

MEDIATION



UNDERSTANDING THROUGH INFORMATION AND DIALOGUE

Biannual
publication
of Fondation
Hirondelle

Exile should be a last resort, but a chance to inform

Looking at media in exile for an organization that has decided not to work on this is not a paradox: it is recognizing that multiple approaches exist when one wants to make the access and right to information possible, even under the most difficult conditions.

Our first operational experience in Rwanda in 1995 after the genocide taught us about challenges facing displaced and exiled journalists, such as maintaining trust and dialogue. Radio Agatashya did not obtain a broadcasting license in Rwanda and the radio station was therefore located in Bukavu. Before the era of Internet and cell phones, working from outside the country was logistically and technologically difficult. Maintaining contact with the audience, with sources, and verifying information from the ground was an everyday challenge. On top of that, national coverage and providing space for inclusive dialogue, a key priority of Fondation Hirondelle, is hardly possible when a government refuses to accredit a news outlet.

We try as much as we can to support media directly in crisis-affected regions. Sometimes, however, escalating assaults on press freedom are so widespread that this is not a viable situation any more. Journalists are being forced into exile to escape imprisonment, violence and death for simply reporting facts. Following the coup in Myanmar in 2021, the staff of our partner, Frontier Myanmar, had to leave the country and now operate from Thailand. We cannot rule out that this will also happen in other regions. We need to adapt our project management process and media support tools to better help those brave journalists who will not allow their voices to be silenced.

Caroline Vuillemin, CEO



A Palestinian woman listens to the radio in Rafah in December 2023, during the war between Israel and Hamas. © Said Khatib / AFP

STRUCTURING EXILED JOURNALISM IN A MORE AUTHORITARIAN WORLD

Hundreds of endangered journalists living in authoritarian or conflict countries are forced into exile each year. And the phenomenon is growing. How can we organize collectively to protect them, help them recover and keep on doing their job from the host country?

Due to the rise of authoritarian regimes worldwide (see *Mediation*#11, "Battered media cannot be guarantors of democracy"), the human right to free information and expression is in danger. One of the main means authoritarian regimes use to prevent people from getting reliable news is to repress professionals who produce it. In the last ten years, the number of imprisoned journalists has risen constantly, from 236 in 2014 to 320 in 2023. Most dangerous countries for journalists today are China and Myanmar in Asia, Belarus and Russia in Europe, Eritrea in Africa, Iran and Israel / Palestinian territories in the Middle East. The war in Gaza brought killings of journalists to an unprecedented record of 77 in a single country last year.

To escape death or injuries, imprisonment, threats to their families, an increasing number of journalists are forced into exile. Their exact number is hard to tell, but last year hundreds of them contacted dedicated media NGOs such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ, based in New York), Reporters Without Borders (Paris) or International Media Support (Copenhagen) which can provide them with assistance to leave their home countries. CPJ says the number of journalists requesting assistance for exile more than tripled between 2020 and 2023. Last year these endangered journalists mainly came from 12 conflict or authoritarian countries including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Sudan or Ukraine. Most of them seek exile in one of the 51 countries of the Media Freedom Coalition, mainly located in Europe and in America, that united in 2019 to advocate for media freedom and safety of journalists... though they still hardly manage to provide them emergency visas.

But being far does not always mean being safe, as the tentacles of authoritarian regimes and shady interests reach beyond borders, and loved ones back home may suffer acts of reprisal. This issue of *Mediation* gives the floor to exiled journalists from Gaza, Eritrea, Myanmar and Russia who share their journeys into exile and their insights on keeping safe, staying sane and reporting accurately in the most trying of circumstances. It is dedicated to Christophe Deloire, former director of Reporters Without Borders (2012-2024) who passed away last June and did so much in the last twelve years to promote a universal right to reliable news and protect endangered journalists worldwide. ■

Interviews



PEOPLE SHOULD NOT BE LEFT ALONE WITH PROPAGANDA



The editorial office of Novaya Gazeta Europe, Russian media in exile. © Novaya Gazeta Europe

© Daniel Thüeler

Ekaterina Glikman is one of the founders and the first deputy editor of Russian media in exile **Novaya Gazeta Europe**, an online platform launched in April 2022. She currently lives in Switzerland. Previously she worked for the independent Russian newspaper **Novaya Gazeta** for over 20 years.

Novaya Gazeta was Russia's largest independent media outlet for over 30 years and was one of the last surviving publications inside the country to hold the Kremlin to account. What drew you to work in exile?

