other users to attack them. While these security threats are faced by all journalists in these conditions, the distance can make it even more difficult for the exile media outlet to protect their in-country reporters.

To mitigate this challenge, it is vital that the identities of in-country reporters are never disclosed in public or exposed by others. The exiled media house could adopt the practice of limiting the contact of a new reporter to others within the organization.

Some exile media outlets have policies whereby freelancers only have direct contact with editors in exile, and are never introduced to each other. In the initial stages, the freelancer will often not know who they are in communication with since either titles (i.e. editor in chief) or pseudonyms are used by the editors.



Digital safety

Digital threats are perhaps the most common challenges of media and journalists in exile. The digitalisation of news has enabled new, more pervasive forms of censorship, surveillance and online harassment. While some interviewees witnessed their news websites being censored, others had their emails hacked or suffered other forms of communication interference.

Many journalists regularly receive fraudulent links via email, phishing attacks aimed at gaining control of an account. This can have severe consequences, disrupting not only the operation of the media outlet but also potentially exposing confidential information about individuals at risk. New forms of spyware have emerged in recent years which can spread without even the need for the victim to click on a malicious link. One notable example is spying software Pegasus, which developed 'zero-click capability' between 2016 and 2019. Once installed, the software can read text messages, access the device's camera and microphone and track its location.

Safe online infrastructure includes two-factor authentication, secure networking, encryption and other measures. These need to be continuously updated and improved to meet similarly evolving threats. The need to deal with or counter these threats brings additional stress and costs.

Online harassment of journalists can take the form of trolling campaigns, systematic hateful commenting, and slanderous disinformation targeted at their person. While Twitter and Facebook are often important to reach their audience in their home country, they are also an easy platform for intimidating comments.

One interviewee detailed this as follows: "They continue to harass us. I get stories written by the government media to this day, denouncing me

and writing rubbish about my life. They want to delegitimise you. [...] You just have to ignore them, carry on with your life and write about what you believe in."

Several interviewees have been victims of the spread of slanderous disinformation about them. This is often produced and spread by government-aligned media, and used as to delegitimize media and journalists in exile. Female journalists in particular are often targetted with gender-specific attacks in addition to general attacks on their reputation and allegiance. This can include Photoshopped photos and manipulated audio-visual materials. Several female interviewees reported that fake images of them had been spread as part of an online harassment campaign.

Psycho-social problems

The stress surrounding organisational uncertainty and on-going (online) attacks faced by journalists in exile contribute to the broader set of personal challenges: leaving their families and friends, isolation and struggles with integration into their host countries, but also uncertainty over their professional future.

When asked about the most important challenge that exile media face, several interviewees mentioned losing their social life. "Losing your life at home, basically [...] You switch from one type of living to something completely different," is how one journalist in exile put it. Slander and personal attacks at home, such as being designed 'enemies of the nation', cause further distress, as does the way this affects loved ones in the home country: "your family will be under the target of the pro-government activists or people."

Part of the reality of exiled journalists is an increased exposure to psychological distress and risks for mental health. Journalists may experience isolation, survivor's guilt, and feel a loss of valuable parts of their self-



identity. (Foster, 2019: 23) Several interviewees had suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression, which was worsened by an initial lack of access to professional support.

The personal aspects of exile differ and influence the extent of isolation that the journalist may experience. While some journalists had to leave their countries alone, others were joined by their families. Similarly, the experience of exile can differ between freelancers and those journalists who work with their colleagues in a media organisation. In any of these situations early and accessibly psycho-social support can be highly valuable though, to prevent journalists in exile from becoming stuck in a downward spiral with cascading problems.

Psycho-social problems can also worsen if the journalists in exile find themselves hindered from continuing their profession. All the interviewees stressed that they risked their safety and eventually were forced to leave their countries because they wanted to preserve their independent voice. Therefore, it is important for them to continue their work and be heard in exile.



Financial sustainability

Financial sustainability is a persistent challenge for independent media in exile. Financing was identified as one of the critical challenges for independent exiled media in CIMA's 2011 publication on exile media. The experience of Free Press Unlimited in the years since, as well as the interviews conducted in the context of this study, confirm that this remains a major issue.

