

A multitude of trends are converging to undermine the foundations of information integrity globally. AI-powered disinformation, weak laws and regulations and struggling news organisations are just a few of the factors making it ever harder for people to rely on the information they access.

Since the threats to information integrity are varied and complex, there isn't a single fix that will solve everything. What is needed is a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that reflects the complex and highly diverse nature of those threats: an approach based on collective and strategic action by local, regional and global actors with a shared interest in ensuring that everyone can make informed decisions based on access to trustworthy and timely information.

The IMS Information Integrity Solution Papers address a range of key threats to information integrity. The papers do not purport to be silver bullets, individually or together, nor do they claim to be exhaustive. Instead, they propose a variety of experience-based, workable solutions to mitigate some of the most prominent threats to information integrity and to the ability of people everywhere to access the kind of trustworthy and timely information they need in order to shape their own lives.

This paper outlines approaches to developing scalable solutions that promote media freedom and the safety of journalists.

# Information integrity needs safety of journalists and media freedom

## THE PROBLEM

Ensuring journalist safety and media freedom is not simply a human rights issue. It's foundational to maintaining the integrity of public information. When media freedom is violated and journalists are silenced through physical or online assaults and intimidation, lawfare or any other means, the door is opened to unchecked narratives and disinformation.

Fatalities and physical attacks may form the most visible and headline-gripping threats to journalists. But increasingly sophisticated harassment campaigns are equally effective in silencing critical voices. Such campaigns may encompass orchestrated online harassment or smearing or (mis)use of legal, judicial and administrative tools to drain journalists and news organisations of emotional and financial resources. While methods of targeting may differ, the intention does not: obstructing the flow and integrity of critical public information.

Additionally, modern technology enables governments and other actors to reach beyond their borders to intimidate, harass and harm journalists. Transnational repression may target journalists forced into exile or manipulate the work of media and journalists in other countries. When Russian chatbots attack media platforms in Tanzania, it is a stark reminder that while the battle for information integrity may be fought in different national arenas, it must be won globally.

## A COMPREHENSIVE AND STRATEGIC APPROACH

Helmets, press vests and body armour can help safeguard journalists against physical harm. Meanwhile, targeted online persecution, lawfare and the subsequent mental health attacks that victims often experience are more insidious.

Comprehensive attacks, whether offline or online, require an equally comprehensive response. Sustainable safety of journalists and media freedom are best achieved when all key stakeholders work together in a persistent and coordinated manner, locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. For responses to be effective, it is thus essential that those stakeholders are aligned as much as possible in their ambition and approach.

Crucially, this is no theoretical point: on the contrary, it is a well-documented approach that to date has produced 58 national safety mechanisms and 16 national action plans for the safety of journalists globally, according to UNESCO.

The 2012 UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity offers the most effective and productive roadmap available to ensure sustainable safety of journalists and media freedom. It emphasises institutionalised, multi-stakeholder and multi-level approaches to promote the prevention and prosecution of violations against journalists globally as well as locally and the protection of journalists against these violations.

Sustained change occurs when local key stakeholders, including media representatives, judicial bodies, law enforcement and military personnel, are brought together to develop national safety plans and implement safety mechanisms to protect journalists. This is not a quick fix solution, though. Achieving lasting impact requires persistence, determination and long-term commitment by all relevant stakeholders to develop a common understanding and design and implement effective, context-specific measures that enable media and journalists to work safely and freely to provide reliable, fact-based information to the public.

All too often, targeted media outlets and journalists find themselves unprepared and unequipped to react effectively to attacks or crises. Proper support and training equip media outlets and journalists to continue their work by mitigating threats in an effective and timely manner.

## SOLUTIONS

In **Ukraine**, for example, mental health support to media workers has proven to be vital. A survey has shown that due to working and living in constant danger, more than 90 percent of Ukrainian media workers experience burnout and depression symptoms. As a result, many have been forced to leave their profession. Mental health support to individual journalists and newsrooms provided by mental health specialists from the Suspilnist Foundation has helped reduce burnout and depression levels for over 80 percent of the affected media workers who participated in the programme, helping them to continue operating under extremely stressful circumstances.

In conclusion, international and regional stakeholders play an important role in promoting the safety of journalists and media freedom, globally as well as locally. The mentioned UN Plan of Action provides a framework for multilateral organisations and regional interstate actors—such as UN agencies, the Media Freedom Coalition, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe—to assist States in developing national safety mechanisms. This is done most effectively when international actors stay actively engaged and close to the process. Finalised in 2020, the continuous development and implementation of the **Philippine Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists** (PPASJ), coordinated through the PPASJ Multi-Stakeholder Coalition and the Journalist Safety Working Group, has benefitted greatly from the interactive support and committed engagement of a network of local embassies under the Media Freedom Coalition framework.

## ASKS

- State actors and international organisations must recognise that media freedom and the safety of journalists globally are essential to information integrity locally. Supporting the safety of journalists and media freedom abroad should therefore be considered an indispensable part of efforts to secure information integrity at home.
- To achieve sustainable impact, state actors and donors should prioritise long-term support for comprehensive, context-specific, locally led safety interventions instead of short-term, emergency focused, reactive, global interventions.
- All stakeholders, including global tech platforms, must recognise their role, potential and responsibility in ensuring the safety of journalists. Global tech platforms should engage with and support local and global efforts to find operational mitigating solutions for online harassment and violence against journalists on their platforms.

## READ MORE

- [Global Repository of National Safety Mechanisms for Journalists](#)
- [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#)