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advancing media resilience

Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia

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ASSESSMENT REPORT ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF EXILED MEDIA IN LATIN AMERICA

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All quotes in this report have been translated from their original language.

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ACRONYMS

AGILE	Advancing Global Innovation and Learning Effectively to Build Resilience in Independent Media
APES	Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador (Journalists Association of El Salvador)
APG	Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala (Journalists Association of Guatemala)
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
DW	Deutsche Welle
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)
FLED	Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia (Foundation for Freedom of Expression and Democracy)
FLIP	Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (Foundation for Press Freedom)
FPU	Free Press Unlimited
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPLEX	Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión - Costa Rica (Press and Freedom of Expression Institute)
IPYS	Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela (Press and Society Institute of Venezuela)
OAS	Organization of American States

OSE	Órganos de Seguridad del Estado de Cuba (Cuban State Security Bodies)
PROLEDI	Programa de Libertad de Expresión y Derecho a la Información de la Universidad de Costa Rica (University of Costa Rica Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information Program)
SR FoE	Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression
RELPEX	Red Latinoamericana de Periodismo en el Exilio (Latin American Network of Journalism in Exile)
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders)
RCTV	Radio Caracas Televisión
IAPA	Inter American Press Association
SIF	Seattle International Foundation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a regional assessment of the current situation of media in exile in Latin America, offering a comprehensive, up-to-date, and human-centered perspective on a phenomenon that has become one of the most serious expressions of democratic backsliding in the region: the forced displacement of journalists and independent media outlets.

Unlike other studies that focus primarily on quantifying exile or analyzing restrictions on press freedom, this report adopts a qualitative approach grounded in the voices and experiences of exiled journalists, members of displaced newsrooms, specialists, and representatives of intermediary organizations and donors. Drawing on these testimonies, the analysis not only captures the scale of the phenomenon, but also reveals the human, professional, and emotional toll involved in rebuilding journalistic work under conditions of uprootedness.

Implemented by the Foundation for Freedom of Expression and Democracy (Fundación por la Libertad de Expresión y Democracia, FLED) within the framework of Internews Europe's AGILE program, the study compiles and analyzes information from a wide range of primary and secondary sources. It covers seven countries driving journalists and independent media outlets into exile —Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Ecuador— as well as key host countries for exiled journalists and media outlets, including Costa Rica, the United States, Spain, Mexico, and Colombia. Its comparative approach makes it possible to identify both shared patterns and differences in how national contexts shape risks, responses, and opportunities for resilience among displaced journalists and media organizations.

The analysis also examines how those who sustain journalism in exile are interconnected and mutually dependent. Rather than focusing solely on media outlets or journalists, it looks at the relationships among three key actors: displaced journalists and media organizations, organizations that channel support, and donors or international cooperation agencies. This approach helps clarify how the dynamics, decisions, or transformations affecting any one of these actors directly impact the others—an interdependence that is particularly significant amid a global contraction of funding for press freedom and human rights defense.

A strategic perspective further emerges through the identification of resilience and sustainability strategies developed by exiled media outlets to continue their work. These include technological innovation, the use of digital formats, collaborative partnerships, content diversification, formal registration in host countries, and the creation of networks of professional and emotional solidarity. Far from portraying these outlets solely as victims of authoritarian contexts, the analysis highlights their capacity for autonomy, adaptation, and resistance.

A cross-cutting identity, gender, and diversity lens is also integrated throughout the analysis. Structural inequalities—related to gender, sexual orientation, race, or class—shape experiences of exile and influence access to opportunities, funding, and recognition within the media ecosystem. Women journalists, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and Indigenous and Afro-descendant media workers face additional conditions of exclusion and precarity that, in turn, reflect persistent equity gaps in Latin American journalism, even within spaces of resistance.

The findings further show how the crisis in international cooperation is affecting the sustainability of Latin American journalism in exile. The sharp reduction in public funding—including funds from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)—together with the redirection of European programs toward other regions and priorities, has created a critical situation for independent media outlets. In this context of scarcity, however, some newsrooms and support organizations have begun reshaping their strategies, exploring hybrid sustainability models, collaborative networks, and approaches centered on capacity-building rather than exclusively on content production. While these efforts remain at an early stage and have yet to produce a clear turning point, emerging practices are already showing promising signs.

Based on the evidence gathered, exile has become a structural—rather than temporary—condition for Latin American media workers. In countries such as Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba, return is uncertain or impossible under current political regimes. In other cases, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Haiti, exile initially emerges as a temporary protection measure but often becomes long-term due to the persistence of violence and the criminalization of independent journalism.

In host countries, journalists face new challenges, including economic insecurity, prolonged migration processes, and a lack of legal or professional recognition, resulting in ongoing vulnerability and uncertainty. Despite these conditions, both formal and informal support networks emerge as a primary source of resilience and continuity of journalistic work. Examples include initiatives such as the Casa para el Periodismo Libre (House for Free Journalism) in Costa Rica, regional networks of exiled journalists, as well as scholarship programs and psychosocial support initiatives. Together, these experiences underscore the importance of collaborative environments and holistic care as key pillars for sustaining journalism in contexts of forced displacement.

At a time of transition in international cooperation, the analysis calls for strengthening support strategies for journalism in exile through listening, flexibility, and mutual trust among the different actors within the ecosystem. The findings show that displaced media outlets and journalists particularly value flexible funding, ongoing accompaniment, and support for team well-being, while intermediary organizations and donors recognize the need to adapt their mechanisms to respond more effectively to the realities of exile and to strengthen long-term sustainability.

Keeping journalism alive in exile is a way of preserving one of the last spaces of freedom, memory, and truth in countries where democracy has been dismantled or is at serious risk of erosion. The resilience of exiled Latin American media is both an act of resistance and a collective affirmation that the right to inform and to be informed remains an indispensable condition for the region's democratic future.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

As the world moves through the first quarter of the twenty-first century, democracy as a form of social and political organization is experiencing its most severe setback in decades. In its Democracy Report *2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?*, V-Dem Institute suggest a 30-year regression in levels of democracy for the average citizen worldwide, with key indicators falling to the levels of 1985. The same report found that the world has fewer democracies (88) than autocracies (91). In other words, three out of every four people worldwide now live under autocratic regimes, the highest figure since 1978.

Similarly, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)'s The Global State of Democracy 2025 found that, over a five-year period, 54 percent of countries experienced a decline in at least one key indicator of democratic performance, including freedom of expression and free elections. Freedom of the press, in particular, has experienced its steepest decline in the past 50 years.

The Americas reflect this global pattern. A comparison between 2019 and 2024 shows that most countries in the region experienced some form of democratic backsliding. Key indicators (including access to justice, free elections, and political pluralism) registered notable deterioration over this period.

The most severe deterioration in democracy indicators related to political representation, such as credible elections, was observed in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Haiti, where democratic backsliding, or, in some cases, state collapse, has taken hold. El Salvador and Nicaragua also rank among the three countries in the region experiencing the sharpest declines in press freedom.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF)'s World Press Freedom Index 2025, journalism in the Americas faces "persistent structural and economic challenges." RSF further notes that the most significant setbacks to press freedom in the Americas are closely linked to the authoritarian turn taken by several governments. Serious concern, exacerbated by propaganda and disinformation and by the absence of information in the public interest.

Nicaragua (172nd position in RSF's World Press Freedom Index) has become the country with the worst performance in Latin America, ranking below Cuba (165th position). The Ortega–Murillo regime has dismantled independent media outlets, stripped numerous journalists of their nationality, and forced hundreds into exile. Venezuela (160th) continues to rank among the lowest-performing countries in the region, amid widespread censorship and judicial persecution. In Haiti (111th), state collapse and gang violence have turned journalism into a high-risk profession.

Exile as a Response to Repression

According to a 2025 report by Freedom of Expression and the Right to Information Program (*Programa de Libertad de Expresión y Derecho a la Información, PROLEDI*), since 2018, nearly 913 journalists have been forcibly displaced to other countries to protect their lives, their safety, and that of their families, a phenomenon affecting 15 countries across the region. This is not a new development in Latin America. Rather, it has a long historical precedent throughout much of the twentieth century, driven by the civic–military dictatorships of that period, and has now reemerged in the context of rising authoritarianism, with Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba, and Haiti among those that have most consistently forced journalists into exile. The also report states that "journalism is one of the sectors most harmed by this rise in authoritarianism", with the two primary drivers of forced displacement are political and state persecution, and threats posed by organized crime and other corrupt para-state actors.[1]

In a 2025 report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)'s Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression (SR FoE), exile is also seen as "a consequence of the deterioration of basic guarantees for the exercise of freedom of expression and unfolds within a context of democratic erosion, the closure of civic space, the intensification of repression by authoritarian governments, declining public trust in governance and democratic institutions, and rising levels of violence linked to organized crime." These dynamics of democratic weakening across several countries in the region have eroded protections for freedom of expression, translating into direct reprisals against independent media.[2]

1 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano (Displaced Voices: A Mapping of Latin American Journalistic Exile), July 2025. PROLEDI (University of Costa Rica), the UNESCO Chair at Diego Portales University, and Fundamedios.

2 Exilio de periodistas y libertad de expresión (Exile of Journalists and Freedom of Expression), April 2025. Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

According to the Rapporteurship's monitoring, repression is expressed primarily through the instrumentalization of the justice system and the misuse of criminal law to harass, persecute, and criminalize the legitimate practice of journalism, particularly when reporting addresses issues of high public interest, such as corruption, human rights violations, or links between public officials and organized crime. - IACHR's Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression.

According to estimates by PROLEDI[3], Venezuela (477 cases), Nicaragua (268), and Cuba (98) account for the largest share of media professionals forced to cross borders in order to safeguard their lives. Taken together, these three countries represent 92.31 percent of journalist displacement in the region. They are followed by Guatemala (19), Ecuador (13), Haiti (10), and El Salvador (10), where forced departures occur at more moderate levels, while figures in the remaining countries are low, minimal, or non-existent.

Figures cited in the IACHR's Office of the SR FoE's 2025 report broadly align with PROLEDI's. The report established that 374 journalists were forced into exile from Venezuela, 289 from Nicaragua, 150 from Cuba, 26 from Guatemala, five from El Salvador, and 14 from Ecuador (amounting to a total of 858 individuals displaced due to their journalistic work or work related to journalism). In this case, the data were compiled from multiple sources, including civil society organizations in each country.

Data from the Latin American Network of Journalism in Exile (*Red Latinoamericana de Periodismo en el Exilio, RELPEX*)[4] similarly show that most exiled journalists come from contexts of persecution in Nicaragua (92 cases), Venezuela (63), Cuba (34), and El Salvador (17)[5]. In addition, recent records from civil society organizations working on journalism in exile in Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala were reviewed for this analysis.

In Venezuela, the Press and Society Institute of Venezuela (*Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela, IPYS*) identified 357 Venezuelan journalists living outside the country as of August 2024[6]. In Cuba, journalistic investigations and data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) indicate that at least 150 journalists were forced into exile between 2022 and 2024.

3 To produce these estimates, the researchers relied on "a calculation combining two statistical approaches: the weighted average and the trimmed mean."
4 An initiative of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) aimed at supporting displaced or exiled journalists.
5 Resiliencia en el exilio: voces que desafían al silencio 2024- 2025 (Resilience in Exile: Voices That Defy Silence) 2024–2025, 2025. RELPEX
6 Periodistas en el exilio: Aproximación a la diáspora de la prensa venezolana (Journalists in Exile: An Approach to the Venezuelan Press Diaspora) IPYS.

In Nicaragua, the most recent consolidated figure points to 304 journalists and media workers living in exile between 2018 and September 2025, based on data compiled by FLED. From El Salvador, 43 journalists had left the country as of June 2025, according to figures reported by the Journalists' Association of El Salvador (*Asociación de Periodistas de El Salvador*, *APES*) in the 2025 report Exile of Salvadoran Journalism.

In Guatemala, estimates from the Journalists' Association of Guatemala (*Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala*, *APG*) indicate that approximately 25 journalists were living in exile as of March 2024.

The Numbers Behind Exile

Exiled journalists by country [7]

Country of origin	PROLEDI (2025)	IACHR's Office of the SR FoE (2025)	RELPEX (2024–2025)	Most Common Host Countries (according to PROLEDI and RELPEX)
Venezuela	477	374	63	Colombia, USA, Spain, Argentina
Nicaragua	268	289	92	Colombia, USA, Spain
Cuba	98	150	34	USA, Spain, Mexico
Guatemala	19	26	-	Mexico, USA, Costa Rica
Ecuador	13	14	-	USA, Spain, Chile
El Salvador	10	5	17	Guatemala, USA, Mexico
Haiti	10	-	-	USA, Dominican Republic, Canada

Source: PROLEDI (2025), SRFOE (2025) and RELPEX (2024–2025).

PROLEDI, IACHR's Office of the SR FoE, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, have all stressed that the true scale of the forced exile of journalists in the region is difficult to determine, largely due to the absence of official mechanisms for registration and monitoring. As a result, available figures are likely to underestimate the scope of the phenomenon.

7 Based on information from PROLEDI (2025), IACHR Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (2025) and RELPEX (2024–2025).

Interviewees also expressed concern that journalism in exile in Latin America is a growing trend, with little likelihood of decreasing in the coming years. Moreover, as one interviewee noted, *"many media outlets do not publicly identify as exiled, even though they operate from abroad or under hybrid models, with some team members inside the country and others outside. The lack of self-identification makes it difficult to compile a comprehensive list and explains why no definitive figure exists."*

It is also important to note that both the desk review and the interviews conducted for this analysis documented cases of internal displacement of journalists in countries such as Mexico, Honduras, and Ecuador. In these contexts, internal displacement is often used as a protection measure in response to the same types of attacks and conditions described above. This report, however, focuses specifically on forced cross-border displacement.