Donor Funding

Donor funds are crucial for independent media in exile. They constitute the primary source of income for all interviewed media organisations. One of the interviewees mentioned how their media organisation is now fully reliant on donor funding, while they had a diversified income stream of advertising and sponsored pages before going into exile.

Projects to support exiled media outlets are unique in that core operations take place in another country than the one in which the organization operates. Some institutional donors (such as embassies or UN agencies) are constrained by diplomatic reasons from supporting activities for which the project was forced to operate in exile. Similarly, working discreetly and not disclosing the media outlet's location can make it difficult to establish strategic relationships. On the other hand, donors might actually rely on exile media organisations for information about the target country.

A further challenge is the need for a professional administration system. Consistent with earlier findings by Cook (2016), interviewed media outlets indicated that even when exile media receive the funding, there are extensive requirements on donor reporting that place heavy burdens on the media. Meanwhile, many exile media organisations are forced to work from countries that are more expensive than their target country.

It is important that this funding is consistent and long-term. Short-term project-specific funding often does little to secure the financial sustainability of exile media outlets, who require secure long-term support to be able to build up some reserve funds and/ or invest in developing further funding solutions. (Foster 2019) For the media organisations themselves, it takes time to build the trust of donors. One Tajik interviewee noted that this is especially an issue for newer media organisations, who do not have many contacts.

In the experience of several interviewees, donors tend to shift their attention and funds to places where an abrupt crisis situation emerges: "income (grants) is sustainable as long as our country is in their focus. Once it falls out of the priority countries list, donors will stop funding us". The change of focus is accompanied by decreased support for media targeting different countries. While understandable, this is detrimental to media support as a whole. Institutional donors are therefore called upon to provide long-term commitments to exile media organisations.

Commercial income

Independent media in exile form have great difficulty developing an effective business model. They cannot fully participate in the market of their host country, nor that of their home country. External support from donors is nearly always essential. It is possible to supplement this with further income streams though. This greatly strengthens the viability of the media organisation. As an added benefit, exiled media that have diversified portfolios of donors or revenue streams in general are less prone to falling into a "grand dependency cycle" (Cook, 2016, p. 10). In turn, this can help them preventing uncomfortable perceptions of limits on editorial freedom.

Commercial income streams mainly include either income raised directly from audiences or a form of advertising, for example in the form of Google Ads or sponsored pages. Both of these come with their own challenges for media in exile.



Advertisers from the home country of media in exile are often reluctant to engage with media in exile, to avoid repercussions from the side of the government. Meanwhile, the audiences targeted in the home countries of exile media are often not of interest to potential advertisers from the host country. Furthermore, their content is often not in English or in the language of the host country, which makes it difficult and costly to attempt to serve both audiences. For media organisation that do manage to serve both an audience in the home country and an international or diaspora audience this does become a viable option.

Income raised directly from audiences can take several forms, such as subscriptions, crowdfunding, or micro-donations. The economic position of the target country (or a potential diaspora audience) is obviously an important factor for the viability of these models. Another precondition is the presence of the required technical infrastructure: "There are a lot of readers who want to contribute, however, we don't have a banking system. It is completely a cash country."

The viability of crowdfunding or micro-donations is similarly dependent on the income level of (part of) the target audience. Furthermore, they can require significant capacity to turn into sustained, rather than one-off, sources of income. In some situations, crowdfunding or micro-donations can be potentially dangerous, if it is possible to track them back to the contributor. (Foster 2019) In those cases, it is important to ensure that secure payment gateways are used.

Subscription services in particular provide the media organisations with a relatively stable income, compared to the other options. Subscription services used to take some administrative capacity to set up, but new platforms such as Substack make it easy for journalists to start a subscription-based newsletter. But excluding audiences who cannot afford to pay for content is usually contrary to the mission and purpose of the independent media in exile: to serve the interest of all people in society, as as to provide them with an alternative voice to the media affiliated with the government.



Reaching Audiences and Sources

Any media organisation in exile runs the risk of losing touch with the country in which they report. Unless a strategy is developed to minimize this risk, the physical distance between the host country and country of origin can over time influence the quality and quantity of reporting. There are challenges both in reaching (in-country) audiences as well as in obtaining sources.

