

GLOBAL MEDIA DEFENCE FUND

report

2020-2024

Published in 2024 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,
7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

© UNESCO 2024

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Cover credit: panuwat phimpha/Shutterstock.com

Graphic design: Aurélia Mazoyer

Printed by UNESCO

Printed in France

CI-2024/WS/1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Background	6
Output 1	10
Calls for Partnerships	15
Output 2	17
Output 3	20
Output 4	23
Crisis Response Mechanism	26
UNESCO Global Priority Africa	28
UNESCO Global Priority Gender Equality	29
Communications and visibility	31
Sustainability	34
Challenges and Risks in Implementation, Remedial Actions	35
Lessons Learnt	37
Way forward	39



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The GMDF since its creation

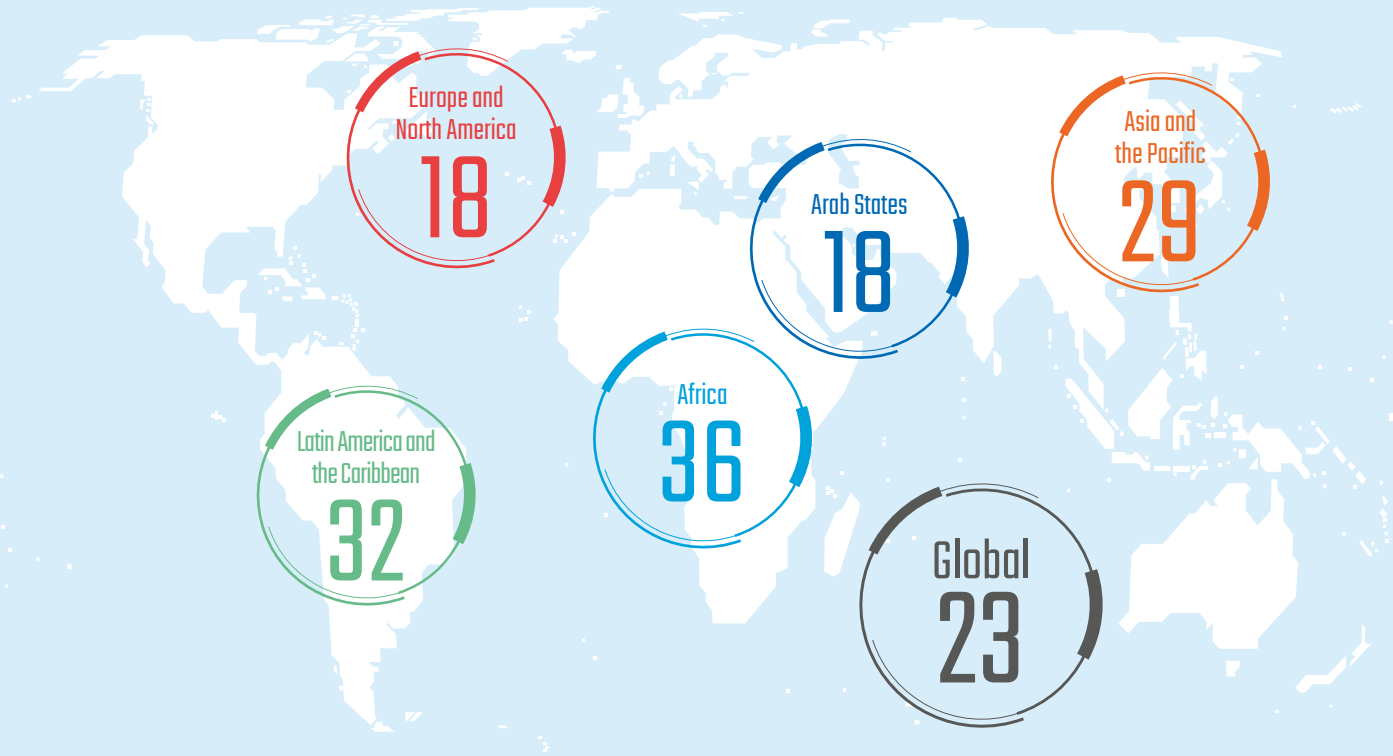
The Global Media Defence Fund is a Multi-Partner Trust Fund administered by UNESCO. Operating under the umbrella of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, it bolsters the defense of journalists.

In the past five years, contributing to its four Outputs, the Fund has supported not-for-profit organisations from all around the globe in the implementation of local, regional, and global projects that seek to bolster journalists' legal protection and/or enhance media freedom through legal assistance, relevant investigative journalism and/or strategic litigation. In particular, it has continuously:





- ▶ Launched four (4) Calls for Partnerships for not-for-profit organisations in the implementation of local, regional, and global projects, and through them selected over 150 projects. These projects are contributing to bolstering journalists' legal protection and/or enhance media freedom through legal assistance, relevant investigative journalism and/or strategic litigation;
- ▶ Activated the Crisis Response Mechanism to provide emergency support to journalists and media in distress in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, and Haiti;
- ▶ Supported the High-Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (HLLP) through a partnership with the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI);
- ▶ Backed the work of the Media Freedom Coalition's Consultative Network;
- ▶ Supported the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression implementing actions related to recommendations from her report "Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression".