One key aspect of journalism in exile is its temporal nature. As the IACHR's Office of the SR FoE 2025 report notes, *"while exile has been conceptualized as a temporary protection measure, experience in the Americas shows that, over time, exile tends to become a 'permanent condition' that fundamentally transforms journalistic practice and the organizational structures of media outlets."*

The interviews conducted for this report reveal two distinct patterns. In Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela, journalists have been forced into exile under conditions that are largely indefinite. By contrast, in countries such as Ecuador, exile has often functioned as a temporary protection measure, with some journalists able to return and resume their work after implementing specific precautionary measures.

According to RSF, the main destinations for Latin American journalists and media outlets in exile include Costa Rica, USA, Colombia, Spain, and Canada[8], with PROLEDI also identifying Chile, Mexico, and Argentina as host countries for journalists in situations of displacement.

Two critical aspects of the current Latin American context of journalism in exile deserve particular attention: the forced abandonment of the profession and the severe reduction in funding available to support those who continue to practice journalism.

8 Exile Journalists Map – Fleeing to Europe and North America, 2023. Reporters Without Borders.

According to data compiled by RELPEX from a sample of 242 journalists from 14 countries forced into exile, only 30 percent continue working permanently for a media outlet. This group includes journalists from small, investigative, or niche outlets, as well as digital-native and collaborative media projects. By contrast, journalists who previously worked for larger, more traditional (or legacy) media organizations in their countries of origin often leave the profession entirely. An additional 20 percent engage only in occasional journalistic work, typically on a freelance basis, while 41 percent have stopped working in media entirely and shifted to other lines of work.

Another critical factor shaping the current conditions faced by exiled Latin American media outlets and journalists is the severe reduction of international cooperation funding for journalism support. In March 2025, the United States government announced the cancellation of more than 80 percent of programs run by USAID, which in 2023 alone supported over 6,000 journalists and 700 media outlets worldwide, including Latin America, according to an article published in newspaper *El País*.

At the same time, sources interviewed for this report mention that European cooperation supporting journalism, human rights, and democracy initiatives has also been significantly reduced. According to a dozen media directors quoted by *El País*, this represents "*the hardest blow the independent Latin American press has received*," noting that "*some of these outlets were created specifically to confront corrupt and authoritarian governments*." The same article documents that, prior to the funding freeze, the 2025 budget allocated to independent media and the free flow of information had reached nearly 268 million U.S. dollars.

Together, these factors undermine the sustainability of media outlets and journalists in exile in Latin America. Many face the loss of skilled staff and chronic shortages of operational funding, all within an already fragile economic environment marked by limited and poorly diversified sources of income.

The following sections examine these and other key factors influencing the resilience of journalism in exile in Latin America in greater depth, drawing on the case studies presented throughout the report.

1.2 Methodology

This regional report is part of the project *Building Networks in Exile*: Assessment, Mentorship, and Collaborative Resilience for Latin American Exile Media Outlets, implemented by FLED within the framework of Internews Europe's AGILE project, co-funded by the European Union.

The report serves a strategic purpose by bringing together and synthesizing existing, up-to-date knowledge on media outlets operating in exile in Latin America. It offers a regional assessment of the exile media ecosystem, examining both the broader context of press freedom in the region and the specific conditions under which these outlets operate amid repression, forced displacement, and precarity.

The analysis identifies shared needs and challenges, as well as good practices and resilience strategies that have enabled many of these media outlets to sustain their journalistic work despite adversity. It also provides practical tools and recommendations for two primary audiences: media outlets and journalists in exile, and the support organizations, intermediaries, and donors that accompany them and work to strengthen their sustainability.

The central question guiding this report is: How is journalism practiced and sustained in exile in Latin America under conditions of repression and precarity, and what is needed for it to endure?

The research adopted a qualitative approach to explore the experiences, challenges, and strategies of journalists and media outlets operating in exile. It drew on both primary and secondary sources, which were brought together through an analytical process designed to triangulate information and provide a broad, contextualized, and balanced understanding of the phenomenon.

This report uses a hybrid citation format. Documentary sources are cited in footnotes, while interviews conducted for the study are attributed within the body of the text, following journalistic conventions.

Primary data were collected through 18 semi-structured interviews with journalists and media workers in exile and representatives of media support organizations. The interviews focused on key thematic areas, including personal and digital security; the financial sustainability of media outlets; the development of support networks; adaptation to host-country contexts; the psychosocial impacts of exile; and relationships with media support organizations and intermediaries involved in international cooperation. All interviews were conducted virtually, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed with participants' informed consent.

Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity across geography, gender, age, professional background, and type of employment relationship (journalists working independently or those affiliated with media outlets).

The analysis was deliberately limited to journalists and media outlets from countries of origin with the highest number of documented cases, as identified in the sources reviewed. As noted above, these countries include Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, and Ecuador. At the time of the interviews, participants were based in locations such as Costa Rica, Spain, the USA, Mexico, and Ecuador. This geographic spread allowed the study to capture a range of migration trajectories, legal frameworks, and conditions for practicing journalism across the region.

All interviewees who participated as specialists, coordinators, or representatives of media support and intermediary organizations have extensive experience supporting Latin American media outlets in exile.

Interview data were analyzed using thematic coding, with findings grouped into categories aligned with the study's key thematic areas and used to identify both recurring patterns and distinctive features across the narratives.

Secondary sources were examined through an extensive desk review of recent reports, academic studies, and institutional and specialized publications related to journalism in exile, press freedom, media ecosystems, and media sustainability. Sources were drawn from recognized institutions and organizations, with priority given to those offering explicit methodologies and up-to-date data. Based on this review, country profiles were developed to organize contextual information on countries of origin and destination, taking into account variables such as legal frameworks, migration policies, press conditions, and security risks.

All collected information was organized and analyzed using a comparative matrix to triangulate interview findings with documentary evidence. This process helped identify convergences, tensions, and gaps in the available information, strengthening the consistency of the findings and highlighting common trends across national contexts.

Throughout the research process, strict ethical standards were applied regarding confidentiality, informed consent, and source protection, given the risks faced by journalists in contexts of persecution or censorship. Secure communication channels were used, and the anonymity of all interviewees was preserved. In addition, the research team adopted a reflexive approach to potential biases and documented analytical decisions to ensure transparency and traceability.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

1.3.1 Exile

Exile is understood within this research as a form of forced displacement resulting from threats, persecution, or censorship that compels individuals to leave their country without the possibility of a safe return. In the context of journalism, exile is a direct consequence of repression and the systematic closure of spaces for the free practice of the profession.

1.3.2 Being an Exiled Journalist or a Journalist in Exile

For participants in this study, being a journalist in exile means accepting uprootedness without abandoning the profession, even as many are compelled to devote a significant portion of their time to other forms of work to make a living in host countries. According to interviewees and the sources consulted, journalists in exile rebuild their professional lives in unfamiliar settings, reconfigure their work networks, and adapt and innovate to maintain ties to their countries of origin through their journalistic practice.

For many interviewees, identifying as exiled individuals is not an immediate process. Several described a period during which they moved back and forth between their country of origin and the place of refuge, initially reluctant to accept that their departure was permanent. Only when threats intensified or became more explicit did they come to realize that returning was no longer a viable option.

"It took me a very long time to process that I was in forced mobility. I didn't even see myself as a forcibly displaced person, but there came a point when I could no longer go back," one interviewee explained. In her case, coming to terms with exile meant accepting that distance was no longer temporary, but rather a quasi-permanent condition imposed by violence.

Other journalists associated exile with the impossibility of being with their families, working alongside their teams, or walking the streets where they had built their careers. "*My family is inside the country, my team is inside the country,*" one interviewee said, expressing how exile separates journalists not only physically, but also emotionally, from their personal and professional worlds.

Others noted that, although exile was an imposed experience, over time it came to be understood as a form of freedom. One journalist explained that at first, he felt uncomfortable describing himself as exiled, as the term seemed too heavy. Over the months, however, he began to see it differently, not as a negative label, but as a necessary choice. *"I prefer to be in another country and remain in contact with my family than to have stayed and risk being arbitrarily detained. It is the decision that allows me to stay alive, free, and practicing journalism,"* he said. Not all interviewees fully identify with the term "*exile.*" Some prefer to speak of displacement or forced mobility, as they feel that these terms better capture their situation without assigning it a definitive meaning. One journalist explained that the word *"exile"* feels too harsh and that, although she lives outside her country, she still holds onto the hope of returning. For her, exile is a word that "*the body rejects*," because it implies accepting a separation she is not yet willing to accept as permanent.

1.3.3 Being a Media Outlet in Exile or an Exiled Media Outlet

Media outlets in exile are newsrooms and journalistic teams that, having been forced to leave their country, and in some cases to formalize their legal status abroad, continue to report for their original audiences. These outlets document events and preserve an important space of freedom that has been closed off in their countries of origin. In doing so, media in exile redefine the terrain from which press freedom is exercised. Some operate through hybrid newsrooms, with part of their teams based inside the country of origin and part abroad, while others function entirely from outside the country.

2. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

2.1 Sociopolitical Context

Across the region, journalism is being practiced under increasingly restrictive conditions, shaped by repression and censorship. RELPEX identifies the following recurrent patterns:

- Political and judicial persecution as for a means of silencing journalists
- Criminalization of the profession through fabricated charges
- Police, digital, or criminal harassment targeting journalists and their families
- Seizure and closure of media outlets as mechanisms of information control
- Economic precarity in exile, limiting the sustainability of journalistic projects[9]

The following section analyzes the sociopolitical conditions in the Latin American countries covered in this report, highlighting key factors that have undermined the independent press and forced journalists into exile.

Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela account for the largest share of journalists forced into exile, according to the records and estimates highlighted in previous sections. These three countries also stand out as contexts where independent journalism has experienced forced displacement in a prolonged and systematic manner. As one source notes, "the cases of Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Cuba clearly illustrate contexts in which the state apparatus has been deliberately used to eliminate criticism and dissent, triggering the mass exile of journalists."[10] A second group of countries has undergone more recent periods of instability and persecution. Although journalists initially left on a temporary basis, in some cases exile is now becoming increasingly prolonged. These include El Salvador, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Haiti.

9 Resiliencia en el exilio: voces que desafían al silencio 2024- 2025 (Resilience in Exile: Voices That Defy Silence, 2024–2025), IAPA.
10 Exilio de periodistas y libertad de expresión 2025 (Journalists in Exile and Freedom of Expression 2025), IACHR Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression.

Venezuela

Political situation and type of regime	In the early 2000s, Venezuela began shifting toward an authoritarian system, a trajectory initiated under Hugo Chávez and continued by President Nicolás Maduro. The 2007 shutdown of RCTV marked a turning point in state hostility toward independent media. This was followed by the purchase of media outlets by politically aligned actors, along with censorship and restrictions on access to essential supplies for the press.
Press Freedom	In Venezuela, a "deliberately planned state policy" has been described as aiming to silence journalists and weaken public debate. The country ranks 160 out of 180 in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index published by RSF, and operates under a system of so-called "communicational hegemony," with 405 media outlets closed over the past two decades. Independent media have faced systematic digital blocking and online censorship, as well as the application of punitive legislation, including the Anti-Hate Law (2017). The abusive use of vague criminal charges, such as terrorism or the dissemination of "false news", continues to be employed to punish dissent and justify the persecution of journalists and media outlets. These practices are compounded by tax pressure and the criminalization of international funding.
Drivers of Exile	In a context marked by repression, economic precarity, and fear, exile becomes the only viable way to protect personal safety and preserve the very possibility of practicing independent journalism. This exile also unfolds against the backdrop of a broader crisis and prolonged economic recession that have forced millions of Venezuelans to leave the country. Repression following the 2024 elections became a key trigger for forced displacement, marked by arbitrary detentions and threats. As of August 2025, 15 journalists remained imprisoned.
Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	Venezuela is the primary country of origin for journalists and media outlets in exile in Latin America. The main destination countries for this exile include Colombia, the USA, Spain, and Argentina. According to interviews conducted for this study, it is still possible to practice journalism in Venezuela, albeit under highly restrictive conditions. Exiled journalists interviewed for this study reported that parts of their editorial teams remain inside the country, giving rise to hybrid working arrangements in which independent media operate with staff both in exile and within Venezuela. Journalists who remain in the country are generally able to do so by adopting strict security measures, maintaining a low public profile, and avoiding topics deemed sensitive by the government. Nevertheless, the risk of reprisals—such as arbitrary detention, surveillance, or judicial sanctions—remains high and largely unpredictable.

Sources: RSF; IPYS Venezuela; authors' interviews; PROLEDI; SRFOE; RELPEX.

Testimonies:

- "Before going into exile, I used to travel in and out of Venezuela, until my passport was annulled. A government official called me and explicitly told me that I could no longer return to Venezuela and that there was a detention order against me."

- "All journalists in Venezuela are at risk of being deprived of their liberty, because detention is arbitrary; they can arrest them simply because the government feels like it."

- "2023 and 2024 marked the peak of exile. Covering protests meant having no guarantees about whether a journalist would end up detained, injured, or worse. Some went into exile after receiving direct threats; others did so as a preventive measure."