Ekaterina Glikman: Seven Novaya Gazeta employees have been murdered for doing their jobs since Putin came to power, but even so, the newspaper kept going. After the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 decided by Putin and after he imposed military censorship in March 2022, press freedom no longer exists in Russia. Our logic is: if it's not possible to provide Russians with truthful information being in Russia, then it must be done from abroad. People should not be left alone with propaganda. No one deserves

that. At least half of the population is against war but they cannot express their opinion and they are represented nowhere. Independent journalism is their only voice and connection to real information, to the rest of the world.

What is it like reporting from outside, gaining access to reliable information and maintaining ties with your audience?

Many reporters have remained in Russia, even though they are in danger there. They work for us secretly. We hide their personalities using pseudonyms. We even hide them from our own team. Those reporters who are at greatest risk are known only to one or two members of our team. We try to protect our sources of information from Russia as much as possible. We also check documents and try to counter state disinformation with facts. I am very worried about my colleagues and informants in Russia. Each of them is facing years (and even decades) of imprisonment for collaborating with our media, as we have been labelled as an "undesirable organization", that is, criminals, in Russia. And those brave people who provide us with information from the territories of Ukraine occupied by Russian troops are risking their lives.

Our aim is to reach Russian audiences with fact-based reporting, to counter the Kremlin's censorship, propaganda, and disinformation. Our readers in Russia bypass blockades (naturally, our website is blocked!) using vpn services. We also use social media not yet blocked in Russia (such as Telegram and YouTube) to inform and raise awareness among Russians. And then there's a special example: in the last two years we have been doing newsletters for Russian prisoners and have earned

a good reputation behind the bars. That's why we were the first media outlet to be able to tell the world the details of Alexei Navalny's death. In that distant colony in the Russian Arctic, there were also our readers, and they became our sources of information.

I am very worried about my colleagues and informants in Russia

What are the psychological effects of reporting in exile?

Most of our journalists left the country overnight. Since then, they have mostly been covering the war in Ukraine and repression in Russia seven days a week, hardly ever leaving the newsroom. Our 70 reporters are very young and have been living in exile for two years, with no prospect of returning to Russia. They don't know when they may see their relatives and parents again, so it is very hard for them. Recognizing their psychological challenges is just as crucial as ensuring their physical safety.

Digital surveillance of journalists in exile is becoming alarming. How do you deal with this situation?

There are two aspects here. We have already become used to facing threats from the Russian authorities. Unfortunately, western intelligence services are not lagging behind our state either: Pegasus spyware was found on the devices of journalists in exile. The second fact turned us into healthy sceptics. ■



AMANUAL GHIRMAI
(Erena Radio):

“COLLECTING
RELIABLE
INFORMATION
FROM ERITREA
IS EXHAUSTING”

Erena is a radio station based in Paris, founded in 2010 on the initiative of Reporters Without Borders and Eritrean journalists in exile. It broadcasts news, analysis and music, as well as giving the floor to the audience through “Open Mic” programmes. Amanual Ghirmai, Erena’s director, has been living in exile for 15 years.

“Living in exile is exhausting. Reporting in exile is exhausting, as Eritrea is far away, and it’s a very closed country. You cannot get information easily, it takes a long time and requires lots of effort. Our journalists cannot work and be identified as such in the country. And Internet doesn’t work in Eritrea, or very poorly and only in public places so that we cannot have safe private communication with anyone. Furthermore, people are afraid to talk to us: they know the government could harass them. All that means we cannot get trusted information instantly from our home country. We mainly work in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan, where we can get good information from recently arrived Eritrean refugees. To confirm the information we have, we have developed a solid network of informants or so-called “citizen journalists”, people who have an opportunity to visit the country as traders or NGO workers.

We also cover news of the diaspora, with a network of correspondents in all countries where there is a strong Eritrean community, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Uganda, Ethiopia and Sudan. We open our microphones to our audience outside Eritrea, so as to make their voice heard back home. We are willing to create more links between Eritreans inside and outside the country.

In Eritrea, our programmes are broadcast by satellite. Anyone can receive them with a simple satellite-TV set, or by transistor radio on short wave. It is not formally forbidden to listen to Erena, but people try to do it discreetly. It’s difficult to collect precise data on our audience inside the country. Our last audience survey was made in 2017, mainly with data collected in refugee camps. Results concluded that we are followed mostly in Eritrean cities, where 500,000 people listen to Erena weekly, which is a lot for a country with 3.5 million inhabitants.