5 YEARS IN BRIEF...

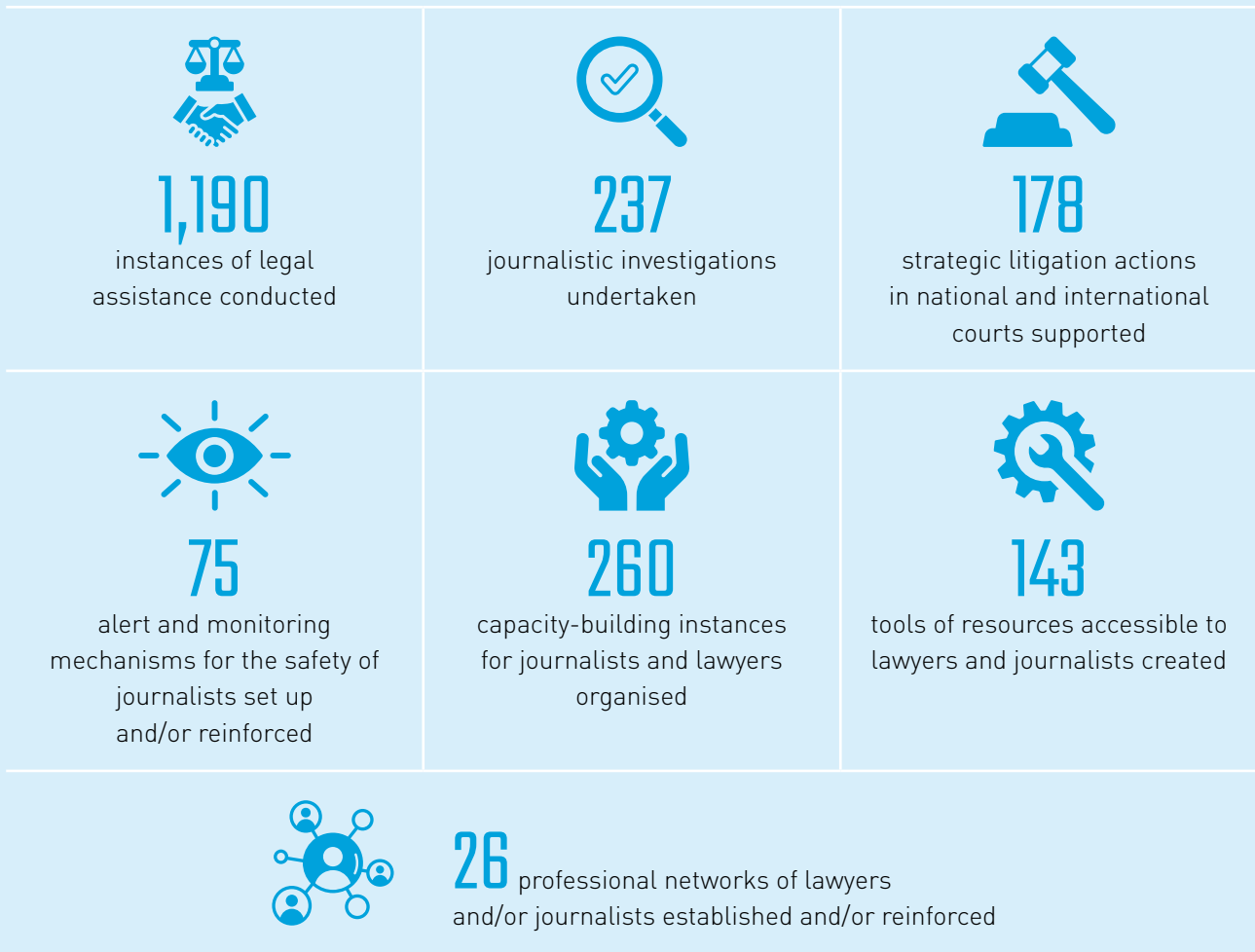
GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE OF PROJECTS



DIRECT BENEFICIARIES

 8,086 journalists, of which 40 % women journalists	 1,415 lawyers, of which almost 25% women lawyers	 318 media organisations	 242 non-governmental organisations
--	---	--	--

IMPACT



SURVEY

On 27 March 2024, UNESCO launched an anonymous survey to gather feedback from its Global Media Defence Fund partners to unveil insights into areas of improvement, to help refine strategies and enhance the impact of the Fund.