Nicaragua

Political situation and type of regime	Since the April 2018 protests, Nicaragua has been engulfed in a political and human rights crisis marked by state repression, arbitrary detentions, and lethal force used to suppress mass protests demanding the removal of the government. Inter-American bodies and United Nations mechanisms have documented serious human rights violations and indications of crimes against humanity committed by state authorities, with a death toll exceeding 350 people. Since then, the political project led by Daniel Ortega, who has governed the country since 2007, has evolved into what has been widely described as a radical and dynastic dictatorship. His wife, Rosario Murillo, has been positioned as his successor and, since January 2025, has formally held the title of "co-president" alongside Ortega following a constitutional reform. That reform also formalized the Executive's total control over the other branches of government and state institutions.
Press Freedom	Attacks against the media escalated in 2018, with the seizure of leading outlets such as Diario La Prensa, 100% Noticias, and Confidencial. This was followed by the shutdown of all independent media outlets—more than 60 by March 2025. In 2020, a package of repressive laws was adopted in violation of international standards on freedom of expression. Since September 2018, journalism has been fully criminalized under a de facto police state. In Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, so-called colonos—settlers who invade Indigenous lands—have carried out violence against local communities and journalists working in those territories.
Drivers of Exile	Attacks against journalists include surveillance, censorship, raids, court summons, fabricated charges, imprisonment, expulsion from the country, and enforced disappearances. Entry into the country is de facto prohibited for both domestic and foreign journalists. The result of this escalating repression has been the near-total dismantling of independent journalism inside Nicaragua. According to the 2025 World Press Freedom Index published by RSF, Nicaragua ranks 172 out of 180, with a media landscape characterized by official propaganda, confiscations, and the survival of journalism largely through clandestine work.
Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	The few traditional media outlets that continue operating outside the direct control of the presidential family refrain from publishing any critical information, under threat of closure and confiscation. The limited number of reporters who remain in the country are forced to work covertly or clandestinely, as they face the risk of imprisonment or expulsion. Most journalists, including those working from exile, no longer publish under their own bylines. The exile of journalists began in 2018 and has continued uninterrupted since then, with all independent media outlets now operating from abroad, and only a very small number maintaining partial teams inside Nicaragua. FLED warns that 11 of the country's regions, representing 65 percent of national territory, have become "news deserts." Journalists in exile are also subjected to deprivation of nationality, confiscation of property, and reprisals against family members who remain in Nicaragua, hallmarks of transnational repression. Most independent media outlets are now based in Costa Rica, with others operating from the USA, Spain, and other Latin American countries. Many of these outlets have formally registered in their host countries. While they initially exile as temporary, the intensification of repression and the consolidation of absolute power by Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo have made the prospect of returning under democratic conditions increasingly uncertain.

Sources: Authors' interviews; RSF; PROLEDI; SRFOE; FLED; RELPEX.

Testimonies:

- "The risk was always extremely high. We were imprisoned, stripped of our nationality, and I had my home confiscated—but they did not take away our determination to keep informing from abroad," referring to state repression since 2018.

- "In Nicaragua, journalism is completely criminalized. And if the state doesn't kill you, a colono might," referring to the violence faced by communities and journalists in Indigenous territories.

- "If you're a journalist, you're an enemy of the state. Even so, we continue reporting from exile."

Cuba

Political situation and type of regime	Cuba is a single-party socialist state, constitutionally defined as a Marxist–Leninist republic in which the Communist Party of Cuba is designated as the "leading force of the State and society." The regime prohibits political pluralism and independent political activity and imposes severe restrictions on fundamental freedoms. The Constitution reserves "fundamental" media outlets for state ownership or ownership by affiliated organizations, effectively rendering any non-aligned journalism de facto clandestine. The media landscape is fully state-controlled: television, radio, and print outlets are subject to oversight and surveillance, while
Press Freedom	RSF and IACHR's Office of the SR FoE concur that, since 2021, the brief space in which independent digital media were able to operate has closed, and repression has intensified. IACHR's Office of the SR FoE warns that there are no guarantees for the exercise of fundamental freedoms in Cuba. The Social Communication Law (2024) tightly regulates the media sector—composed primarily of state outlets or organizations linked to political entities—and subjects digital communication to stringent rules, enforced in coordination with the state-controlled telecommunications infrastructure. The 2022 criminal Code expanded the use of vaguely defined offenses—such as "public disorder," "insult," and "endangering the constitutional order"—which are used to persecute journalists and silence dissent. This legal architecture discourages critical reporting and legitimizes punitive practices. Reported coercive practices include arrests, arbitrary detention, threats, home searches, and confiscations, routinely employed against those who challenge the official narrative.
Drivers of Exile	Exile is neither new nor recent in the Cuban context. Journalists note that repression has been continuous, even as the methods through which it is enforced have evolved over time. Since mid-2024, multiple testimonies have described experiences of harassment, interrogations, arbitrary detention, and threats. The State Security Bodies (*Órganos de Seguridad del Estado*) operate as the core of the repressive apparatus. The government routinely labels independent media as "outlets funded by foreign governments" or "mercenaries." Journalists also report receiving notices to appear without clear identification of the issuing authority or the grounds for the call, reinforcing a climate of uncertainty and intimidation.
Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	Most independent journalistic projects now operate from exile. A large share of critical reporting is produced outside the country and must overcome significant obstacles to reach domestic audiences. Those who remain in Cuba keep a low public profile and rely on self-protection protocols to continue working. Harassment and impunity are structural features of the environment. A substantial number of exiled media outlets and journalists have settled in the USA, Spain, and Mexico.

Sources: authors' interviews; SRFOE; PROLEDI; RELPEX; RSF.

Testimonies:

- "I left during the most recent wave of repression… it wasn't only directed at independent journalists, but also at entrepreneurs and anyone associated with a media outlet not affiliated with the government."
- "Sometimes [exile] is framed in a softer way: 'Why don't you go pursue a master's or a PhD?'. The harsher version is: 'You have to leave'… they tell you, 'either you leave or you'll end up in prison.'"
- "The government does not recognize independent journalism; it labels us as mercenary outlets whose goal is to destroy the revolution."
- " Journalists have been leaving Cuba for decades; repression is continuous, even if the names and the tools change."

El Salvador

Political situation and type of regime	El Salvador is a presidential republic with a strong concentration of power in the Executive, under President Nayib Bukele. A state of emergency has been in force since March 2022, repeatedly extended since then. Freedom House classifies the country as "Partly Free" in its 2025 assessment, citing a weakening of the rule of law.
Press Freedom	According to RSF, El Salvador ranks 135 out of 180 in the 2025 World Press Freedom Index. RSF describes a media environment defined by official propaganda, restricted access to public information, and attacks on critical outlets. Technical investigations have confirmed the use of Pegasus spyware against journalists and civil society actors between 2020 and 2021. Since 2019, civic space has steadily narrowed. Under the ongoing state of exception, arbitrariness, surveillance, and opacity have become normalized. International organizations have documented the judicialization of dissent and mass detentions.
Drivers of Exile	The approval of the Foreign Agents Law in May 2025 introduced a 30 percent tax on foreign funding and cross-border transactions, along with new registration and oversight requirements for organizations that receive such resources. Critics warn that these measures risk severely constraining the financial viability of civil society organizations and independent media outlets. At the same time, USAID funding cuts in 2025 have further weakened the sustainability of local media and NGOs, prompting reports of outlet closures, scaled-back operations, and growing institutional vulnerability. Alongside these financial pressures, journalists and organizations face intensified surveillance, escalating persecution, and the threat of criminalization. The most acute risk remains criminal proceedings and detention under the state of emergency. The closure and self-exile of human rights organizations have compounded these dynamics, contributing to greater opacity and reduced independent oversight.
Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	Traditional media outlets with a degree of editorial independence still operate inside El Salvador, along with journalists who continue to report on corruption and other issues sensitive to those in power. However, 2025 saw a sharp increase in forced displacement, with 43 journalists leaving the country due to fear of arrest and harassment. This represents a "curve that has not yet flattened," according to APES, which itself was forced to relocate its legal registration abroad in response to state pressure and the enactment of new legislation. Journalists who have gone into exile have done so primarily in Guatemala, the USA, Costa Rica, and Mexico. APES further notes that this is the first time in over three decades that the country has experienced a comparable phenomenon, and that it has occurred under a civilian administration not linked to military coups, referring to the only recent precedent during the civil war of the 1980s. Given the rapid escalation of attacks against journalists and the limited prospects for meaningful improvements in conditions for practicing journalism, many journalists now expect their exile to be prolonged rather than temporary. Interviewees report that for those who remain in the country and continue to cover issues deemed sensitive by the authorities, the primary risk is legal harassment. As a result, they work under preventive legal protocols, maintain a low public profile, and adopt heightened security measures.

Sources: Freedom House; RSF; PROLEDI; APES; RELPEX; authors' interviews.

Testimonies:

- "The attacks intensified from the very first day [under the government of Nayib Bukele]."
- "When there is no longer any rule of law, when the will of a single person governs, critical voices are the ones at risk."
- "Before I left, I was harassed at my home, with visits from gang members, police officers, and businesses, all seeking to intimidate me."

Guatemala

Political situation and type of regime	Guatemala is a presidential republic experiencing a deterioration of the rule of law driven by the co-optation of the justice system and broader institutional capture. Freedom House classifies the country as "Partly Free" in its 2025 assessment.
Press Freedom	Since the withdrawal of the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2019, Guatemala's institutional crisis has intensified. Anti-corruption officials and former CICIG members have been persecuted, and testimonies describe a judiciary and Public Prosecutor's Office that operate as de facto centers of power, aligning courts and prosecutorial bodies against actors perceived as threats to the status quo. From 2022 onward, "international funding has been criminalized and reframed as money laundering in order to pursue dissenting media through the courts," one interviewee said. This narrative coincides with the adoption of restrictive legislation on foreign funding (Decree 4-2020), which grants the state broad authority to audit, suspend, or shut down NGOs and media outlets that receive international resources. A widely cited case is that of José Rubén Zamora, a prominent journalist who has remained imprisoned on money laundering charges since July 2022. His defense has documented a series of procedural irregularities, and international press freedom organizations consider his detention to be a case of persecution directly linked to his journalistic work.
Drivers of Exile	The exile of Guatemalan journalists is a direct consequence of a prolonged institutional crisis marked by the co-optation of the justice system and the systematic criminalization of independent journalism. According to PROLEDI, unlike in other countries where persecution is driven primarily by the Executive branch, in Guatemala the process is led by the judicial branch, which is controlled by a network of political and economic interests operating with impunity. In this context, the Public Prosecutor's Office has become the main instrument for punishing the press. According to the Red Rompe el Miedo Guatemala (2024), although the current administration of President Bernardo Arévalo has expressed its intention to guarantee press freedom, "the situation of media outlets and journalists remains fragile; they continue to face criminalization and other forms of violence." The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (IACHR's Office of the SR FoE) confirms a "sustained increase in cases of journalist exile," with a peak in 2023 coinciding with the intensification of judicial proceedings. The persistence of judicial and business sectors linked to the so-called "pact of the corrupt"—a term coined by citizens critical of these actors and their actions—has prevented protection measures from being effectively implemented and continues to expose journalists to the risk of detention or open persecution.

Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	RSF documents media closures, judicial harassment, smear campaigns, and economic pressures that have forced many journalists into exile or internal displacement. "Fearing for their lives or the safety of their families, many are forced into exile," RSF concludes. However, several journalists continue to view exile as a temporary measure. Some have even returned to Guatemala for short periods, maintaining a low profile before leaving again. A number of media outlets have established operations abroad, working through hybrid teams based both inside and outside the country. Large, traditional media outlets continue to operate normally. However, journalists engaged in investigations into corruption and other issues considered "sensitive" by powerful sectors—while remaining in the country and continuing to report—must adopt security measures and maintain a low public profile.

Sources: Freedom House; PROLEDI; SRFOE; APG; RSF; authors' interviews.

Testimonies:

- "The Public Prosecutor's Office has criminalized several of us… even when they know that the cases are not legal and have no legal basis, they allow them to proceed. Many people have had to leave the country because we have the living example of José Rubén Zamora."
- "After the dismantling of CICIG, a judicial dictatorship emerged. The entire justice apparatus (the main courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office) is aligned and operates as the de facto power."
- "International funding is being criminalized and reclassified as money laundering in order to pursue dissenting media through the courts."

Ecuador

Political Situation and Type of Regime	Ecuador is a multi-party presidential republic experiencing high levels of polarization amid a broader security and institutional crisis. Freedom House classifies the country as "Partly Free" with a score of 65/100 in its 2025 assessment. The confrontational legacy of correísmo (the movement associated with former president Rafael Correa) includes the stigmatization of the press, control over public media, and the use of litigation as a form of intimidation against journalists. Following the crisis under the government of Guillermo Lasso, and snap elections in 2023 held after the assassination of presidential candidate and journalist Fernando Villavicencio, Daniel Noboa has held the presidency since 2023.
Press Freedom	In Ecuador, journalists operate in a climate of growing self-censorship, hostility, and insecurity, driven in part by the expansion of criminal gangs and cartels. RSF reports that journalists face threats, attacks, and killings, and highlights the emergence of what it calls "information black holes" in border areas and ports—zones where reporting has become extremely dangerous. At the same time, traditional media business models have weakened, while digital outlets have yet to secure stable and sustainable sources of support. Although the government of Guillermo Lasso reformed several of the most restrictive aspects of the Organic Law on Communication, originally adopted in 2013 and widely criticized for undermining journalistic practice, violence and political polarization have continued to intensify in recent years. The kidnapping and murder of a reporting team from El Comercio in 2018 marked a turning point. Journalists Javier Ortega, Paúl Rivas, and Efraín Segarra were abducted and killed along the Ecuador–Colombia border by dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC). Regarding the case, the Foundation for Press Freedom (Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa, FLIP) has stated that "the governments of both countries have concealed information, preventing a clear understanding of how the events unfolded."
Drivers of Exile	In terms of press safety, RSF and IACHR's Office of the SR FoE document a sharp escalation in violence linked to organized crime, including death threats, attacks on newsrooms, and hostage-taking incidents targeting media outlets. One of the most striking cases was the armed takeover of TC Televisión in Guayaquil in January 2024, when 13 gunmen stormed the studio during a live broadcast—an episode that starkly illustrated this new level of violence. An annual 2024 report by Fundamedios records at least 14 journalists forced into exile between 2023 and 2024, along with an 870 percent increase in attacks by criminal groups compared to 2020. The report also documents 42 death threats issued between 2022 and April 2024. This pattern of violence is compounded by insufficient state protection and entrenched impunity, factors that directly influence journalists' decisions to relocate—whether temporarily or permanently—in order to safeguard their lives and continue their work.
Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	The stigmatization of the press inherited from the administration of Rafael Correa—particularly the label of a "corrupt press," which became deeply entrenched in public discourse—has combined with the expansion of organized crime, whose members now issue direct death threats against journalists. As a result, exile among Ecuadorian journalists has taken on a hybrid pattern: some experience temporary departures followed by low-profile returns, while others leave under conditions that make the timing of their return uncertain or indefinite. Journalists interviewed for this study believe the phenomenon is underreported, as many reporters in exile choose not to disclose their forced departures for security reasons. To date, exile in Ecuador appears to involve more individual journalists than entire media outlets, with fewer news organizations relocating their operations wholesale.