Fifteen years of exile is a long time. When Erena was created, we would have preferred to be closer to our country, in Djibouti, Ethiopia or Sudan. But that was not possible for safety reasons. And it is still not possible today. My dream is that some day Erena will be based in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, and will be run by a young generation of Eritrean journalists.” ■



YOUNNA EL SAYED
(Al Jazeera English):

“I HAD TO FLEE SIX
TIMES IN THREE
MONTHS”

Palestinian and Egyptian journalist Youmna El Sayed is the correspondent for Al Jazeera English in Gaza. In exile in Cairo since January 2024, she tells of the dangers she had to overcome as a reporter and mother in a deadly conflict for civilians, and how she tries to recover.

“I was living in Gaza City with my husband and our four children aged 12, 11, 8 and 5. When the war broke out in early October, bombardments were indiscriminate, we didn’t know what place could be safe. As journalists, we were directly attacked by Israeli forces to silence reporting. Our offices, homes and neighbourhoods were the target of direct strikes. In three months, I had to flee six times with my family. After evacuating to the south of Wadi Gaza at the beginning of the war, we decided to go back to our apartment in Gaza City: there was a lack of water and electricity in the south and, if we were to die, let it be in dignity. Another time, we had to flee to Khan Younes walking 6-7 km with my children through shootings and the bodies of whole families killed and still lying on the ground. And when we arrived in Rafah early December, winter was coming, there

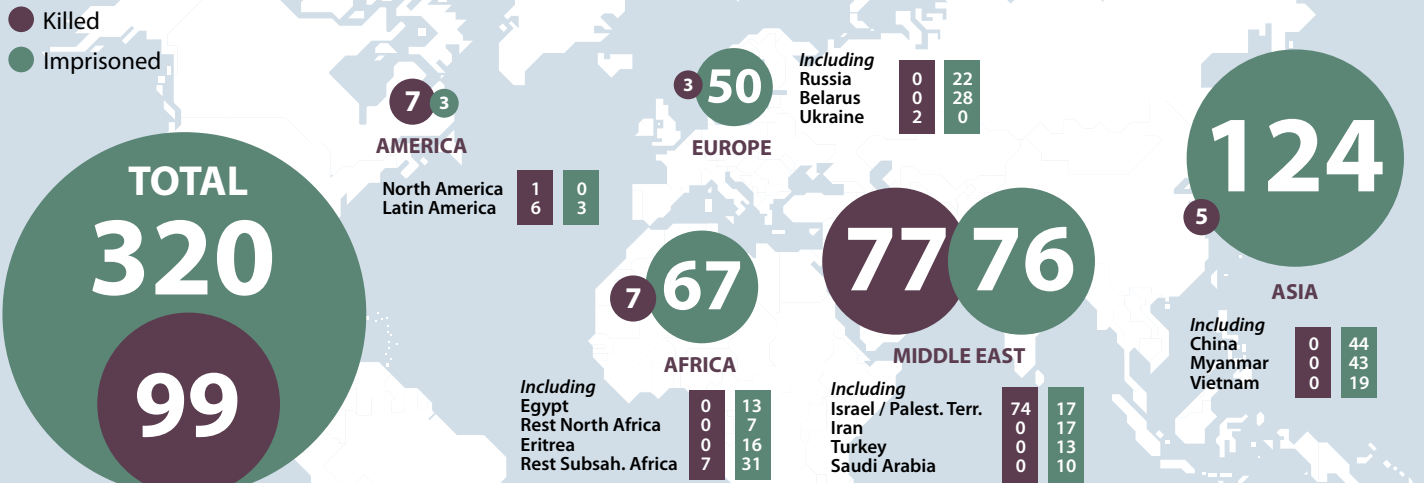
were no more warm clothes to buy, my younger child was cold. Finally, thanks to my father who could put pressure in Egypt and pay a lot of money, we managed to be evacuated to Cairo.