BACKGROUND

Context

Media freedom, safety of journalists and freedom of expression are under threat around the globe. Electoral crises, armed conflicts, or environmental issues have significantly aggravated the challenges posed to press freedom and the work of journalists. This, while disinformation and misinformation online and offline proliferate with serious impact on the institutions underpinning democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Polarised political and societal discourse; erosion of trust; impositions of states of emergency and internet shutdowns; crackdown on critical voices and independent media; news desertification due to the collapse of traditional media business models; and tackling hate speech and online harms that disregard international standards, pose new threats to freedom of expression, and media freedom – at a time when the free, independent, and pluralistic press has, more than ever, a pivotal role to play in informing the public.

According to the [UNESCO Observatory on Killed Journalists](#), the number of murdered journalists has steadily increased around the globe over the last decade. Despite the collective efforts deployed under the [UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) – which has succeeded in reducing unresolved cases of killings of journalists – UNESCO condemned the killings of 353 journalists since 2019. In 2023 alone, 72 journalists were killed, and in 2022, 88 journalists. Journalists reporting from crisis- and conflict-zones face severe threats in carrying out their critical work. While from 2017 onwards UNESCO recorded gradual decreases in media workers killed in conflict zones, more recently the trend has been reversed. UNESCO's monitoring in 2023 recorded more than 50% of journalist killings occurred in crisis- and conflict-zones, with continuously high numbers in the first half of 2024.

The trend of widespread impunity for the crimes committed against them persists: roughly 9 out of 10 killings of journalists around the world remain unpunished. These numbers are a reminder of the risks journalists face and the growing fissures in rule of law systems worldwide. This demonstrates states' failure to fulfill their obligations to protect journalists and prevent and prosecute crimes against them.

The nature of the violence against journalists is also changing. The ability of journalists to report the news and bring verified information to the public is being hampered by a wide range of attacks and violations, including threats, harassment, economic pressures, illegal ICT-powered surveillance from both state and non-state actors, [the misuse of the judicial system to attack freedom of expression](#) (e.g. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation against public participation (SLAPPs)), arbitrary detentions, and a lack of access to specialised and gender-sensitive legal assistance. Additional specific contextual threats to journalists have also been identified by UNESCO in the past 5 years. This includes threats to journalists' safety when covering [protests](#), [elections](#), [environmental issues](#).

Women journalists face a multitude of specific risks and dangers because both of their profession and their gender. While women journalists encounter threats to their physical safety – such as assault, sexual assault, rape, and murder – they are also targeted more frequently and more viciously by online abuse and harassment than their male colleagues. A [UNESCO-ICFJ study](#) showed that 73% of surveyed women journalists face online violence, while 30% of them said they self-censor as a result of being targeted by online abuse and violence. Further, abuses against them are often highly sexualized, based not on the content of their work, but on their physical traits, cultural background, or private life.

The safety of journalists and the fight against impunity for crimes committed against them are essential to guaranteeing the fundamental right to freedom of expression, which is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hence the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) was reinforced, repositioned and reaffirmed in 2022 as part of its [10th Anniversary](#). The active engagement of all stakeholders is essential to promote a free, safe, and independent environment for journalists to perform their work without undue interference.

 The Fund has significantly bolstered the operational capacity of the organisation dedicated to safeguarding journalists' rights. Additionally, the Fund's advocacy efforts and investments in technology and infrastructure further fortify the organisation's ability to protect journalists and promote press freedom."

GMDF partner (through anonymized 2024 survey)

Global Media Defence Fund in this context

The Global Media Defence Fund ("GMDF" or "the Fund") is a Multi-Partner Trust Fund developed under the the overall umbrella of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Established in late 2019 with major initial contributions from the United Kingdom and Canada, originally as part of their Global Campaign for Media Freedom, the Fund has the goal of enhancing media freedom and bolstering the access of journalists to specialised and gender-sensitive legal assistance.

The GMDF is administered and implemented by UNESCO, the specialised UN agency responsible for promoting freedom of expression and press freedom, and the global coordinator of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

The launch of the GMDF followed a series of consultations held among relevant stakeholders in the weeks leading up to the first Global Conference for Media Freedom (London, 10-11 July 2019). These consultations identified the need to develop a mechanism to bolster the legal defence of journalists, ensure judicial follow-up and hold perpetrators and relevant authorities accountable for crimes against journalists and the widespread impunity, and foster environments where legal frameworks are conducive to a plural, free and independent media ecosystem. The Fund was thus conceived as a means of addressing these needs by upscaling the work to protect, train, and support media lawyers and journalists around the world. Other outcomes of the same consultation process and Conference led to the creation of the Media Freedom Coalition (MFC) gathering over 50 countries (and to which UNESCO is an Observer), as well as of a High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (HLLP).

Background

The GMDF contributes to a free and safer environment for journalists to undertake their work through four key approaches, or Outputs:

1. Fostering international legal cooperation, as well as the sharing and implementation of good practices to promote the defence of journalists under attack;
2. Reinforcing the operationalisation of national protection mechanisms and peer support networks to ensure journalists' rapid access to specialised legal assistance, bolster their defence and enhance their safety, taking into account the gendered nature of the threats against them;
3. Supporting investigative journalism that contributes to reduced impunity for crimes against journalists, and enhancing the safety of those conducting this line of work;
4. Enhancing structures for fostering strategic litigation in order to protect environments where the legal frameworks are conducive to an independent, free, and pluralistic media ecosystem.