Sources: Freedom House; RSF; FLIP; PROLEDI; SRFOE; Fundamedios; authors' interviews.

Testimonies:

- "As crime increases, we have become targets not only of criminal gangs, but also of the politicians who work with them."
- "If you investigate how [organized crime groups] operate, you'll end up having to go into exile because they want to kill you."
- "Practicing journalism has become a coin toss, in a context of total impunity and widespread violence."
- "You no longer need to investigate organized crime to be killed: in some areas, even reporting on ordinary crime has become off-limits."

Haiti

Political Situation and Type of Regime	Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, Haiti has undergone a profound institutional collapse. Armed gangs now control an estimated 85 to 90 percent of Port-au-Prince and have expanded their influence into other regions, fueling widespread killings, kidnappings, and sexual violence amid near-total impunity. This crisis has triggered a severe humanitarian emergency, with between 1.3 and 1.4 million people internally displaced, hospitals forced to close, and repeated attacks on humanitarian missions. Conditions further deteriorated in 2025, when the number of killings surpassed 5,000 in less than a year, according to the United Nations.
Press Freedom	The impact of this context on the press has been devastating. Journalists and media outlets have faced armed attacks on newsrooms, arson and looting of media facilities, the killing and kidnapping of reporters, and the closure or suspension of operations due to insecurity. In 2025, IACHR's Office of the SR FoE published a thematic report on Haiti, calling for immediate assistance and protection measures, as the country is the one that "faces the most serious and persistent challenges to the exercise of journalism in the hemisphere." According to the report, the events documented between 2018 and 2025 "paint an extremely alarming picture for media professionals." The Rapporteurship further concluded that "the country—and especially those areas where the State has lost its monopoly on the use of force—is becoming an unprecedented silenced zone in the Americas."
Drivers of Exile	Journalists in Haiti face death threats, kidnappings, attacks on their homes and newsrooms, and sustained stigmatization. In the absence of meaningful guarantees—amid the collapse and co-optation of key state institutions and the territorial control exercised by armed gangs—many journalists are forced to flee or to operate clandestinely, maintaining a low profile, rotating teams, and relying on intermittent departures. The lack of effective state protection and pervasive impunity further drive journalists to leave the country, whether temporarily or permanently.
Patterns of Exile and Current Journalistic Practice	For those who remain in the country, journalism work requires strict security protocols and forms of tactical self-censorship. For those who leave, exile becomes the only viable option to protect their lives and to continue reporting from abroad on corruption, abuses, and the humanitarian crisis—often under extremely difficult conditions, given the lack of even basic means of subsistence in host countries.

Sources: Human Rights Watch; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR); SRFOE; PROLEDI; authors' interviews.

Testimony:

- "Practicing journalism in Haiti is extremely challenging, and very few people pay attention to it. I know many journalists who are so afraid that they have to carry weapons when they go to work, because they are threatened by gangs and by people within the government," said a Haitian journalist interviewed for this report, who has been forced into exile three times over the past two decades after receiving death threats. "Because I defend press freedom, they think I'm against them… but I'm just doing my job."

Host Countries: Opportunities, Challenges, and Resilience in Exile

According to RELPEX, the main host countries for exiled journalists from Latin America are the USA, Costa Rica, Spain, and Mexico.[11] PROLEDI similarly identifies Costa Rica, the United States, Spain, Chile, Mexico, and Argentina[12] as key destinations.

As PROLEDI's report notes, the choice of host country varies depending on journalists' countries of origin. In the case of Nicaragua, most journalists have sought refuge in Costa Rica, largely due to geographic proximity and longstanding ties shaped by sustained migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. Existing support networks there play a decisive role. By contrast, Venezuelan journalists tend to go into exile in neighbouring Colombia, as well as in the United States, Spain, and Argentina.

> *For journalists from El Salvador, the main host countries are Guatemala (eight cases), the USA (six), and Mexico (three). Regional proximity plays a key role, as initial departures often take place to neighbouring countries, while the USA tends to serve as a destination for longer-term settlement.* – *RELPEX*

Most Latin American journalists who go into exile do so in democracies with stronger rule of law, where they find minimum conditions of personal safety, access to support networks, and, sometimes slow, pathways to regularize their migration status.

Even so, political and regulatory tensions persist, affecting both their sense of security and their ability to stabilize their lives and professional work. Specialized organizations have warned that, even in host countries, risks such as digital harassment, surveillance, legal actions, and transnational repression remain present. These conditions require journalists to maintain security protocols and a low public profile as they rebuild newsrooms and journalistic projects in exile.

The USA offers a robust ecosystem to work as a journalist, as well as opportunities to find employment in other sectors to supplement income. However, restrictive migration rhetoric and policies under the current administration of President Donald Trump have increased uncertainty for asylum seekers and other migrants with pending, temporary, or undefined immigration status, including journalists.

11 Resiliencia en el exilio: voces que desafían al silencio 2024- 2025 (Resilience in Exile: Voices That Defy Silence, 2024–2025), RELPEX.
12 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano 2025 (Displaced Voices: A Portrait of Latin American Journalistic Exile), PROLEDI.

Costa Rica continues to be a key destination for Central American exiles, but serious incidents involving political opponents in exile have raised growing concern among displaced communities. The most recent example is the killing of retired army major Roberto Samcam in San José in June 2025. This tragedy heightened alarms about the physical security of the refugee population. At the same time, the country has accelerated the administrative closure of tens of thousands of pending asylum applications.

Despite the challenges they face in host countries, exiled journalists and media outlets recognize that returning to their countries of origin is either impossible or would expose them to serious risks.

In some cases, particularly among individual journalists, a second migration has taken place. After spending time in the country to which they initially fled, some move on to a second destination, either independently or through refugee support and resettlement programs. In the case of Nicaragua's journalistic ecosystem, for example, several journalists over the past two years participated in the Safe Mobility program, organized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with former support from the United States government. The program was discontinued under the Trump administration, although some cases have since been resumed through resettlement pathways in countries such as Canada or Spain.

2.2 Main Challenges for Media Outlets and Independent Journalists in Exile

Journalism in exile in Latin America has differentiated impacts on displaced news organizations and on independent journalists. While the former seek to maintain collective news production structures amid precarious conditions and persecution, the latter face professional isolation, a loss of occupational identity, and a lack of institutional backing. Although both groups share contexts of vulnerability, they differ in how they cope, in their needs, and in their scope for action. The following section identifies interrelated dimensions that capture the main challenges of media outlets and independent journalists operating in exile.

2.2.1 Economic and Operational Sustainability, and Content Production

Media Outlets

For exiled media outlets, economic sustainability is the largest structural challenge. Most relocated or displaced newsrooms rely on short-term international donor funding, typically covering only six to twelve months, which neither guarantees stability nor allows for strategic planning. This dependence prevents teams from consolidating, leads to constant restructuring, and makes it difficult to invest in innovation or training.

This financial fragility results in staff cuts, wage reductions, and increased workloads, undermining content quality and teams' psychosocial well-being. In addition, newsrooms are forced to juggle news production with administrative management, the ongoing search for funding, and the implementation of security measures, which reduces the time available for investigative reporting and in-depth journalism.[13]

A lack of sustainability has a direct impact on the production of high-quality journalism in exile. Interviewees also noted that producing journalism under these conditions is generally more expensive and slower, given the many challenges involved in obtaining reliable information from the country of origin.

13 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano 2025 (Displaced Voices: A Portrait of Latin American Journalistic Exile), PROLEDI.

Another direct impact of the lack of economic sustainability among exiled media outlets is the loss of skilled personnel, particularly following the sharp reduction in international donor funding beginning in 2025. As a result, these outlets have had to cut their payrolls due to insufficient funds to continue paying salaries, although some team members have also resigned because of security concerns and emotional and physical exhaustion.

In addition, there is a skills gap in business management, digital marketing, and audience development. These capacities are essential for media outlets in exile, which lack access to traditional revenue sources such as advertising or commercial sponsorships, as such activities are criminalized in their countries of origin. The absence of diversified income streams limits their ability to innovate and sustain independent projects, perpetuating reliance on external funding.[14]

Specialists and the documents reviewed converge on the same finding: beyond the lack of resources, international cooperation tends to concentrate its support in higher-profile countries, creating inequality in the distribution of funds. As a result, media outlets from less visible contexts face greater difficulties in accessing funding or gaining visibility.

Independent Journalists

In the case of journalists working independently, economic precarity is reflected in intermittent income, the absence of formal contracts, and the need to take on non-journalistic work to survive. Many are forced to work as freelance photographers, translators, or teachers while trying to sustain sporadic collaborations with media outlets.

> *"I learned to bake cakes to survive... It's physically and emotionally draining to know that if no project comes up next month, I won't be able to pay for housing or food." - Nicaraguan journalist in exile.*

RELPEX's report found that 40.9% of journalists in exile have lost all ties to media outlets. Those who manage to remain active face long working hours and wages below the local average, with reporters and editors being the most affected.

The lack of legal recognition for degrees or professional credentials, along with local media outlets' distrust of people with irregular or non-permanent migration status, severely restricts access to employment opportunities in host countries. This instability leads to professional fatigue and, in some cases, people leaving the profession altogether.

14 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano 2025 (Displaced Voices: A Portrait of Latin American Journalistic Exile), PROLEDI.

Another major challenge is building new networks and gaining access to technical and professional training opportunities that are formally recognized by authorities in the host country. "The most frequent request from journalists relates to access to professional contacts," the report notes.[15] A media support organization's coordinator adds that the three most frequently cited needs are clear: job contacts, technical training, and legal support.

In the absence of opportunities, many journalists are forced to shift into work outside of journalism, eroding their professional identity and contributing to the weakening of the region's news ecosystem.

> *"I try to keep the same pace, but it changes if I have to go clean a house or work in a supermarket. Those jobs start limiting your time [and the time you can devote to journalism]." - Cuban journalist in exile*

This new phase of displacement unfolds in a context marked by geographic fragmentation, isolation, and the loss of support networks, making it difficult to rebuild professional and personal communities in exile.[16]

2.2.2 Physical and Digital Security

Exile does not mark the end of risk, but rather the beginning of a different stage of uncertainty. Both media outlets and independent journalists face different levels of digital, physical, and emotional insecurity, and a lack of specific public protection policies. In some cases, leaving does not eliminate risk; it only relocates it. Political persecution, criminalization, and harassment extend into exile, taking the form of digital threats, smear campaigns, or legal proceedings initiated by governments in countries of origin against journalists and media outlets.

Media Outlets

Exiled newsrooms continue to be targets of surveillance, harassment, and disinformation campaigns coordinated from their countries of origin. Exile does not necessarily guarantee the safety of media outlets or their teams.[17] In some cases, threats, harassment, and persecution campaigns extend beyond borders, taking the form of digital actions, intimidation, and reprisals coordinated from countries of origin.

15 Resiliencia en el exilio: voces que desafían al silencio 2024- 2025 (Resilience in Exile: Voices That Defy Silence, 2024–2025), RELPEX,
16 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano 2025 (Displaced Voices: A Portrait of Latin American Journalistic Exile, 2025), PROLEDI.
17 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano 2025 (Displaced Voices: A Portrait of Latin American Journalistic Exile, 2025), PROLEDI.

"We are very careful to constantly delete team members' phone conversations, especially for those who still live in Venezuela, because there is a risk they could face reprisals if any authority finds out they work with a critical outlet." - *Director of a hybrid Venezuelan media outlet*

Although some media outlets have received digital security training, not all have managed to institutionalize collective protection protocols or holistic security measures. Security, in all its dimensions, continues to depend more on teams' ad hoc efforts than on structured outlet-wide policies. The lack of resources to pay for secure servers or tailored technical support leaves media outlets exposed to vulnerabilities.

Independent Journalists

For journalists working independently, exposure to multiple risks is even greater. They lack technical teams, institutional backing, or protection protocols. *"We went into exile to survive, but even outside the country we still look over our shoulder,"* one interviewed journalist said. *"Even in Costa Rica, I have experienced hacking attempts and surveillance. I learned to use secure platforms and to record without compromising my sources,"* added a Nicaraguan journalist.

Multiples statements from international organizations note that transnational repression has become a systematic practice.[18] Many journalists receive threats on social media, anonymous calls, or threatening messages, as do their family members. Without protection networks, their day-to-day security depends almost entirely on informal solidarity and, in some cases, on support from international organizations.

In the context of transnational repression, notable examples include journalists from Nicaragua, who have faced the stripping of their nationality, de facto statelessness, and the fear generated by assassination attempts in Costa Rica targeting exiled opposition figures, as discussed earlier in this report. Venezuelan journalists whose passports have been cancelled represent another such case.

Media outlets and journalists who have received workshops and training facilitated and funded by media support organizations on digital security tools to protect their devices, websites, and social media platforms; improve the handling of sensitive information; and strengthen communication with their sources, highlight the value of this support.

18 OHCHR, 2025. Nicaragua experts warn of escalating repression reaching beyond borders. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/09/nicaragua-un-experts-warn-escalating-repression-reaching-beyond-borders and CPJ, 2026. They are hunting journalists: Nicaragua's covert repression tactics strike fear beyond borders: https://cpj.org/2026/01/they-are-hunting-journalists-nicaraguas-covert-repression-tactics-strike-fear-beyond-borders/

2.2.3 Housing Insecurity, Lack of Private Space, and Inadequate Minimum Conditions for Living and Working Media Outlets

Media Outlets

Displaced media outlets face difficulties affording offices or formal workspaces. Many operate remotely, from homes or cafés, in some cases sharing technological resources with other outlets.