Sources

“Am I being accurate? Am I describing things the way they are? Because I haven’t been there for so long,” was how one interviewee described the challenges of reporting on their home country from exile.

For media organisations, the preferred situation is to have reporters directly present in the country. Depending on the specific situation, those reporters can either be officially accredited or operate anonymously. In addition, the safety of any persons interviewed or otherwise contacted for information should be considered. One interviewee explains that it is often too risky to call sources directly. Instead, they attempt at reaching out using more secure technologies. Journalists can make use of platforms that allow for anonymous file sharing, such as GlobaLeaks and SecureDrop.

In some circumstances, freelancers can be vital to bridge this gap and ensure that the exiled media house remains relevant with a local feel. But due to the sensitivities of operating from exile, any exposure to the team or organizational modus operandi from new/outside people should be considered with extra precaution. In addition to assessing their background, they should also be evaluated on the grounds of their vulnerability. Can the person work discreetly or do they create additional risks? It is good practice to do a short audit of any freelancer’s digital safety skills and assist them with basic digital hygiene.

There can also be a number of logistical challenges to managing reporters – including freelancers – in the country of origin. This ranges from securely paying reporters, to accessing the right equipment. It can help to have one or more trusted intermediaries in the country to help with these activities. Furthermore, a lack of registration of an exiled media organisation means that the journalists can not obtain a press pass from the organization, or official permission letters to attend press conferences or travel to specific regions. Alternative ways should be sought to work around these challenges: if feasible, it can be useful if the reporter can obtain accreditation with another media organisation who can facilitate their movements.

If some or most of the journalists do not live in the country where the editorial room is based, their deliberation and interaction may be impeded. This could lead to a delay or reduced quantity in the content production process. When editorial meetings cannot be attended by everyone, this can cause difficulties in efficiently dividing tasks, easy communication between staff, and there are less newsroom discussions that would lead to an improved quality of the work. The media organisation should establish a variety of means of communication to use internally, in order to mitigate the risk of losing a connection in the news production process if one communication platform becoming inactive.

Another issue concerns the reliability and verification of information. One interviewee uses contacts within the government and political parties. Yet, the participant also notes that “with regard to the information, it is always difficult, and the reliability is also a big problem [...] you can trust like 50 %.” One thus needs to verify all the input carefully, and this can be challenging. “The circle of people that you can talk to is smaller, so then you start outsourcing: okay, I know that they won’t talk to me but maybe they could talk to this person and this person could verify this.”

Often audiences also becomes sources. Audience engagement can be a potential source of information and means of maintaining the relevance of news



content. Many media organisations in exile have opened additional communication channels where their audience can reach them with leads for news stories or with photos. Mobile chat applications tend to be popular in many countries for this purpose.

Reaching audiences

Widening their reach of audiences, particularly beyond their core demographics of already critically engaged citizens, is a challenge for most independent media outlets. For many exile media outlets a further major obstacle to reaching audiences is censorship: the content of independent exiled journalists is not welcome by the government or other groups in their home countries that consequently try to hinder access to it. Radio can be jammed, websites blocked and some countries also block access to certain social media platforms outright.

A diversification of channels to diffuse news is often crucial to target specific audiences and overcome attempts at blocking the free flow of information: websites, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and region-specific social media platforms are often key here. In addition, the past decade has seen a growth of the use of messaging applications as a means of disseminating news content. This was first observed by Madrigal in 2012, who coined the term 'dark socials' for the practice of sending links to specific articles directly from one user to another via messenger apps or emails. While at that time this was a new phenomenon, using Telegram channels or WhatsApp or Signal groups to disseminate content has since become a popular tactic in response to the repressive tactics of governments (e.g. active blocking of users' access to media channels). (Musgrave, 2017)

It should be noted that exile media can target different types of audiences: in addition to audiences in their home country, these can be diaspora audiences as well as an international audience. For exile media, targeting international audiences mainly

represents a means to inform and raise awareness among the international community on what is going on inside their home country. It can also allow the media organisation to tap into an additional, larger audience.