Within the framework of the GMDF, UNESCO supports not-for-profit organisations from all around the globe in the implementation of local, regional, and global projects that seek to bolster journalists' legal protection and/or enhance media freedom through relevant investigative journalism and/or strategic litigation.

 Our experience with UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund highlights its crucial role in promoting journalists' legal safety worldwide. The Fund supports legal aid, safety training, and advocacy, crucial for combating press freedom suppression."

GMDF partner (through anonymized 2024 survey)

As part of the broader programme implemented under the GMDF, the Fund's Steering Committee approved in October 2021 the establishment of a Crisis Response Mechanism (CRM). This to provide time-sensitive emergency support to journalists and media in distress in countries experiencing unforeseen or sudden major crises affecting their media community (e.g. conflict outbreak, revolution, regime change / coup d'état). The aim is to ensure the immediate defence of media workers facing danger or threat as a direct result of their profession, with a focus on women journalists. Additionally, it supports the work of journalists and media outlets working on the ground to continue to safely and professionally report the news and avoid an information vacuum in crisis-affected countries.

The GMDF contributes to UNESCO's Global Priorities Gender Equality and Africa:

- ▶ All partnership proposals seeking funding under the GMDF are required to mainstream gender equality in both project design and implementation, while gender-responsive and/or a gender-transformative proposals are ranked highly and prioritised.
- ▶ Eligible partnerships with organisations based in or targeting one or more African countries are also prioritised.

The GMDF also complements and synergises with actions implemented under UNESCO's regular program and other extra-budgetary funding modalities supporting the Organisation's work on freedom of expression and safety of journalists, such as the Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP), the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), as well as single-donor UNESCO Funds-In-Trust projects.

The GMDF synergises with other relevant activities implemented by UNESCO, including UNESCO's initiative to support the role of security forces and the Judiciary in protecting and ensuring an environment conducive to freedom of expression, the Organization's existing partnerships with judges' and prosecutors' networks and regional courts (including the African Court on Human and People's Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights) and the action of OHCHR on the ground.

The GMDF contributes to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The Fund contributes to achieving SDG target 16.10 (ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms), in particular to the indicators 16.10.1 (safety of journalists) and 16.10.2 (public access to information).

As a Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the GMDF is open to voluntary contributions from donors. All contributions are pooled into a single, special account, and expenditures are not linked to specific donations. This approach contributes to ensuring programmatic coherence, and the reduction of transactional costs, for a greater impact and sustainability of the Fund, while avoiding the fragmentation of activities.

The strategic implementation of the Fund is overseen by a Steering Committee (SC). Permanent members of the SC are those having contributed over \$500k to the Fund (the United Kingdom and Canada since the creation, as well as Germany since November 2022, and France since August 2023), while two positions are filled on an annual, rotational basis by the other donors of the Fund. As of June 2024, the Steering Committee's rotating positions are currently held by Austria (since 2022) and Estonia (since December 2023).

Donors

Since its inception, the GMDF has received generous contributions from the following countries (in alphabetical order): Australia, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The newest additional donor is Lithuania, which joined the GMDF's pool of donors in December 2023. Several donors have pledged additional voluntary contributions to the Fund since 31st May 2023 (Estonia, France, Germany, Lithuania and Slovakia).

Funds were also mobilised from the private sector (Siemens AG) via the German National Commission for UNESCO. Italy provided complementary funding through a single project funds-in trust contributing to the outcomes of the GMDF, with a particular focus in Overseas Development Assistance countries.

These generous pledges multiplied the Fund's resources, allowing for continued and upscaled support.

OUTPUT 1

Foster international legal cooperation, as well as the sharing and implementation of good practices for promoting the defence of journalists under attack, with a triple focus on: ensuring journalists are better able to protect themselves, addressing impunity for attacks against journalists and ensuring journalists are able to access legal assistance.

In brief



At least
35

residence permits annually for journalists at risk from all over the world for continuing their work safely in Estonia



1,400

emergency visas to human rights defenders, including journalists from Media Freedom Coalition states (MFC)



4

advisory reports on best practice systems for states on media freedom by HLLP



5

ad-hoc and in country technical legal assistance provided by HLLP



Over
60

cases of concern submitted to the MFC by the MFC Consultative Network



153

letters sent by OHCHR to Governments on cases of violations of freedom of expression



Launch of 'Freedom of Speech in International Law'
© IBAHRI

Supporting the work of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom (HLLP) through a partnership with the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

The promotion of specialised legal support and the undertaking of advocacy, technical assistance and capacity building initiatives to foster international legal cooperation play a pivotal role in the GMDF's approach to bolster the legal protection of journalists, combat impunity for attacks against journalists, and defend media freedom.