> *"In Costa Rica we don't have an office; we work from wherever we can. The challenge is to survive and keep reporting." - Director of a Nicaraguan media outlet*

In some cases, newsrooms rely on logistical assistance from media support organizations to access shared spaces or basic infrastructure.

The editor of a Guatemalan media outlet adds that some journalists leave their country on a temporary basis, but upon encountering difficult conditions abroad, end up returning: *"Economic conditions are very harsh,"* she notes.

> *"Keeping people inside Venezuela is the hardest part. Those who are outside don't have economic stability; those who are inside don't have physical security. It's a precarious balance that wears everyone down." - Director of a Venezuelan media outlet*

Despite these challenges, interviewees recognize the risks associated with concentrating the entire team in one physical space, which could be subject to breaches and attacks.

Independent Journalists

For individual journalists, survival becomes the immediate priority. *"Leaving the country doesn't guarantee a better life; it only changes the kind of fear. Now it's the fear of not being able to pay rent or becoming undocumented,"* says a displaced Salvadoran journalist. *"Sometimes you work from somebody else's place, with a phone and mobile data donated by friends,"* adds a Nicaraguan journalist.

The USA, Costa Rica, and Spain host the majority of Latin American exile cases, three contexts in which high living costs and prolonged migration procedures exacerbate housing precarity.

"I'm still figuring out how to manage, because I can't return soon. Where I'm staying, they weren't prepared to take me in. I'm sleeping on a folding bed in the home of acquaintances." - Haitian journalist in exile

Most live in overcrowded conditions or temporary housing, combining informal work with poorly paid collaborations. This housing insecurity and economic instability affect their mental health and their ability to continue to do their work.

2.2.4 Lack of Legal and Migration Protection

Media Outlets

A lack of legal status in host countries prevents outlets from opening bank accounts, signing contracts, or applying for formal grants, forcing them into informality or into relying on intermediaries such as media support organizations. In many cases, outlets operate under individual registrations or under the umbrella of local organizations, which limits their autonomy.

"Registering as a non-profit association was a key step: it gave us legitimacy and a legal framework to keep operating without fear of sanctions or arbitrary decisions." - Director of a Salvadoran media outlet in Costa Rica

However, not all outlets are able to establish their legal standing. Most remain without legal recognition, which keeps them in the informal sector and limits their ability to provide stability or safe working conditions for their teams. Outlets that have been in exile longer are more likely to be formalized, whereas recently exiled outlets more commonly have not yet been able to establish themselves legally in their host countries.

The transnational nature of these outlets—reporting on issues in one country while being based in another—remains a legal blind spot within host-country regulations. Difficulties in accessing an appropriate institutional or tax status can, in some cases, prevent them from participating in public calls for proposals or receiving philanthropic funding. The report *Voces desplazadas* (*Displaced Voices: A Mapping of Latin American Journalistic Exile*) 2018–2024 warns that some outlets must channel their resources through local NGOs, which can delay transfers, increase administrative costs, and compromise editorial independence.

A Cuban journalist captured this paradox: *"You may have donors who are willing [to help you], but if you don't have legal status, that money can't reach you. So you depend on another organization's goodwill to manage it for you. That leaves you in a state of absolute vulnerability."*

RELPEX notes that international support often runs out after the initial emergency phase, leaving a gap in legal assistance.[19]

Independent Journalists

At the individual level, the lack of specific asylum or protection frameworks leaves many journalists trapped in a "migration limbo" that can last for years, due to the heavy caseloads faced by immigration authorities across different countries. Without work permits or health coverage, they live in a state of constant vulnerability. One Venezuelan journalist in exile explains that although host-country policies were more agile in the past, procedures in the country where he currently resides are now slower and more restrictive, affecting his ability to obtain legal status.

> *"Permits used to be straightforward, but now the paperwork is torture. Many colleagues moved to Spain because here [in Colombia] they ended up without immigration status." - Venezuelan journalist in exile*

The situation is even more severe for those who have applied for asylum and are still awaiting a response: procedures are lengthy and, in some countries such as Costa Rica or the United States, a decision may take over five years. During this time, applicants are unable to fully access their rights. In Costa Rica, for example, a lack of awareness among public institution staff may lead to the denial of services, and banks do not grant loans to individuals applying with an asylum-seeker ID card.

Host countries lack specific policies for journalists at risk. This institutional omission leaves them in a prolonged "limbo," forcing them to rely on personal networks or ad hoc support from humanitarian and solidarity organizations.

> *"I believe that asylum procedures should provide differentiated treatment for journalists, given their public role and exposure to risk. This is not about privileges, but about recognizing that independent journalism is a public good essential to democracy." - Exiled Salvadoran journalist.*

Interviewed journalists also pointed to the need for financial support provided by organizations to be allocated to ongoing, individualized immigration legal advice and assistance, so that they can present their cases successfully and in a timely manner before immigration authorities. *"[We need] legal support that doesn't leave us on our own, because we're dealing with so much and legal issues are very, very confusing," one interviewee emphasized.*

19 Resiliencia en el exilio: voces que desafían al silencio 2024- 2025 (Resilience in Exile: Voices That Defy Silence, 2024–2025), RELPEX.

2.2.5 Psychosocial Impact and Emotional Strain

Media Outlets

Exiled newsrooms operate under constant pressure and with reduced teams. Being in exile, having colleagues scattered across multiple countries, and, in some cases, facing abandonment or rejection by traditional audiences generate a pervasive negative impact on both personal and collective spheres.

> *"Exile changes the way you see and feel. It means starting over every day with the weight of what you left behind."* - *Exiled Cuban journalist.*

Without institutional support programs or individual and collective self-care practices, emotional exhaustion affects productivity, internal cohesion, and decision-making within exiled media outlets.

Recent research by the Press and Freedom of Expression Institute (Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión, IPLEX), RELPEX and PROLEDI on the mental health of displaced journalists confirm that overload, emotional fatigue, and anxiety are recurring symptoms. RELPEX finds that exile takes "a significant psychological toll," including anxiety, grief, fear for family members who remain at risk, and the economic vulnerability journalists face.[20]

These conditions make it harder to rebuild both professional and personal lives in host countries and deepen feelings of loss and lack of belonging.

A Cuban journalist underscored the need for individualized, one-on-one psychological support rather than online group sessions, which can sometimes generate mistrust due to concerns about surveillance or infiltration. *"On a video call, you never know who is on the other side of the screen," she explained.*

Isolation and the loss of personal and professional support networks have intensified emotional distress, stress, and a sense of uprootedness among journalists in exile. These conditions affect team cohesion and the emotional stability of those working in displaced newsrooms.

Despite these constraints, some newsrooms have begun to incorporate collective care practices: editorial pauses, wellbeing check-ins, or mutual support among colleagues. These strategies, though informal, represent an attempt to build resilience in the face of precarity and the prolonged trauma of exile.

20 Resiliencia en el exilio: voces que desafían al silencio 2024- 2025 (Resilience in Exile: Voices That Defy Silence, 2024–2025), RELPEX

Some newsrooms have, for limited periods, been able to implement wellbeing programs thanks to donor funding that allows budget lines to reimburse the costs of therapeutic activities or other initiatives aimed at supporting journalists' emotional and mental wellbeing.

Independent Journalists

On a personal level, exile is lived as a prolonged process of mourning. *"Exile is not measured in kilometres, but in nights without sleep, wondering whether you made the right decision,"* an interviewed journalist says.

Professional isolation, legal insecurity, and the inability to plan for the future generate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Research indicates that many women journalists experience physical effects related to stress and face economic barriers to accessing psychological care. Those forced to flee also report stress-related physical effects: insomnia, exhaustion, gastritis, or panic attacks. Women report these symptoms more frequently and face greater economic barriers to accessing psychological care.[21]

A Venezuelan journalist wonders how to cope with what she calls "*authoritarian fatigue*," referring to the repressive contexts in countries of origin that create ongoing obstacles and trigger crisis after crisis, while also remaining the primary focus of coverage for exiled newsrooms. *"I call it 'authoritarian fatigue' because there comes a point when you think, 'My God, how much longer can I take this?' We're experiencing it intensely," she said.*

2.2.6 Identity-Related Challenges

Experiences of journalism in exile are deeply shaped by multiple identities and structural inequalities. The impact is not uniform; it varies depending on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, and socioeconomic level.

RELPEX's 2025 report gender parity in its network (50.8% women and 49.2% men), but women show greater continuity within media outlets (61.8% compared to 56.3%). However, this continuity does not imply better conditions: caregiving responsibilities and economic insecurity remain the primary drivers of burnout.

21 La mochila invisible: Desafíos y resiliencias de periodistas centroamericanas en exilio 2025 (The Invisible Backpack: Challenges and Resilience of Central American Women Journalists in Exile, 2025), IPLEX & DW Akademie.

A) Gender Inequalities and Caregiving Overload

Media Outlets

In exiled newsrooms, women face pay gaps, limited recognition, and restricted access to leadership roles. PROLEDI's report[22] notes that although many women journalists sustain the day-to-day functioning of outlets, they rarely occupy formal leadership positions. Work overload, combined with a lack of awareness within outlets of the "double burden" of paid work and domestic responsibilities borne by women journalists, directly affects both their ability to remain in the field and their overall wellbeing.

> *"Women are the ones who end up doing everything: we produce, we edit, we look for funding, and we take care of our families. The day isn't long enough, and it takes a physical and emotional toll."* —*Editor of an exiled Nicaraguan media outlet.*

Exile has also exacerbated pre-existing inequalities: in several outlets, women sustain teams through networks of support and care without equivalent financial recognition. "If women stop, the outlet stops," a Venezuelan journalist summed up.

Independent Journalists

Women journalists working independently face accumulated violence and inequality. *"Exile has a woman's face: we are the ones who care for others, sustain everything, and still try to continue reporting,"* a displaced Nicaraguan journalist says.

IPLEX's report on the impact of women's exile indicates that migratory grief among women involves successive losses (of home, work, and community) compounded by caregiving responsibilities and informal work. This double or triple workload increases the risk of anxiety and emotional exhaustion.

"You have to be strong all the time, because if you break down, no one else will be able to carry on the work you do," a Guatemalan journalist said. This invisible effort sustains the resilience of journalism in exile, but at the cost of women's physical and mental health.

Threats with sexual connotations are common. An Ecuadorian journalist and the director of a Guatemalan media outlet agreed that while male colleagues are insulted for their ideology, women journalists are directly threatened with rape:

22 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano (Displaced Voices: A Mapping of Latin American Journalistic Exile 2018–2024), PROLEDI

"Attacks against feminist journalists are much more aggressive than those against male journalists. Stigmatization is more aggressive and visceral when women journalists are targeted, especially when they openly identify as feminists," said the Guatemalan director.

B) Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Media Outlets

Within media structures, sexual diversity continues to be rendered invisible. Few exiled outlets integrate LGBTIQ+ perspectives into their editorial lines or have internal inclusion policies.

> *"Being part of the LGBTIQ+ community and doing critical journalism doubles the risk. Many times, they will tell you your story doesn't fit, or that your approach is too political."* - *Central American trans journalist.*

Some newsrooms acknowledge that there is still a need to incorporate a queer lens not only in the editorial agenda, but also within the institutional structure.

Despite these gaps, outlets led by LGBTIQ+ journalists have begun to create their own spaces for representation. *"We created a newsletter with an inclusive lens because no one was telling our stories with respect,"* explained a Salvadoran journalist. These initiatives show that inclusion is not only a matter of visibility, but also a strategy of resistance in the face of silencing.

Independent Journalists

For LGBTIQ+ journalists working independently, discrimination takes on new forms. *"When you're a migrant and also part of the LGBTIQ+ community, you must explain who you are and justify why you're here [in the host country]. It's a double barrier,"* a displaced journalist said.

> *"You flee a country where your sexual orientation is a reason for persecution, but in exile you end up hiding again because asylum doesn't protect you from prejudice either."* — Nicaraguan journalist in exile.

Even so, the LGBTIQ+ community has developed its own forms of resistance: virtual support networks, collaborative projects, and safe creative spaces that reframe journalism through identity. These spaces function as symbolic refuges in the face of institutional exclusion.

C) Structural Racism and the Exclusion of Indigenous and Afro-descendant Journalists

Media Outlets

Exiled media outlets tend to replicate centralist or urban dynamics, often excluding Indigenous and Afro-descendant voices. PROLEDI's[23] describes journalism in exile as a form of democratic activism, a means of building historical memory, and a way of coping with grief and uprootedness. However, it does not sufficiently foreground issues related to the plurality of identities and intercultural perspectives. One Indigenous journalist interviewed notes, for example, that exile journalism narratives still need to engage more deeply with processes of land dispossession, resistance, and memory that shape ancestral territories, where key stories are also woven to understand displacement and the reconstruction of meaning in exile.

"Inside the country, national media outlets never gave us space, and in exile it's the same. Stories from the Caribbean only appear when there is violence or disaster." - Indigenous journalist in exile

This exclusion is also reflected in editorial decision-making: Indigenous or community media outlets are often relegated to the category of "local" or "niche" projects, without equitable access to funding or regional visibility. In its report, PROLEDI notes that not all displaced outlets are able to access international cooperation on equal terms, and that support tends to concentrate on those that already have greater administrative capacity.

Independent Journalists

Indigenous and Afro-descendant communicators experience a double loss: that of territory and that of a cultural space of belonging. *"You leave your language, your community, and your radio station behind. In exile, everything feels foreign; you must learn again how to tell stories from somewhere else,"* explained a displaced Indigenous Nicaraguan journalist.

Unequal access to funding, especially for Indigenous or Afro-descendant journalists working independently, perpetuates historical inequalities that continue to marginalize Afro-descendant and Indigenous voices, even within press freedom discourse.

"We are journalists too, but sometimes they see us as if we were part of the story, not the ones telling it." - Indigenous journalist in exile.