Now I’m trying to rest and to recover physically and mentally. I am still in position at Al Jazeera, they leave me time to recover. But I cannot report, because Al Jazeera has no license to work in Egypt. My situation, as well as my future, is very uncertain. The whole Gaza strip has been destroyed and has become unliveable: there are no more roads, hospitals, schools. After losing a whole year, my children still don’t know if they will attend school in Egypt or elsewhere in September. Most of all, I am trying to overcome and to cure my survival guilt: I did my best to report inside Gaza but at some point I decided to leave as a mother, to save my children. Now I feel it’s important for me to give conferences and interviews, to raise conscience worldwide about the situation in Gaza. Many of my colleagues working in Gaza now had to move again to the central city to work from Al Aqsa hospital after they were ordered to evacuate from Rafah. They continue to work in dire conditions with the least necessities available.” ■

Big Data

The Middle East, most dangerous place in the world for journalists

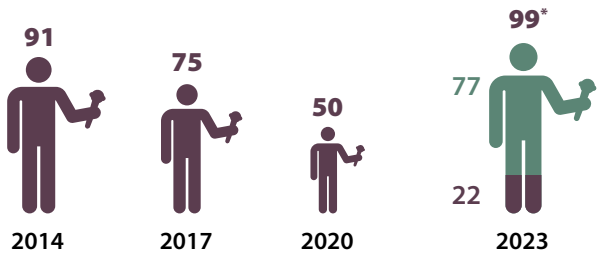
Journalists and media workers killed or imprisoned in 2023



Source: Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Journalists and Media Workers killed during the year 2023. Journalists imprisoned on 1st December 2023.

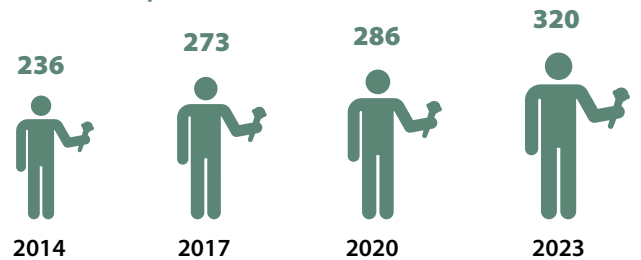
Less journalists killed but more journalists jailed in the last 10 years

Journalists and media workers killed worldwide



* including 77 in Gaza

Journalists imprisoned worldwide



Source: CPJ. Journalists imprisoned on 1st December of each year.

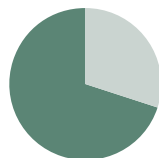
Journalism in exile: a rising phenomenon, though hard to measure

“The precise scale of the problem is difficult to assess, in the absence of data from receiving States”

Journalists in exile, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, **Irene Khan**, United Nations Human Rights Council, April 2024.

“The total number of journalists in exile is unknown”

Lucy Westcott, CPJ Emergencies Director on June 16, 2023.



70%
Share of journalists in exile among hundreds of requests for assistance received by CPJ and Reporters without Borders in 2023



+ 227%
Rise in the assistance to journalists in exile by CPJ between 2020 and 2023



12
Countries* of residence of journalists requesting assistance for exile of the NGO coalition Journalists in Distress between June 2023 and May 2024

*Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Iran, Myanmar, Palestine, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Ukraine



+10 years
Average duration of exile for a journalist according to International Media Support

Our experience

DOH ATHAN: A HUMAN RIGHTS PODCAST THAT CONTINUES, EVEN IN EXILE



Two internally displaced men listen to the radio in a temporary shelter in Danai, in the North of Myanmar. © Ye Aung Thu / AFP



© Annabelle Chith and Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club

Zar Ni, is a reporter for Doh Athan "Our Voices", weekly 10-minute podcast produced and broadcast by Fondation Hironnelle and Frontier Myanmar that covers human rights issues in Myanmar. After the coup in 2021, the team had to leave the country and now operates from Thailand.

Doh Athan was initially produced in the country, why did you have to leave?

Zar Ni: The turning point was the coup in February 2021. At the time, I was already working as a reporter for Doh Athan "Our Voices". Brutality struck the nearby media companies. Officers arrested, and even raided, those who worked at some of these institutions. This coup came with its own challenges as well. My family was neighbour with a military family and the school across the street was filled with soldiers. I could no longer work at home, and for several months I worked at night, holed up in my father's office. The situation

became increasingly difficult. By continuing my work as a reporter, I was putting myself and my family at risk. I've had to go into exile in Thailand with the rest of the staff, like the vast majority of Burmese journalists. Most fled after the 2021 coup.

You've been away from your family for two years now. What drives you to continue working as a journalist despite the sacrifices?

After the 2021 coup, most of my friends were fighting for democracy. At that time, I was wondering if journalism was still supporting the country. One of my colleagues younger than me, not from the journalism field, asked me for an interview before my departure. At that time, I answered him like this, "I don't want to work as a journalist any more. Are my stories effective for the country or not?" He said "Sister, you are doing a great job, you are writing history." When I heard that, I thought I need to stay as a journalist, write history, make sure it's accurate, not biased. Whenever we produce a story it will be accurate and not biased and we will record history clearly. Starting from that time, I mainly concentrate on being an independent journalist, focusing on the people.