Under this approach, since January 2020, the Fund has supported the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom ("the Panel") through the backing of the work of its Secretariat, managed by the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI). This Panel seeks to provide specialised legal advice and recommendations to prevent and reverse abuses of media freedom, and undertakes advocacy and technical assistance activities to foster international cooperation to implement the rights of journalists and media workers worldwide.

To date, IBAHRI has supported the Panel by:

- ▶ Developing its four Advisory Reports, providing best practice systems for states to enact in the defence of media freedom and journalists namely:
 - [Advice on Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses Against Journalists](#)
 - [Report on Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk](#)
 - [A Pressing Concern: Protecting and promoting press freedom by strengthening consular support to journalists at risk](#)
 - [Report on the Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists](#)

Output 1

All four advisory reports were endorsed by over 80 international legal experts and organisations, including by the present and former Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Opinion and Expression (UN and Inter-American Commission) and every major international NGO working to promote media freedom.

- ▶ Supporting the advocacy and engagement efforts of the HLLP through the development and implementation of tailored advocacy strategies for each published report. To do so, it has developed targeted advocacy with states of the Media Freedom Coalition. These provide a starting point for engagement with states and help build their capacity to determine how to prioritise their work on media freedom and the safety of journalists. So far, the Panel has developed 4 bespoke engagement plans.
- ▶ Furthermore, based on the reports, the IBAHRI supported the HLLP in providing technical legal assistance (ad-hoc and in country) on 5 occasions. One example included providing assistance to the lawmakers drafting the Zimbabwe Media Commission Bill and the Cybersecurity and Data Protection Bill. In addition, the High Level Panel engaged on a bilateral basis with nineteen MFC member states, throughout 2023, to provide targeted legal and policy advice.
- ▶ Supporting the Panel for the publication of six International Standards reports commissioned to international academic and law firm partners. The titles of these International Standards reports are (with some amended vis-à-vis previous GMDF donor's report):
 1. On Religious Freedom and Discontent: Report on International Standards and Blasphemy Laws;
 2. False Speech;
 3. Insulting Speech;
 4. Espionage laws;
 5. Hate speech;
 6. Official Secret laws.
- ▶ Assisted the High Level Panel in the development of background research and recommendations to States on the issue of cyber-targeting and surveillance of journalists. As of the publication of this report, the Whitepaper on the cyber-targeting and surveillance of journalists is ready for launch and the High Level Panel will work closely with MFC member states (including on a bilateral basis) going forward on the uptake of these recommendations and their wider distribution.
- ▶ Providing legal, technical and operational assistance, by amongst other things, coordinating meetings of the Panel, facilitating over 80 meetings among Panel members and other actors (including member states, MFC meetings), and providing input to the MFC Embassy Network's toolkit.

Backing the efforts of the Media Freedom Coalition's Consultative Network

The Consultative Network (CN) of the MFC, created in January 2020, is a group of 22 national, regional and international organisations¹ that in collaboration with a much broader set of civil society groups, voluntarily provides advice to the MFC on the Coalition's work and facilitates selection of cases that it believes require State intervention. Three CN Co-Chairs are elected by members for a term of two years, serving for a maximum of four years. In May 2023, Public Media Alliance replaced IFEX as CN co-Chair, while International Press Institute replaced Article 19 in February 2024. The current co-chairs are International Press Institute, Public Media Alliance and Media Action Nepal.

1 ARTICLE 19, Association of International Broadcasting (AIB), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), DW Akademie Free Press Unlimited (FPU), Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP), Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), IFEX, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Media Support (IMS), International Press Institute (IPI), Internews, Maharat Foundation Lebanon, Media Action Nepal, Media Monitoring Africa, Media Voice, Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), Public Media Alliance (PMA), Reporters sans Frontières (RSF), South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEENPM), Syrian Center for Media Freedom and Expression, WAN-IFRA (World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers).

The key objectives of the Consultative Network (CN) are:

- ▶ To present cases to the MFC for action – both cases of concern in countries where media freedom is at particular risk and cases of individual journalists or media outlets under threat. This includes sharing information on the situation and providing recommendations on what the MFC can do to address it;
- ▶ To offer advice on present and future issues within media freedom and media development, including speaking at MFC events, and channeling suggestions from CSOs, media, journalists' associations, and others to inform the MFC membership;
- ▶ To monitor the work of the coalition and provide inputs on the day-to-day and strategic work of the MFC.

Since the MFC-CN has been supported under the GMDF, it has:

- ▶ Submitted over 60 cases of concern to the Media Freedom Coalition, with 20 of these cases acted on by MFC member states, and 18 resulting in public action. Eight involved private diplomacy and/or trial monitoring².
- ▶ Created strong ties with the MFC's Embassy Network Initiative, by attending meetings and briefing sessions, to encourage greater information sharing and diplomatic coordination at the local level on cases and situations of concern. This has included some key impacts such as in depth briefings for MFC member states on focused topics, including (pending) UN Cybercrime Treaty and situation for journalists in Sudan.
- ▶ Finally, the MFC-CN has participated on a regular basis in MFC led meetings and Conferences, including the MFC Media Development Working Group. It has even created the CN working group on media development to pursue its important role in this group and field.