23 Voces desplazadas: radiografía del exilio periodístico latinoamericano 2018-2024 (Displaced Voices: A Mapping of Latin American Journalistic Exile 2018–2024), PROLEDI

D) Migration Hierarchies and Nationality

Media Outlets

Several reports consulted for this research note that practicing journalism in another country entails navigating legal, administrative, and accounting processes that often constitute the first barrier for those forced to leave their country of origin. The ability to formalize an outlet—to register it legally, open bank accounts, or access international funds—depends on knowledge of the host country's legal framework and the economic capacity to meet its requirements.

In this context, nationality and migration status directly shape opportunities to establish a media outlet in exile. *"Many colleagues have been waiting for more than a year for a response to their asylum applications. Without papers, you can't open a bank account, rent an office, or receive funds,"* said the director of an outlet whose appointment to apply for asylum is scheduled in 2026.

Independent Journalists

On a personal level, journalists from less visible nationalities face greater invisibility and fewer opportunities to access networks or financial support. Nationality becomes a determining factor in levels of protection and access to employment opportunities. A journalist's nationality can also serve as a basis for discrimination in host countries where certain migrant groups are targets of xenophobia, directly affecting their adaptation and integration. *"Refugee status doesn't protect you from prejudice, or from government-driven xenophobia,"* says a Nicaraguan journalist in exile in Costa Rica. A Salvadoran journalist adds that Nicaraguan colleagues *"have faced xenophobia because of their language and skin color,"* and says he hopes he will not have to go through the same.

Taken together, these experiences show that exile is not a uniform condition, but rather a web of overlapping inequalities. This intersection of violence—based on origin, migration status, socioeconomic level, or ethnicity—creates a state of permanent instability and undermines the right to rebuild a life project.

2.3 Resilience Tactics

It is evident that the challenges facing Latin American media outlets in exile are substantial and require a holistic response. Nonetheless, despite precarity and pressing needs, both media outlets and independent journalists continue to innovate and adapt, reshape their relationships with audiences, and leverage technology to expand their reach and enhance their coverage.

2.3.1 Creativity in Reporting

One of the most notable aspect of this reinvention is the creativity with which outlets compensate for limited access to official information and on-the-ground reporting. Reporting has become increasingly document-based, relying more heavily on triangulation and other verifiable sources of information. An editor at a Cuban outlet explains that, when confronted with officials' refusal to provide comment, her team learned to seek answers in academic research, reports from international organizations, and digital records.

> *"Instead of asking the minister, we look for papers that talk about pollution in Cuban rivers."* - *Cuban journalist in exile.*

Another verification method relies on sources and informants who remain inside the country, although this requires additional security measures. In most countries, a hybrid model persists, with some journalists in exile and others operating inside the country; however, it is increasingly common to maintain complete anonymity for those who remain inside. In some Cuban newsrooms, for example, in-country informants communicate with only one or two editors, while the rest of the team remains unaware of their identities.

In parallel, exile has driven a transformation of both editorial agendas and audiences. A Cuban editor notes that her outlet's coverage has expanded to *"tell the stories of the Cuba that is outside Cuba,"* exploring how migration affects both those who left and those who stayed behind. In many cases, the diaspora has become a new core audience, according to the studies consulted and the people interviewed. *"Cuban outlets that once worked primarily for audiences in Cuba now do so for Cubans living in the United States, and that has enabled them to become sustainable,"* a media specialist explains. In Central America, the specialist adds, a similar strategy has emerged: expanding agendas and regional coverage to attract readers, partnerships, and resources.

2.3.2 Technological Innovation to Attract Audiences

Technological innovation is another pillar of resilience. A Cuban journalist said that their outlet has developed digital mining capabilities to capture conversations and trends inside the island.

> *"We use social media and technological tools, such as artificial intelligence, to extract data from the digital flow and process large volumes of conversations in Facebook, WhatsApp, or Telegram groups."*
> *- Cuban journalist in exile*

In cases where governments have blocked media outlets' websites, organizations have opted to create apps or mirror sites to reach their audiences. Alliances have also emerged to ensure the circulation of information. *"We try to collaborate more with other outlets so the reporting reaches a wider audience,"* says a Venezuelan journalist.

The relationship with audiences has also evolved. Some outlets have opted for direct, secure channels where interaction is less visible. One Cuban outlet implemented a WhatsApp button on its website that routed users to a chatbot now operating on Telegram. *"People perceive it as a one-to-one channel, and that increased engagement,"* the journalist explained. The outlet went from receiving a handful of messages a day to more than one hundred.

Exile has also forced many reporters to learn different ways of practicing journalism. A Nicaraguan journalist said she had to shift from in-person reporting to digital tools. She now uses secure platforms, records interviews, and even edits them on her phone.

> *"Back home, my work was in person, walking with people, recording in the field, and broadcasting on community radio. In exile, I had to learn to use digital tools to keep going. Sometimes communities send me audio messages and tell me, 'Don't quote me by name, but tell the story'. That trust keeps my work alive."* - Nicaraguan journalist in exile.

Technical learning is combined with a narrative shift. Journalists recognize that younger audiences no longer consume traditional media but instead engage with content on social platforms. As a result, investigative reporting is adapted into short, visual formats. *"We want to translate investigative journalism into the language of those who no longer read newspapers,"* says the Salvadoran journalist and outlet director. *"We are developing short videos, explanatory reels, and data visualizations."*

In Nicaragua, a reporter has found a new vehicle for impact on TikTok: *"Sometimes your face talking to the camera works better than a complex edit... People want to see you explain; that goes viral and also generates income."*

In parallel, security measures have evolved as risks have increased. Teams dispersed across several countries coordinate their coverage using rigorous protocols:

> *"We established protected channels, verification routines, and an internal support system that allows us to coordinate without exposing anyone. We almost understand each other through signals."* - Director of a Salvadoran media outlet

2.3.3 Solidarity as a Model of Resilience

Amid uncertainty, many journalists have found collaboration to be a form of resistance. Alliances among exiled media outlets and journalists not only facilitate the sharing of resources, but also foster knowledge exchange and emotional support. *"In networks of exiled Nicaraguan women journalists, we hold each other up,"* one interviewee said.

For a journalist from El Salvador, peer support was key to his adaptation: *"When we arrived in Costa Rica, [exiled] colleagues welcomed us with open arms. They showed us how to process documents, how to find cheaper housing, and even which buses to take."* That solidarity has become part of the fabric of survival.

Not every attempt at collective organizing is successful: some groups fracture due to leadership disputes or disagreements over the distribution of funds. Nevertheless, positive experiences demonstrate that guided, flexible cooperation can be effective. What remains lacking are stable physical spaces for reception and support.

> *"Except for what is being done in Costa Rica with Casa para el Periodismo Libre (House for Free Journalism) in Costa Rica, there really isn't a hub where journalists know they can go. We need to transform this wilderness that exile has become into something with conditions that make us feel protected."* - *Venezuelan journalist in exile*

2.3.4 Sustainability and Support Networks

With advertising markets collapsed, no local revenue base, and international cooperation in crisis, media outlets must reinvent their economic models while sustaining their day-to-day operations. Testimonies reveal a complex transition already underway: from reliance on emergency and core (structural) funding toward the pursuit for mixed, financially self-sustaining models.

> *"Cuba will never be a source of sustainability. What we have left is to develop products that our audience will pay for, whether through donations, memberships, or small contributions."* - Editor of an exiled Cuban media outlet

Along similar lines, other outlets have reactivated service units to generate their own revenue. A Salvadoran editor notes that before exile, a strategic communications agency covered 20% of the outlet's income. Now, from the host country, they are trying to revive that model.

A Venezuelan journalist agrees that hybrid models can be an effective response. She explains that in some cases, outlets reinvent themselves as organizations that, while continuing to produce journalism, also carry out other forms of community-based work, such as citizen listening, dialogue promotion, or workshop facilitation. This diversification allows them to apply for funding streams beyond journalism-specific grants, while remaining aligned with democracy, human rights, and other core values that fit their mission and vision. *"Organizations like ours that aren't very large need those spaces for experimentation,"* she says.

Where a culture of paying for news is limited, digital monetization has emerged as an alternative. *"Our focus is that people read, watch, and share,"* explains a Nicaraguan journalist. *"We don't have a paywall or a membership program; we prefer for consumption to translate into income through monetization."*

Another key factor affecting sustainability, as noted earlier, is legal status. Formalizing outlets in host countries has become a crucial step to access funding, secure legal protection, and remain operational. "Registering as a nonprofit association gave us legitimacy, structure, and a legal framework to keep operating without fear of sanctions," explains the director of a Salvadoran outlet. Others highlight the importance of legal support provided by some networks: *"Legalizing your status in the host country gives you access to funding and protects you from coordinated accusations across regimes."*

Even in its fragility, the ecosystem of journalism in exile in Latin America shows unexpected vitality. The crisis in international cooperation has forced innovation, and precarity has generated resourcefulness.

> *"We joke that one day we'll open a pupusería*[24] *in the morning and do journalism at night, but beyond the joke, that's the reality: diversify or die."* —Director of a Salvadoran media outlet in exile.

2.4 Support to Media in Exile

The continuity of media outlets in exile depends largely on the support of organizations, donors, and international cooperation. The paradox of our times is that today—when that support has become more indispensable than ever—funding is shrinking in a concerning way. Inputs for this section are drawn from interviews with journalists and media workers, and representatives from media support organizations, including a former Internews staff member in Latin America, a representative of the Seattle International Foundation (SIF), and a former member of Free Press Unlimited (FPU). All of these organizations have recently worked in the region, supporting independent and exiled journalism in various ways.

In the words of a specialist and member of a support organization, there is fatigue, *"a burnout of international cooperation. They feel they invest without seeing results (...) instead, they see corrupt or authoritarian [government] structures becoming more entrenched in power, and I think that discourages them."*

In addition, according to a specialist interviewed, international cooperation is in a moment of transition, where some philanthropic organizations have discontinued their journalism programs; in the United States government, many programs supporting human rights and democracy-related projects have been halted; and in Europe there has been a shift toward an approach centered on profitable investment and business. As the director of an international support organization points out: *"as cooperation is reduced or reallocated, some outlets will close."*

In a landscape with fewer resources, it is essential to assess what works (and what does not) in the projects implemented by support networks and donors to assist journalism in exile. It is equally important to have the tools to sustain what is already working, while discontinuing what has proven less effective.

According to those interviewed for this report, effective support to date combines three interrelated layers:

24 A pupusería is a specialized restaurant or stall primarily in El Salvador that serves pupusas –traditional, thick, corn flour tortillas stuffed with fillings.

- Flexible resources oriented toward the organizational core, including people and the structures that sustain media outlets.
- Holistic support at the legal, administrative, and psychosocial levels.
- A sustainability-oriented approach that reduces the chronic dependence of media outlets in exile on international cooperation.

For journalism in exile to continue to exist and flourish, a broader structural scaffolding is also needed, with support networks in host countries and the exchange of lessons learned with other media outlets around the world.

2.4.1 Flexible Financial Support based on Listening

The prevailing view among interviewees is that financial support, particularly emergency funding with few restrictions, has been indispensable to the survival of journalists forced to leave their countries from one day to the next. Even when short term, this type of support is widely viewed in a positive light.

Resources that extend for a year or more to foster sustainability, those that help journalists navigate legal and logistical procedures, and especially those that offer flexibility in how funds can be used are highly valued by beneficiaries. By contrast, support tied to very specific interests—funding that deliberately or subtly imposes agendas or ways of working—tends to generate more negative assessments and often results in projects that collapse once funding ends.

For most interviewees, the starting point of effective support is listening and flexibility. A Nicaraguan journalist asks that *"donors listen first to people on the ground before designing projects."* The director of a Salvadoran outlet adds that *"it's not only about money: it's also about flexibility, trust in outlets, and understanding the specific conditions of exile."*

That listening, participants stress, must be intentional. It cannot be treated as just another item on a checklist before funding is awarded.

> *"Legal insecurity, migration restrictions, the lack of work permits or access to banking, everything makes it harder to implement projects. That's why it's so important for donors to adjust their mechanisms so that support is actually provided to people."* - Salvadoran journalist in exile

One of the Cuban journalists consulted emphasized that two-way communication is essential for funding to have a more immediate impact, particularly with regard to advisory support: *"Sometimes international organizations impose who you should work with or rely on pro bono law firms, which can make the quality of support highly uneven. There needs to be more flexibility, more willingness to listen to the experience of those of us on the ground who know what can work best."*

A specialist from a journalism support organization adds that while donor organizations should better understand each outlet's experience, it is also true that some media leaders need an external perspective: *"I'm not entirely in favor of being completely 'hands off'. You have to consider that there is a lot of stress (...) as intermediaries, we have the luxury of seeing a somewhat broader picture and without the pressure of having a team that depends on me."*

Although most interviewees recognize that resources are increasingly scarce, many agree that three-month support at the onset of exile is insufficient to establish themselves in host countries, particularly in contexts such as the United States, Costa Rica, and Spain, where the cost of living is high and access to housing is limited. At the other end of the spectrum, those who have received one-year fellowships (whether from donor organizations, universities, or other non-journalism entities) describe them as a lifeline that has enabled them to continue practicing journalism.

One interviewee highlighted a program that guarantees half of journalists' salaries in newsrooms operating from exile: *"It's something that changes people's lives, the fact of having stable income, a guaranteed salary, a guaranteed position within an outlet in exile. You have people who might have been writing one piece perhaps every six months, and now they are publishing consistently and contributing again to the public interest through paid work within an outlet."*

Intermediary organizations that receive cooperation funding and distribute it among organizations, also welcome donors' flexibility to redesign projects "on the fly" when necessary, especially in situations as uncertain as exile. However, they warn that this type of project requires *"a more continuous monitoring and a much closer relationship with media outlets."*

2.4.2 Beyond Funding: Other Forms of Support

The mission of donors and support organizations is perceived as providing structural support that can help media outlets survive beyond the financial assistance they offer.