Some exile media organisation bring news about their host country for a diaspora audience (such as refugees) from their country of origin. One of the interviewed media organisations, *Amal, Berlin!*, writes in Arabic and Farsi/Dari but reports on German news. Their objective is to inform refugees in Germany about what is happening in the country of exile.

It can be useful for (digital) exiled media to actively track their reach and analytics data. First of all, this data can be used to target specific groups more effectively, especially when seeking to diversify dissemination channels. One interviewee for instance mentioned how they shifted some of their focus to Instagram, when they observed that this was an effective way of engaging a younger audience. This type of data can also help to prove the impact of the media outlet and thus to secure financing from donors or increase advertising revenue.

Exile media do face some potential challenges in monitoring audience data though: if the media organisation and their audience need to rely on VPNs or anonymizing technologies, then their audience data is obviously limited. Musgrave (2017) adds that while 'dark socials' can become alternatives to the censored websites, they also make it more challenging to monitor one's audience. Furthermore, although the most frequently used channels, such as YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram, allow for measuring of audience reach on these platforms, the aggregate data from all channels can be inaccurate.

While these tactics are helpful in many contexts, in other places internet penetration is still relatively low. Most exile media working in these contexts rely on short-wave radio signals, which can result in a virtual arms-race with governments trying to repress



signals and media and media support organisations attempting to get around these. Some interviewees expressed a desire to launch a satellite TV channel of their media outlet to reach audiences in their home countries, but this is not a common method.

Credibility

Governments and other political actors from the home country of exiled media outlets will likely try to frame them and other independent journalists as political activists or partisans for the opposition. This is a strategy of these governments to damage the credibility of independent media, but it can negatively impact the reputation of the media organisation towards potential audiences and sources. To counteract this, exile media organisations need to prioritise upholding transparency and defending their credibility towards those potential audiences or sources who might still be on the fence.

Drivers of credibility may be: factual accuracy, grammar and spelling, timeliness, publishing corrections where appropriate, accurate headlines, representing the whole story, representing diversity, depth and seriousness, fair reporting procedures, and fairness/balance in stories. (Thompson, 2009) Most of these should be part of an editorial charter, with statements about accuracy, objectivity, and integrity, to guide the news production process and clarify roles in the media organisation. If possible in

the circumstances of the exiled media organisation, this charter could be made public in order to be as transparent to the audience as possible.

It is further recommended to set up a complaints mechanism, to receive and process feedback and complaints. Feedback from the audience is helpful to understand whether a format is effective, even more so for exiled media who are at risk of losing touch with the communities in the targeted country. If people think that the media house has not complied with its own editorial guidelines, they have the right to complain and can do so through an accessible means of communication. This mechanism for correction helps to maintain credibility. Again, whether this is possible depends on the circumstances of the exile media organisation in question though.

Any exiled media needs to be scrupulous in its self-criticism, reviews and assessments, even though their circumstances might make this harder to do. While most journalists in exile will have suffered from the actions of the government of the home country from which they are in exile, it is important to maintain a clear line between journalism and activism. Media organisations need to be very strong, transparent and accountable around their editorial charter, complaints mechanism and so on to avert any doubts. Internal reviews on the use of terminology can also be done to make sure that news content is in line with principals of the editorial charter.



Collaboration

It is important for exile media organisations to develop partnerships and collaborate with other organizations, in order to ensure innovation, effectiveness and the flexibility to adjust to changing needs of audiences. In addition, partnerships can be helpful in generating funding.

Collaboration with specific organisations

Collaborating with different types of other organisations can result in a variety of benefits. These range from other exile media organisations to research institutes. The potential nature of this collaboration is elaborated below.

Other exile media organisations can be important partners, for instance to learn from others in similar circumstances, jointly develop new formats or business models, jointly organise support, collaborate on investigations and cross-border items or to share and republish content that could be relevant to multiple audiences. Peers may have already found ways to mitigate some of the challenges the exiled media organisation is facing. They may have best practices to learn from or contacts to use. Given the specifics of exiled media, trust is an issue and if other types of partners can be found through peer organizations this could be helpful. Joining forces can also help in developing plans for the future.