Since the last reporting period, the MFC-CN has submitted over 8 cases to the MFC- and have held specific discussions with the MFC about specific cases. The MFC-CN has regularly engaged with the MFC and its Secretariat and provided key input for the development of an online platform to report cases of concern.

Supporting the action on the ground of the Office of the High-Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and relevant regional Rapporteurs

The project document of Output 1 contemplates the support of relevant global and regional special mandates, relevant special procedures, and the actions of the Office of the High-Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the ground as a key aspect of the Fund's work to support journalists' protection, their right to legal assistance and the fight against impunity for crimes committed against them. During the reporting period, UNESCO worked with OHCHR's to define the activities to be supported under the GMDF, in synergy with other ongoing joint actions implemented by the two organisations.

A UN to UN agreement was finalised in Spring 2023 with the Fund supporting the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion implementing actions related to recommendations from her report 'Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression'.

Since the implementation of this project in September 2023, the Special Rapporteur sent a total of 153 letters between 8 September 2023 and 20 May 2024 entering into dialogues with Governments about individual cases of violations of freedom of expression, including media freedom and the safety of journalists. Some of the communications sent by the Special Rapporteur have in the past months led to successful outcomes, including the withdrawal of a draft law raising concerns on media freedom; legal proceedings against a cartoonist stopped and the recognition of a Supreme Court that the practice of red-tagging could threaten a person's right to life, liberty or security.

² MFC 2023 Annual Report.

Output 1

OHCHR has also undertaken thematic research which led to substantive inputs, guidance and recommendations in the thematic reports of the Special Rapporteur on the topics of 'journalists in exile' and 'media freedom and elections', which the Special Rapporteur plans to address in her reporting to the Human Rights Council (56th and 59th sessions).

On 2 May 2024, the Special Rapporteur organised a regional multistakeholder consultation on freedom of expression in the context of elections in Latin America. The consultation brought together civil society, journalists, state representatives and international organisations to identify and discuss the main challenges in relation to freedom of expression in the context of elections. The consultation served to provide the Special Rapporteur input for her thematic report to the Human Rights Council in June 2025, which focused on freedom of expression and elections. A gender lens was applied to the consultation and the report, identifying particular challenges for the freedom of expression of women and gender diverse persons.

Finally, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May 2024, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion, together with regional mandates on freedom of expression, launched a Joint Declaration on '[freedom of expression and media freedom in the context of the climate crisis](#)'. The Declaration constitutes an important advocacy tool for civil society and media organisations and provides guidance for states to implement freedom of expression obligations in the context of the climate crisis.

CALLS FOR PARTNERSHIPS

under Outputs 2,3,4

One of the core activities of the Global Media Defence Fund consists in supporting specialised implementation partners in the upscaling and/or operationalisation of local, regional, and international projects. These projects enhance the legal protection of journalists and improve their professionals' access to legal assistance. They also contribute to reducing impunity for the crimes committed against them and protecting environments where legal frameworks are conducive to independent, free and plural media ecosystems.

To support this activity, UNESCO launches annual competitive calls for proposals ("Calls for Partnerships") Since 2019, UNESCO has launched 4 calls for Partnerships, distributing in total USD \$4.8 million:

1st Call for Partnerships

Issued in 2020, the 1st Call for Partnerships pre-selected 44 proposals out of 110 received for a total of USD \$1.3 million in financial grants.

1st Call for Partnerships Preselected Implementing Partners per Region	
Geographic Scope	No.
Global	12
Africa	6
Arab States	4
Asia and the Pacific	8
Europe and North America	5
Latin America and the Caribbean	9

2nd Call for Partnerships

Issued in Spring/Summer 2021, the 2nd Call for Partnerships supported the implementation of 42 projects selected out 140 proposals received, for a total of over USD \$1.3 million in financial grants.

2nd Call for Partnerships Preselected Implementing Partners per Region	
Geographic Scope	No.
Global	3
Africa	12
Arab States	5
Asia and the Pacific	12
Europe and North America	2
Latin America and the Caribbean	8

Calls for Partnerships

3rd Call for Partnerships

Issued in Spring/Summer 2022, the 3rd Call for Partnerships is supporting the implementation of 37 projects selected out of 118 proposals received, for a total of over USD \$1.1 million in financial grants.

3rd Call for Partnerships Preselected Implementing Partners per Region	
Geographic Scope	No.
Global	4
Africa	7
Arab States	7
Asia and the Pacific	3
Europe and North America	6
Latin America and the Caribbean	10

4th Call for Partnerships

Issued in Spring/Summer 2023, the 4th Call for Partnerships is currently supporting the implementation, in 2024 and 2025, of 33 projects selected out 129 proposals received, for a total of over USD \$1.1 million in financial grants³.