> *"Of course funding is necessary, but I also think working from exile is very different. It's important to reimagine yourself, to rethink what your role is. [It's important] to give them those spaces and that time for reflection."* - *Specialist at a media support organization*

That role also includes creating spaces where alliances and solidarity among media outlets can emerge. Initiatives such as Casa para el Periodismo Libre (House for Free Journalism) in Costa Rica and the Central American Journalists Network were highlighted by many interviewees. These spaces accelerate learning, enable the exchange of lessons from past mistakes, and help reduce isolation. In countries receiving large numbers of exiled journalists, reporters also see value in the creation of formal support networks.

"Cultivating relationships with the local community so that support does not depend solely on international networks, but also on allies on the ground [is key]," says a Cuban journalist. An Ecuadorian journalist underscores the power of mutual recognition: *"It helped me a great deal to realize that what I thought wasn't being understood was, in fact, felt by many more people."*

An Ecuadorian journalist interviewed described the work of the IPLEX in Costa Rica and the support it provided: *"It opened doors for us, connected us with authorities, and helped us cope emotionally and with bureaucracy. Thanks to those networks, adaptation has been more manageable, more humane, and less lonely."*

Deliberately, these networks should make every effort to include outlets from diverse communities, particularly Indigenous media, where not everyone speaks Spanish. *"It is urgent for international funding to include Indigenous and community journalists, not only the large outlets," an Indigenous journalist emphasized.*

For some interviewees, the focus of support should be on the human being (the journalist) before the media outlet. "To support outlets, we first have to ensure that people are doing well," says a specialist from a media support network. Another expert suggests channelling funds through outlets while maintaining a focus on individual support, because "without experienced journalists... these exiled outlets cannot continue their mission."

Exile goes beyond learning how to survive. After the first few months, people must learn to *"open bank accounts, register with the tax authority, access the health system, obtain work permits, or apply for asylum,"* describes the director of a Salvadoran outlet.

Although psychosocial support is not always the most urgent need, most interviewees highlight it as a necessary experience. That said, *"not just any therapy, but professionals who understand the context,"* noted a specialist from a network that supports journalists in exile.

As an alternative approach, a Nicaraguan colleague suggests understanding mental health holistically: not only by providing therapy, but also by offering opportunities to decompress, travel, reconnect with nature, and use convening spaces to provide technical guidance.

2.4.3 Funding for Sustainability

Although journalists who have received funding for specific projects appreciate the boost to their human rights coverage and investigations into corruption and disinformation in their countries, they also recognize the need for more sophisticated and consistent support to achieve sustainability and reduce reliance on international cooperation.

A member of a Cuban outlet summed it up this way: "Sustainability isn't just about content. Support should focus less on editorial production and more on the sustainability of the outlet and the journalist." The director of a Nicaraguan media outlet agrees: *"Fewer generic workshops; more concrete improvements to the machinery [of the media outlet],"* she emphasized.

For the Cuban media worker, LION Publishers' framework should guide the future of this investment. *"Moving from 'project-based' to 'product-based' is essential. Products that, because of their usefulness and impact, generate revenue and contribute to financial sustainability and organizational resilience,"* the journalist and strategist explains.

That transition requires training staff within outlets not only to apply for grants, but also to budget realistically and pay themselves fairly. *"In many cases, colleagues, trying to submit a low bid and secure funding, don't pay themselves, don't account for their own time, underestimate costs, and ultimately end up worse off"*, explains a program coordinator at a media support organization.

To secure that kind of support, outlets must also be aware of donors' and international cooperation's growing interest in supporting networks and collaborative efforts rather than individual outlets. *"Some donors will likely make partnerships a requirement for renewals, so I do think we need to encourage outlets to think along those lines,"* says a member of a media support organization. She suggests that working together could help donors find ways to ease journalists' financial and administrative burdens: *"One idea could be to hire a service provider of this kind to handle administrative procedures for several outlets. It's much better to have someone specialized, particularly if it can be shared across different outlets."*

Another representative of a media support organization also warns that it will take time to see results, and that international cooperation must be mindful of that. *"Business plans, parallel companies, and audience analysis are developed, but in the end, outlets still depend on international cooperation for 70, 80, or even 100 percent of their funding."* He concluded with cautious optimism: *"Even though I have seen an increase, it is still low."*

25 LION (Local Independent Online News) Publishers defines their sustainability framework as the intersection of operational resilience, financial health, and journalistic impact.

2.4.4 Challenges and Barriers for Donors and Implementers

One of the major unresolved questions concerns the realignment of donors (those who hold and allocate funds) and implementing organizations, such as fund administrators or intermediaries between donors and media outlets, in a period characterized by the withdrawal or drastic reduction of public donors, increased pressure on private donors, and the contraction of the funding-and-implementation ecosystem. The following section includes reflections from specialists with extensive experience in this part of the field.

From the donors' perspective, the main challenge is *"limited resources in the face of seemingly infinite demand,"* says a specialist who previously worked at an intermediary organization. Moreover, the current sociopolitical context has made donors targets of criticism and attacks by certain political actors, forcing significant changes in how funds are allocated and what objectives they are expected to achieve.

Donors must also contend with an unmet expectation: that journalism, as a public-interest good, would eventually become less dependent on philanthropy or development assistance, with responsibility for its financing shared with markets and audiences. To date, however, the primary burden continues to fall on donors, the same specialist notes.

From the perspective of media support organizations, the first obstacle is the donor's lack of flexibility regarding whether funds can be used for core funding or structural support for media outlets, one of the main demands raised by exiled media and journalists.

Implementers explain that, in the case of public funding, it is particularly difficult to secure approval for core funding, such as resources for operations or salaries. Public funds come with stricter conditions and are subject to numerous requirements (log frames, indicators, and measurable results) which demand deliverables to be quantifiable. Even private funds, which tend to be more flexible, still entail accountability obligations.

Even when intermediary organizations advocate for, or try to request, fewer requirements, they are often bound by donors' conditions.

Another challenge for media support organizations in the current context is the need to reinvent themselves and demonstrate the value of their work amid declining public funding and increased pressure on private funds. They must anticipate donors' decisions in this evolving landscape and attempt to influence them, while considering the needs they know their counterparts face. Through program design, implementers seek to bridge the gap between donor-defined priorities and the lived realities of media outlets and journalists in exile.

Overall, the major challenge, both for donors and intermediaries, is to make difficult decisions about how to optimize the use of funding in a context of increasingly scarce resources, one interviewee emphasized. Options range from funding fewer counterparts so the money goes further, to fostering clusters and partnerships to use funds more efficiently.

3. PROMISING PRACTICES: EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE RESULTS

3.1 Casa para el Periodismo Libre in Costa Rica

In a regional context marked by forced displacement and labor precarity, *Casa para el Periodismo Libre* (House for Free Journalism) in Costa Rica has become a key space for welcoming exiled journalists.

Promoted by DW Akademie and Costa Rica's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with IPLEX, and established in San José, this initiative combines physical infrastructure with psychosocial support. It offers shared offices, legal advice, and convening spaces that help rebuild both professional and personal networks.

The House also functions as a collaboration lab, where displaced newsrooms and independent journalists produce work together, share technical equipment, and support one another in sustaining journalistic practice. Beyond the physical space, this model provides a powerful symbolic dimension of refuge and dignity, a place where the profession can continue despite uprootedness.

> *"In this space, we feel welcomed, and it was key to consolidating our legal and operational structure in exile."* - Salvadoran media outlet director in exile

3.2 Individual Support Mechanism through Fellowships

A livelihood support program piloted by Internews in Central America between 2023 and 2025 represented an innovative and effective approach to supporting journalists living in exile or forced displacement. Conceived through a human-centred lens, the initiative was grounded in the recognition that uprootedness generates significant economic and emotional pressure, threatening the continuity of journalistic work and, consequently, the survival of media outlets in exile. The underlying premise was that strengthening the living conditions of exiled journalists would directly contribute to the sustainability of the outlets they were part of. Without reporters with experience and deep knowledge of national contexts, these outlets would be unable to continue fulfilling their mission of reporting on their countries of origin.

The program was designed as a direct assistance mechanism for individual freelance journalists, as well as reporters and other members of the operational teams of media outlets in exile. Its implementation involved coordination with the outlets of origin and with journalist protection and advocacy organizations, which acted as case recommenders.

The support scheme included two monthly tiers of financial assistance, determined through a holistic assessment that considered the cost of living in the beneficiary's country of residence, their financial obligations versus their income, and specific personal circumstances, not only their professional role as journalists. The duration of support varied by case (three, six, or twelve months), based on an overall assessment of each applicant's personal, family, and professional situation.

The primary objective was not to increase productivity or condition support on quantifiable outputs (such as producing a set number of stories or attending training sessions), but to enable beneficiaries to maintain continuity in their journalistic work (or other essential roles within media outlets) while minimizing the administrative burden associated with the fellowship (including reporting, accountability requirements or similar obligations).

The organization monitored the program through brief monthly follow-up calls of approximately 30 minutes with each beneficiary. These conversations were oriented more toward providing support than toward control. They allowed the organization to confirm that beneficiaries continued to engage with the journalism ecosystem, while also offering a listening space to identify additional needs and recommend relevant resources, workshops, or professional opportunities. Beneficiaries could also opt to access psychosocial support.

A guiding principle of the program was minimizing re-victimization and maintaining a trust-based approach that respected participants' autonomy. The design drew on the model of unconditional cash transfers in the field of economic development, grounded in the idea that financial support provided without excessive conditions fosters stability, autonomy, and the ability to plan among individuals facing crisis.

The initiative demonstrated high levels of satisfaction and effectiveness. In all supported cases, the assistance enabled journalists to sustain their livelihoods and continue practicing their profession, generating positive impacts at both the individual and institutional levels. The program proved particularly effective in two types of situations:

- **Consolidated outlets** facing the forced departure of key staff members, where the support provided critical flexibility that allowed outlets to retain staff, reorganize internally, and define medium-term sustainability strategies.

- **Small or one-person outlets**, where temporary financial support enabled stabilization, reassessment of working models, and exploration of new funding streams.

The program's design and validation process included consultations with journalists and organizations working with exiled media outlets in the region, ensuring that the approach was non-stigmatizing and responsive to the realities of displacement. Donor approval also required extensive coordination with finance, compliance, security, and monitoring teams, resulting in a rigorous and robust case-by-case evaluation mechanism.

Although this support model was abruptly suspended in early 2025 due to the United States government funding cuts, it remains a relevant and replicable good practice. The experience demonstrates that human-centred interventions—combining flexible financial support with empathetic accompaniment—can significantly strengthen the resilience of the journalism ecosystem in contexts of exile and forced displacement.

3.3 Collective Care Program

Another noteworthy experience has been the implementation of a collective care program aimed at journalists in exile in the region in 2025. This initiative combines support for emotional well-being with the development of practical tools for stress management in leadership communication, and teamwork, particularly in high-pressure, emotionally demanding contexts such as those faced by independent and exiled media outlets in Central America.

The initiative was conceived as a strategy for organizational strengthening and psychosocial sustainability. It is not a therapeutic space in the clinical sense—it does not address personal trauma or explore life experiences in depth—but rather a practical, applied, and action-oriented process. Its purpose is to create conditions for teams to collaborate in healthy, empathetic, and efficient ways, even in environments characterized by tension and limited resources.

The approach includes team-building processes designed to promote mutual understanding and strengthen cohesion among outlets with very diverse profiles, trajectories, and working styles, yet with shared goals. The starting point is the recognition that collaboration does not emerge automatically: it requires intentional spaces for convening and facilitation, where trust, effective communication, and constructive conflict resolution are fostered.

Facilitation is led by a psychologist specialized in organizational dynamics, who conducts sessions aimed at strengthening the soft skills essential for collaboration and leadership in contexts of ongoing crisis. Exercises include personal and professional reflection activities, such as sharing the motivations that led each participant into journalism and their professional trajectories. This exchange helps build a shared foundation of empathy and respect, acting as a buffer against potential misunderstandings or workplace tensions.

The model is grounded in the understanding that media sustainability depends not only on financial or technological resources, but also on care for the people who make up these outlets and on the quality of their workplace relationships. In this sense, it promotes training in emotional regulation, collaborative leadership, nonviolent communication, and the development of protocols for conflict resolution.

The program has shown positive results in terms of cohesion, trust, and a shared sense of purpose among participants. It also offers a replicable model for other media ecosystems in the region, especially in contexts where outlets must learn to work together in order to survive and sustain their journalistic mission amid crisis and limited resources.

Overall, this approach demonstrates that emotional and relational strengthening is a core component of organizational resilience, and that investing in collective well-being not only improves internal dynamics but also enhances journalism teams' capacity to sustain effective, long-term collaboration.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Journalism in exile is a growing phenomenon in Latin America that is unlikely to diminish in the short term, particularly in contexts where democracy has been completely undermined. This report found that media outlets in exile are barely surviving, and that global threats—such as the sustained reduction or complete cessation of international support—will undoubtedly affect their survival. If international cooperation actors, private donors, media support organizations, and media outlets are unable to jointly identify viable solutions, many of these outlets may ultimately disappear.

While the overall landscape may appear bleak, the journalists, editors, and media directors interviewed demonstrate deep passion for their work and an unwavering commitment to their mission, even under conditions of abandonment and uncertainty. The challenge moving forward is to avoid romanticizing the precarity under which journalism in exile is practiced, and, instead, to recognize it as a fundamental pillar of democratic life in Latin America.

One of the main conclusions is the widespread fatigue evident among both media support organizations and the journalists who keep these outlets going. This exhaustion is felt most acutely by those who have been operating in exile for several years, particularly since January 2025, following cuts to international cooperation funding. Many are forced to change professions. Even so, they continue their work and their commitment, but with a greater need for a formula that allows them to keep going with some sense of support and certainty, at least in the medium term.

Funding also shows signs of strain. As the needs of media outlets in exile grow, the funds available to support them are shrinking, driven by drastic shifts in international cooperation priorities, particularly in the USA and across Europe, and by the pressures that private donors and journalism support organizations also face.

This report identifies two broad forms of exile affecting media outlets and journalists in Latin America. The first is indefinite exile, in which journalists or outlets operate outside their countries for an open-ended period, with virtually no possibility of return in the short or medium term unless there is a sudden restoration of democratic guarantees. This applies to cases such as Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela.