Some of the forms of collaboration can also be developed with **non-exiled media organisations**. While they might not share all the same challenges, they nonetheless be equally relevant to co-develop or republish content or to improve formats and business models. They can also be key partners to collaborate with to improve audience engagement.

Innovation and tech partners can help to improve access to specialised knowledge, ranging from (digital) security to new ways of reaching

audiences or collecting information. Exiled media organisations are often smaller than traditional media organisations and need to ensure that they have all editorial and media capacities as well as project and financial management.. Although technological developments are important for exiled media - both as an opportunity and as a threat - it is unlikely that exiled media organisations will have this specialised capacity in-house. Therefore it can be helpful to develop sustained collaboration with technical and innovative partners who in turn could find it useful to connect their technical knowledge to real needs in the field, to use as test cases and to receive feedback from users. The nature of exiled media work (security implications, innovative ways of reaching target country) could create interesting challenges for tech partners. They can also choose to collaborate out of a desire to be socially responsible.

Humanitarian organisations often serve the same public that exile media organisations do. Although organisations working in the field are often reluctant to openly engage with exile media, for fear of suffering consequences in their access to conflict areas, they can be invaluable partners in exchanging information. Humanitarian organisations can benefit from the local knowledge of exile media to understand in which locations they are needed most. Meanwhile, they can be a source of information for exile media. Humanitarian organisations often conduct deep field work, have security analysts and sometimes strong first-hand information of what's happening in the most remote locations. Having well-protected sources with such organizations, which pass on relevant details, could be valuable for a newsroom.

Universities and other research institutes are increasingly looking to connect with other organisations in society and to conduct research projects and internships for their students. Collaboration can help to foster ongoing learning and development of the exiled media organisation through organising outsider expert input around themes of interest. Students of different disciplines can research questions of exiled media around crowdfunding, reaching audiences, programming



for specific audiences, inclusive media content, and more. These efforts should always be weighted against the security concerns applicable to the exiled media organisation though.

Networks

Exile media face particular challenges in establishing collaboration. They often operate from an undisclosed location, which means that they are not likely to be found by other organisations looking for a partner. Meaningful exchange is hampered by the need of the organisation not to disclose details of its operations for security reasons. In their host country, establishing local linkages can be more difficult if key editorial staff does not speak the language of the host country. At the same time, potential partners in the target country might be wary of the risks of being associated with the exile media organisation – either because of the risk of repercussions or because they have come to believe the slander spread by (pro-) government actors.

Once an exile media organisation is part of an established network it becomes easier to find and facilitate collaboration. Such networks foster mutual support and encourage cooperation. As an example,

one of the interviewed exiled journalists explained how he used those networks to offer training to other, less experienced exiled journalists. Although such networks can form organically, many interviewees stressed that the facilitating and convening role of NGOs can support the process significantly.

One of the interviewees stressed that such a network should not reduce itself to “putting us in one room to talk about exiled journalism.” Instead, they expressed a desire for a platform that would enable them to see the work of other exiled journalists, discuss it and potentially support it. Another issue that a network could address is the invisibility of exiled journalism. A network could make the importance of their work as well as their shared challenges more visible, in order to advocate for better support.

One of the interviewees noted that many independent media in exile do not have access to the distribution “machine” that is inherent to most media networks. The journalists then have to rely on themselves, for example by constantly promoting their work on social media and thus exposing themselves to harassment, trolling and other forms of digital insecurity. Therefore, they would welcome collaboration with NGOs and other exiled media organisations to help amplify exiled journalism reporting.

Conclusion

This report aims to outline the main challenges faced by independent media in exile. In doing so, it provides a framework for further activities and studies that will elaborate this further.

Free Press Unlimited finds it important to highlight the importance of exile media and to draw attention to the specific problems that exile media organisations face. In addition, as a media development organisation, we aim not only to generate knowledge and awareness but also to find ways to address these problems. The findings from this and subsequent reports will help to inform our on-going activities to support exile media organisations. We hope that other organisations in the wider media (development) sector will likewise be able to benefit from it.