4th Call for Partnerships Preselected Implementing Partners per Region	
Geographic Scope	No.
Global	4
Africa	11
Arab States	2
Asia and the Pacific	6
Europe and North America	5
Latin America and the Caribbean	5

³ This current report will provide information on the results of the first three calls for partnerships, as the projects supported under the 4th Call are currently being contracted and implemented. The 2025 report will provide the results of the 4th Call.

OUTPUT 2

Reinforce the operationalisation of national protection mechanisms and peer support networks to ensure journalists' rapid access to legal assistance, bolster their defence and enhance their safety, taking into account the gendered nature of the threats against them.

In brief



82

partners



189

activities



63

countries (excluding global and regional projects)



75

early warning/
alert systems



1,190

legal
assistance



26

networks of
media lawyers



234

capacity building
activities



101

tools or resources



223

advocacy initiatives

Output 2

Since its creation in 2019, the Fund has supported 82 not-for-profit organisations under Output 2⁴. This Output has remained for every call for proposal the most demanded output, demonstrating the need to continue to support journalists rapid access to legal assistance, bolster their defence and enhance their safety, whilst taking into account the gendered nature of the threats against them.

“Tornavoz found us at an important moment in our history. To be given not only financial support but also the direction regarding the proceedings brought me more clarity and made me feel safer. It is known that the challenge of being a journalist is even harder for women. To know we are not alone, and we can count on Tornavoz’s support in this moment strengthens local journalism.”

Mayrla Frazão, Journalist

Overall, the 82 partners supported under the Fund have implemented 189 activities supporting Output 2.

These activities have either been implemented globally, regionally, or locally in 63 countries. The activities covered are wide-ranging and have seen the development of the following impactful actions, reinforcing the legal defence and safety of journalists for:

- ▶ **Developing or reinforcing 75 early warning/alert systems** to monitor the safety of journalists at the national level and document threats and attacks, including with a specific focus on women journalists. Some of these platforms were developed online, and also served to share new legal resources on emerging issues. These initiatives allow to increase the documentation of threats against journalists, and offer safe and secure platforms for journalists to report threats.
- ▶ **Providing 1,190 free instances of legal assistance** to journalists. Legal assistance includes legal vetting, legal advice, legal consultations and counselling, drafting legal complaints, appeals, initiating legal proceedings, and providing gender-sensitive legal representation, to journalists or media organisations facing arrest or detention, lawsuits, threats, attacks, restrictions or judicial pressures for the rightful exercise of their profession. In some instances, complementary to legal issues, partners have been providing counselling sessions to journalists whose mental well-being was affected by the threats received. The threats faced by journalists are varied and have included: SLAPPs, criminal defamation, digital attacks, abusive motions to corrections notices, and issues of physical safety. In some instances, partners reported that the support enabled the creation of free assistance system which did not exist in their country, due to limited budgets and therefore the lack of financial means to pursue legal actions. The successful cases supported by the Fund, contributed to advancing and set jurisprudence for the defence of journalists, including in assessing and acknowledging gender associated risks.
- ▶ **Strengthening protection mechanisms** for journalists by developing legal cells/units, helping to identify cases where journalists have been threatened, attacked or faced any infringement preventing them for doing their job and setting up specialised platforms for access to legal assistance.
- ▶ **Developing peer-to-peer support** amongst relevant civil society groups, NGOs, journalists and media organisations to face future threats related to the journalistic professions and to media freedom. For instance, some initiatives led to the the elaboration of 26 networks of media lawyers, including some officially registered within their respective countries. This process has allowed to reinforce the network and capacity of lawyers to actively defend journalists at risk. The partners have also created informal networks of free legal assistance to review cases. This allows them to share best practices, reinforce their local networks, and

⁴ Organisations can be supported under more than one output.

encourage more lawyers and law firms to put their resources towards *pro bono* issues, especially relating to media freedom. This peer-to-peer support allows the broadening of legal expertise on media law issues in the various countries on both the medium and long term. This in turn enables better representation of journalists or others who face legal difficulties and helps develop stronger media laws on account of coordinated advocacy by the networks.

▶ To complement these actions, partners have:

- **Undertaken 234 capacity building activities⁵**. These capacity building events included workshops on rights for both journalists and lawyers, through familiarisation of international Human Rights Law, local media law, the concepts of protection of sources and whistle-blowers, arbitrary detention, security assessments (about governmental and non-state actor intimidation, digital security), and gender-specific threats. Practical information has been provided to help journalists and lawyers foresee, avoid, or respond to potential legal threats or judicial harassment related to the exercise of journalism. Specific trainings were organised for lawyers providing legal representation. Joint trainings reinforced trust amongst lawyers and journalists, which is key to ensuring a sustainable legal defence system.
- **Published 101 tools and resources⁶** on international standards on freedom of expression, including on how to act when facing legal attacks; best practices and recommendations for protection programs online and offline; tailored information on how to proceed and what to expect when reaching out to national mechanisms for the protection of journalists in place to report threats or attacks. Journalists and lawyers have increased knowledge on their rights and have accessible data to inform future initiatives for the legal defence of journalists.
- **Conducted 223 advocacy initiatives** on current and existing legal challenges journalists are facing, specifically targeted legal cases, to enhance the commitment of public entities to pursuing prosecution for attacks against journalists, to fight against the impunity for crimes against them.