The second type is temporary exile, in which journalists and media outlets are forced to leave for a period but are able to return temporarily or permanently under strict precautionary measures, as observed in countries such as Haiti, Guatemala, and Ecuador. At the same time, several countries are exhibiting worrying signs of authoritarian backsliding that could lead to prolonged exile, as is increasingly the case in El Salvador.

Throughout the report, both journalists and media support organizations express a strong sense of urgency around the question of how Latin American media in exile will survive with significantly fewer resources in the coming years. One proposal points to the creation of consortia, collaborative clusters, or regional networks that could help channel and use resources more efficiently. While no consensus-based solution has yet emerged, there is clear interest in exploring longer-term alliances and collaborative structures among media outlets and journalistic initiatives.

Many outlets have not yet become resilient because they are barely surviving, in other words, they are more survivors than resilient actors. Most still cannot pay the salaries their journalists need to live with dignity in their host countries, where the cost of living is often higher than in the country of origin, especially in cases such as Costa Rica, Spain, and the USA.

Supporting the survival of exiled media outlets requires first supporting journalists as individuals. They face a dual challenge: adapting to life as refugees while continuing to practice journalism under far more difficult conditions. For outlets to become sustainable, journalists must have at least a minimum level of stability that enables them to work.

In addition, the lack of refugee status (or any other defined legal migration status) shapes every other aspect of an exiled journalist's life. The same applies to the lack of legal registration for media outlets operating in host countries. These issues represent some of the most significant challenges during the first months of exile, as not all outlets are equally equipped to stabilize their operations and teams during this initial period. In this sense, the most resilient outlets tend to be those with not only greater financial resources, but also stronger networks and a higher capacity to formalize their operations abroad.

A recurring concern raised by interviewees, specialists, and the documents consulted is that practicing journalism in exile is more expensive, more demanding, more complex, and more time-consuming. To dedicate sufficient time to reporting, outlets require support to manage legal, administrative, tax, and related workloads.

One positive finding is that, despite numerous adversities, creative resilience tactics have emerged among Latin American media outlets in exile to sustain and improve coverage and maintain workflows, whether hybrid or fully operated from abroad. One such tactic is content diversification and the expansion of coverage to migrant communities, which are often located in the same countries where these outlets have resettled—for example, Cuban journalists in the United States, or Nicaraguan outlets covering the realities of Nicaraguan migrant communities in Costa Rica. There are also cases of outlets from Central American countries that now report more extensively on regional dynamics, rather than focusing solely on current affairs in their countries of origin.

On the other hand, the mental health of displaced journalists is deeply affected by the cumulative personal and professional pressures they face. All interviewees agreed that psychosocial support is essential; they are grateful for this type of support and asked for it to continue. At the same time, they acknowledged that, in practice, their top priorities are first to meet basic economic and security needs for themselves and their families.

It is also important to note that there is now substantial knowledge within the region regarding digital security for journalists in exile, thanks to years of training and capacity-building efforts. Going forward, security support must become more holistic and individualized, taking into account the specific contexts of journalists and outlets. For example, journalists based in the USA may require guidance related to immigration enforcement risks, while those in Costa Rica may need support addressing growing insecurity and fears linked to attacks on opposition figures.

This report further confirms that within the ecosystem of exiled media outlets, journalists facing intersecting forms of discrimination—based on ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic level—encounter greater barriers. While the efforts of various support organizations to incorporate more inclusive perspectives and actions are acknowledged, interviewees note that additional challenges persist for Indigenous and Afro-descendants, LGBTIQ+ communities, and other groups. They also anticipate that this situation will worsen in the current global political context, in which companies, governments, and organizations have eliminated diversity and inclusion programs or policies. For Indigenous journalists whose native language is not Spanish, for example, accessing the same spaces and opportunities as other journalists remains particularly difficult.

Conversations with exiled journalists and media outlets reveal that they place great value on support networks, both formal and informal. However, even where support structures and established organizations exist, not all journalists are aware of them or fully understand the role these organizations play in connecting outlets and journalists.

A shared conclusion across interviews is that it is unrealistic to expect exiled media outlets to survive, adapt, and continue holding power to account without sustained and coordinated international support. The resilience of these outlets does not emerge spontaneously; it relies on a solid structure that enables them to continue their work outside their original environment. Such a structure includes formalized support networks, the promotion of narratives that recognize their essential role in democracy, and the strengthening of civil society amplifying their impact. It also requires fostering a welcoming environment in host countries, where local media outlets and support organizations recognize exiled journalists as legitimate and necessary actors within the regional information ecosystem.

Ultimately, safeguarding what remains of democracy in the countries driving journalists into exile requires keeping journalism in exile alive. In contexts of disinformation and authoritarian propaganda, journalism becomes one of the last democratic spaces: a means of documenting and denouncing human rights violations, preserving historical memory, and enabling societies to understand themselves beyond imposed official narratives. In countries such as Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela, the closure of independent media outlets in exile would amount to an information blackout. For this reason, interviewees issued an urgent call:

> *"We've done such wonderful things with the smallest amount of money, because we know how to do good journalism, but it is deeply painful that, on top of having your country taken away from you, having democracy taken away from you, you also feel you have no firm ground when it comes to the love of your life, which is journalism. Organizations and journalists like us shouldn't be left alone in countries like ours."* - Venezuelan journalist in exile

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The research team presents below a set of recommendations that synthesize the perspectives shared by media leaders, journalists, and members of networks and media support organizations. These recommendations are intended to prompt reflection and serve as a starting point for a decisive conversation on strengthening the resilience of media outlets operating from exile.

5.1 Recommendations for Media Support Organizations, Networks, and Donors

1. On How to Provide Strategic Support:

- **Strengthen listening capacity to enable informed action**

A deeper understanding of the needs of media outlets in exile, as well as their existing capacities) would help optimize the use of funds and increase the impact of support on the resilience of journalism in exile. Media representatives understand that in many cases funding comes with predefined goals and indicators, and that it is not always possible to adapt projects to their specific needs. However, there is a clear need to prioritize two-way communication and foster a climate of co-creation among donors, support organizations, networks, and media outlets, recognizing that the realities of journalism in exile are highly fluid and constantly evolving.

- **Strike a balance between flexibility in the use of funds and strategic guidance.**

In emergency situations, temporary exile, and longer-term exile alike, the form of financial support that yields the best results, according to most interviewees, is support that comes with few or no restrictions, or at least with broad flexibility to respond to a media outlet's immediate needs. At the same time, guidance and close accompaniment throughout the process are also highly valued. External actors can ease the burden on media leaders and empower them to make more informed decisions. In this sense, support strategies should prioritize close accompaniment over prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approaches.

- **Invest in the sustainability of media outlets in exile as a priority.**

There is a clear need to move away from strictly project-based funding toward approaches centred on products and financially sustainable models that ensure long-term viability. This shift requires closer coordination between cooperation agencies and support organizations to provide training and tailored support focused on developing viable business models and adopting a product-oriented mindset. The region already has well-established experiences in monetization strategies and the creation of parallel business lines that can serve as a reference. The individuals and outlets that have driven these initiatives should be recognized as trainers and fairly compensated for the value of their experience.

- **Content production fellowships are useful, but they must be adapted to the realities of exile.**

Journalism in exile is inherently complex and demanding. Practitioners often face severe time and resource constraints and must supplement their income with other forms of work. While funding that supports reporting on human rights, corruption, or disinformation plays a critical role, it is essential that such programs provide more generous and flexible budgets, as well as longer implementation timelines, that reflect the actual conditions under which exiled outlets operate.

- **Share and disseminate accumulated knowledge within the support ecosystem.**

Support organizations have gathered extensive knowledge through years of work with media outlets in exile across Latin America and beyond. This expertise should be systematically shared and disseminated, highlighting approaches and practices that have proven effective. Doing so would enable replication, incorporate lessons learned, and reinforce a solutions-oriented approach, continuing the same spirit that guided this assessment report, grounded in collective reflection and joint responses.

2. On How to Build Resilience Networks in Host Countries:

- **Create spaces for media alliances to emerge through affinity.**

As international cooperation increasingly focuses on consortiums and networks as primary recipients of support, media outlets are likely to be encouraged to form alliances to access international funding. In this context, support organizations and networks play a key role as facilitators. The experiences of media outlets indicate that the strongest and most lasting alliances are those rooted in genuine affinity and trusted relationships, rather than external mandates. For this reason, creating and sustaining spaces where these connections can emerge organically would contribute significantly to their long-term success and sustainability.

- **Strengthen and formalize existing spaces for journalism in exile.**

In several host countries, such as Costa Rica and Spain, spontaneous networks have emerged based on affinity and necessity, alongside more established initiatives such as the Central American Journalists Network and *Casa para el Periodismo Libre* (House for Free Journalism) in Costa Rica. Formalizing the support these networks provide and replicating their models in other regions would expand their impact and create better conditions for exiled journalists in the countries where they settle. In addition, support organizations could promote "host newsrooms" willing to receive exiled journalists for professional fellowships and knowledge exchange.

- **Continue providing legal and administrative support to help formalize media outlets in the host country.**

A key role of support organizations is to compile basic information on how to legally register in the main host countries and, where possible, to pair it with legal, tax, and administrative advice for media outlets.

- **Facilitate dialogue with host-country authorities.**

Support organizations can help convene formal meetings with host-country authorities to present the main obstacles journalists face in administrative procedures, such as the recognition of professional degrees or the inability to provide documents that are typically required but, in the case of people living in exile, are often impossible to obtain.

- **Promote public awareness and active engagement by audiences and diaspora communities.**

Independent journalism in exile cannot be sustained solely through international cooperation; it also needs recognition and active engagement from audiences, both within countries of origin and among diaspora communities. It is recommended to promote public awareness and communications campaigns in digital environments and transnational networks that strengthen social understanding of the value of free journalism as a public good and as an essential component of democracy. Public support can extend beyond financial contributions: sharing content, following and recommending independent outlets, amplifying their stories, and recognizing their work are concrete ways to reinforce their symbolic and social sustainability. Additionally, leveraging ties with migrant and diaspora communities, can provide strategic support for the circulation of information.

3. On How to Sustain a Human-Centered Approach:

- **Prioritize journalists' survival alongside content production.**

Ensuring journalists' survival is as important as supporting the production of their work. A human-centered approach must focus on the person behind the news and be holistic, incorporating forms of close support that go beyond financial assistance. While psychosocial support has proven valuable, it should be co-designed with media outlets and journalists to develop more effective and context-sensitive methodologies. Where possible, this support should also be extended to family members of exiled journalists, who likewise bear the consequences of displacement.

- **Recognize and support the leadership of women journalists and journalists from Indigenous and Afro-descendant or diverse communities.**

Dedicated efforts are needed to recognize and strengthen the leadership of women journalists as well as journalists from Indigenous, Afro-descendant and other diverse communities. This includes maintaining or creating targeted equity funds to promote leadership development, visibility, and technical training, while ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making and leadership spaces within regional and transnational networks.

- **Strengthen support for freelance and journalists working independently .**

It is especially recommended that organizations allocate a portion of their financial resources to individualized immigration legal advice and close support for journalists who are not affiliated with a specific outlet. This support is essential for journalists to present their cases successfully, in a timely manner, and in accordance with the requirements set by immigration authorities in the host country. Specialized legal assistance not only helps ensure access to regular immigration status—an indispensable condition for personal and professional stability—but also reduces the vulnerability and stress associated with forced displacement, there by strengthening journalists' ability to continue practicing journalism under conditions of safety and dignity.

5.2 Recommendations for Media Outlets in Exile

1. Strengthen strategic relationships with donors and partners .

The sustainability of journalism in exile requires maintaining fluid, transparent, and consistent communication with donors, support organizations, and networks. This extends beyond simply requesting funds: it involves building mutual trust, sharing information on progress and lessons learned, and communicating actual needs. Creating spaces for two-way dialogue enables media outlets to influence emerging cooperation policies and anticipate funding trends. Being receptive to external perspectives and incorporating specialized advice can also open new opportunities for collaboration and increase visibility.

2. Promote knowledge transfer and inclusive practices.

Formalizing mechanisms for exchange among local outlets, exiled journalists, small media organizations, and Indigenous media helps strengthen the collective capacity of the information ecosystem. Inclusion must be intentional, ensuring that Indigenous, Afro-descendant, LGBTIQ+, and women journalists are represented in production processes, leadership roles, and decision-making spaces. Such alliances broaden editorial perspectives and foster more pluralistic, inclusive, and intercultural narratives of exile.

3. Plan for protection and operational continuity in times of crisis.

Journalists still working in authoritarian contexts should prepare for the possibility of forced displacement. Lessons shared by colleagues in exile underscore the importance of establishing basic structures before leaving the country before leaving the country—such as legal powers of attorney, access to financial accounts, secure documentation, and emergency contacts—to ensure continuity and prevent operational disruption.

4. Anticipate emerging trends in international cooperation and sustainability.

Media outlets should closely monitor evolving priorities on international agendas, including countering disinformation, promoting transparency, combating corruption, and supporting environmental sustainability. These thematic areas can provide opportunities to diversify funding sources and reposition exiled journalism within a broader global social-impact framework.

5. Institutionalize holistic security protocols.

Each outlet should develop an internal security plan that integrates digital, physical, legal, and psychosocial protection measures, tailored to its specific context. Protocols should include emergency response pathways, clearly defined roles during crises, and secure communication channels for teams operating both inside and outside the country. Embedding security into an outlet's institutional DNA not only protects its personnel, it also safeguards the continuity of their reporting.

6. Commit to long-term sustainability models.

The challenge for media outlets in exile is not only survival, but also the consolidation of resilient structures. Outlets can explore journalistic products with the potential to achieve financial sustainability—such as documentaries, podcasts, or memory archives—and reconsider their organizational models to include revenue-generating services aligned with their mission. Strengthening administrative and technological capacities is also essential to reduce dependence on short-term funding.

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