The level of physical and especially digital insecurity is alarming. While going into exile reduces the threat of physical insecurity for some media organisations, all interviewed journalists shared that they are still confronted with different forms of digital insecurity. These range from hacking attempts to online harassment, and can have severe consequences on their ability to continue publishing news content. Support to exile media organisations should pay strong attention to improving digital security. This includes not only trainings on digital security, but also a move away from training towards monitoring the use of digital security skills and a proactive approach to preventing digital threats by upgrading the technology used.

Inconsistent funding of independent media in exile hinders their further development. It is a cause of constant concern. Donor funding remains crucial,

and although alternative income streams exist, their impact is limited. While interventions aimed at improving the financial viability of exile media organisations should promote a diversification of funding streams, they should recognise that most exile media organisations will remain dependent on donor funding for their survival. Interventions should therefore include capacity building to better understand, fundraise and deal with complex donor reporting requirements.

Operating as media in exile brings specific challenges concerning the reach of the audience and access to reliable sources of information. While digitalisation facilitates exchanges with audiences and sources, it also enables the traceability of communications. Keeping a close eye on state of the art technologies and (facilitating the) sharing of knowledge among innovative media could help exile media to face these challenges.

Exile media organisations can benefit greatly from collaboration with like-minded organisations. They can learn from the experiences of similar organisations, collaborate on the development of new formats or business models or even support the distribution of content. NGOs can serve a useful role here, as facilitators and conveners of such networks. Furthermore, NGOs should strive the increase understanding of the importance of exile media and to amplify the impact of their work. These findings should be elaborated further in future studies. While this report has combined insights from a wide range of interviews as the experience of Free Press Unlimited's Community of Practice on Exile Media, each chapter could benefit from a more elaborate analysis. Future reports will zoom in further on the challenges and recommendations highlighted here.



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Glossary

1. **Audience engagement:** the process of encouraging people to be interested and involved in the work of the media house.
2. **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** aggregate of non-governmental and non-commercial organisations and institutions, including NGOs, religious institutions, labour unions, or public-interest associations.
3. **Code of conduct:** set of rules outlining the norms, responsibilities and proper practices of the exiled media organisation and its employees.
4. **Code of ethics:** guide of principles designed to help a newsroom to work with integrity and guide the choices that are made in the production of news content.
5. **Complaints mechanism:** a prescribed method of lodging a complaints to the newsroom.
6. **Contingency plan:** a plan designed to take account on a possible future event or circumstance that poses a severe risk on the exiled media house and/or its staff.
7. **Country of origin:** home country about which the exiled media outlet reports.
8. **DDoS attack:** attempts to make the exiled media services, such as a website, unavailable by overwhelming it with traffic from multiple sources.
9. **Encryption:** process of converting information or data into a code, especially to prevent unauthorized access. An important process for journalists to be able to communicate internally and externally.
10. **Exile media:** a media outlet that can no longer function in the country relating to its content, and operates in either self-imposed removal or enforced removal, due to danger.
11. **Freelancer:** a media worker (journalist, photographer etc.) who sells his work or service by the hour, day, job etc. The majority of the freelancers of exiled media operate in the country of origin.
12. **Grab bag:** contains essential supplies and personal documents in case of emergency.
13. **Host country:** country in which the exiled media organisation operates.
14. **Institutional donor:** organisations that give grants to an organisation within a policy framework that reflects the mandate of the organisation.
15. **Jamming:** deliberate blocking or interference with authorized wireless communications, such as (short-wave) radio transmissions
16. **Marginalised groups:** groups of people within a country that are subjected to discrimination due to the interplay of different personal characteristics.
17. **Media house:** media outlet that communicates news, entertainment, education, data or promotional messages through its channels.
18. **Newsroom:** the area in the exiled media office from where news is processed.
19. **Private donor:** a non-profit organisation which is usually created via a single primary donation from an individual, a group or a business, and who funds charitable causes.
20. **Relocation:** the action of moving to a new place and establishing the media house there.
21. **Short-wave radio:** radio transmission using short-wave radio frequencies, which is often used by exiled media, to reach target groups.
22. **Stringers:** see freelancers.
23. **Target country:** home country that is targeted by the exiled media.
24. **Two-step verification method:** a security process for user authentication through two methods, one of which is usually a password.

Exile Media

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Tim Schoot Uiterkamp (ed.)
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