What are the main challenges reporting from outside?

A challenge of working in exile is trust. Initially, I relied mainly on my personal contacts. As time goes by, however, my contacts move away or become increasingly afraid to talk. Also, I sometimes have to hide my profession so as not to endanger my family. Today, working for Doh Athan is a definite advantage. The broadcast has

won the 'Human Rights Press Award' which inspires confidence. Word of mouth allows us to maintain contact with the local population, including the most vulnerable such as the Rohingyas. We do the best we can, but we can't work the way we used to before the coup, that's obvious.

More than political developments, Doh Athan promotes the stories of ordinary people

People in Myanmar mainly use Facebook for their information, although YouTube, Telegram and radio stations exist as alternatives. Doh Athan has around 120,000 Facebook followers. People also listen to our show on Voice of America, which broadcasts to millions of listeners across the country. According to the demographics from Facebook, younger people from the city typically follow the podcast.

How do you ensure financial viability and sustainability?

Media in exile depend on external funding. Unfortunately, this funding is dwindling as Myanmar is slowly becoming a forgotten crisis and the role of media in conflict prevention is not taken seriously. Doh Athan is unique in its productions. Where other news outlets tell the story of political developments, Doh Athan promotes the stories of ordinary people and the human rights violations that are worsening each year. Programmes like ours can ensure local people express their opinions and receive information from reliable sources. ■

Eyewitness

LACK OF EMERGENCY VISA PATHWAYS TO SAFE COUNTRIES

For 40 years, the **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**, based in New York, has been protecting journalists and press freedom worldwide. Its Emergencies Director, **Lucy Westcott**, describes the needs of journalists in exile and the help CPJ can provide.

What are the general conditions of safety for journalists worldwide?

Lucy Westcott: Journalists around the world face a variety of physical, digital, and psychosocial safety challenges because of their work, mainly when they cover war, civil unrest, protests, and elections. 99 journalists and media workers were killed in 2023, including 77 in the Israel-Gaza war, and hundreds were injured. And in December 2023, 320 journalists were imprisoned, 36% of them in China, Myanmar or Belarus.

Journalists also face threats and harassment, both in-person and online. Digital safety concerns include online abuse, doxing, hacking, and the use of deep fakes to discredit journalists and their news outlets. CPJ has also documented legal threats against journalists, which are often designed to silence them, and are weaponized to attack press freedom.

To escape these threats, many journalists are forced into exile every year, or displaced within their own countries. In the last three years, CPJ's level of exile support provided to journalists increased by 227%, from 63 journalists in 2020 up to 206 in 2023.

What are the main reasons why more and more journalists are forced to exile?

Journalists in exile remain in precarious situations, faced with transnational repression and mental health challenges

This is mainly due to a rise in authoritarianism globally, as well as global conflict. In countries like Iran or Russia, where it is incredibly dangerous to be an independent journalist, journalists flee to escape threats made against them,



Lucy Westcott © Ahmed Gaber

their families, and their colleagues, as well as jail time in retaliation for their work. And there are currently long-lasting crises in countries such as Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Sudan, Myanmar, Ukraine, and Afghanistan, which have had enormous impacts on press freedom and the lives of journalists.

Over the past few years, significant numbers of journalists from these countries and others have fled to safer countries. However, a lack of strong and effective visa pathways to safe countries, as well as the threat of transnational repression, means that journalists in exile often remain in precarious situations.

What help does CPJ provide for them and what remains to be done?

CPJ provides individual assistance grants to journalists in exile. Exile support grants help journalists cover the costs of basic necessities when they first go into exile, including rent, bills, food, transportation, communication costs, and warm clothing. CPJ also helps with the transportation costs of getting to a safe country. Exile support remains the largest area of direct financial assistance CPJ provides to journalists.

One outstanding area of need for journalists in exile, unless they have dual citizenship, is better and more effective emergency visa pathways to quickly flee their home country. We know that many journalists also deal with mental health challenges in exile, and there is a lot of room for more tailored and more effective ways to help journalists with this need. ■

Fondation Hironnelle is a Swiss non-profit organization which provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering them in their daily lives and as citizens. Through our work, millions of people in war-affected countries, post-conflict areas, humanitarian crisis and societies in democratic transition have access to media that speak to them and give them a voice.

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