Since May 2023, 10 additional lawyers' networks were created, 271 cases of legal assistance supported, 21 alert and monitoring systems developed and/or reinforced.



➤ **Empowering Women journalists in Brazil with Accessible Legal Support:** During Brazil's 2022 elections, local NGOs Sitawi and Tornavoz ("Gives voice") joined forces to provide crucial legal defence to women journalists unable to afford legal representation.

⁵ These activities can cover more than one output under the Fund.

⁶ Ibid.

OUTPUT 3

Support investigative journalism that contributes to reduced impunity for crimes against journalists; and to enhancing the safety of those conducting this line of work.

In brief



35

partners



66

activities



28

countries
(excluding global and regional projects)



237

journalistic investigations



100

capacity building activities



45

tools or resources




173

advocacy initiatives

Overall, the Fund has supported 35 projects⁷ under Output 3. This output is dedicated to the pursuit of journalistic investigations on specific cases of crimes against journalists, drawing awareness or pursuing investigative work that risks being terminated or censored when journalists are attacked, threatened, imprisoned, or murdered, and/or enhance the safety of those conducting investigative journalism.

In the first Call for Partnerships, this Output was the second most selected (19%). In the second Call, 11 partners had at least one activity under Output 3 (26% of the selected organisations), and in the third call, 37% of the activities of the partners selected contributed to Output 3. This increase demonstrates that investigative journalism remains an important priority to shed light on the crimes committed against journalists, which in turn should raise awareness and in certain cases reduce impunity for these crimes, enhancing the safety of journalists and media organisations.

 With its [the Fund] assistance, we've successfully elevated the investigative journalism skills of our members. Through Investigative Journalism Project we were able to equip reporters from both public broadcasting institutions and private news organisations across the Asia-Pacific region."

GMDF Partner from the Asia-Pacific region

These projects were implemented globally, regionally or locally in 28 countries.

Overall, the 35 partners supported under the Fund implemented 66 activities under Output 3.

In the past 5 years, **237 journalistic investigations** were pursued, including on:

- ▶ The monitoring and documentation of violences conducted against journalists
- ▶ Specific cases of journalists that were threatened, attacked or killed. This includes illegal detentions, arbitrary disappearances and others.
- ▶ Cases of censorship when journalists were attacked, imprisoned, or murdered. These were widely disseminated, contributing to reduced impunity for crimes against journalists.
- ▶ Shedding light on online- and offline harassment against women journalists and their lack of access to justice.
- ▶ On journalists working on disinformation and how as a result they are threatened, jailed and in extreme cases killed, demonstrating how disinformation threatens press freedom and can lead to the killing of journalists.
- ▶ On the impact of SLAPPs on journalists and how this hinders freedom of expression.

Where possible and considering the do-no-harm principle, most of these investigations were:

- ▶ **Followed by 173 advocacy initiatives⁸** calling for reduced impunity for crimes against journalists. Statements were prepared, published, and disseminated related to incidents and situations identified as threatening for journalists and their safety. These requested actions from relevant authorities in the targeted regions to pursue investigations or prosecution for attacks against journalists and hold perpetrators accountable, thus ensuring judicial follow-up and holding authorities accountable in relation to these cases.

⁷ Please note that one project can cover more than one Output.

⁸ These activities can cover more than one Output under the Fund

Output 3

- ▶ **Complemented by 100 capacity building events**⁹. These included trainings on how to conduct investigations related to violence and crimes against journalists and cases of impunity. The trainings were of paramount importance as they strengthened the capacities of journalists interested in the field by reviewing the concepts, genres, and ethics of investigative journalism, and providing them with tools to fight against disinformation and misinformation. Other trainings were conducted on physical, digital, psycho-emotional training, including on how to proceed when being aggressed.

This Output has directly supported journalists on the ground to carry out research in their countries and amplify their work, while also following up on cases of impunity. In addition, it has ensured the on-going monitoring and documentation of such violations through the creation of alert mechanisms, enhancing the data gathering on these. Finally, it has fostered collaboration among journalists to make the work of silenced reporters visible and impactful, and to make sure that a maximum number of people have access to independent information on these crucial topics.

Since the last reporting period, 20 partners have conducted 138 investigations.



Andrzej Lisowski Travel/Shutterstock.com

- **Investigative journalism:** Unveiling the threats to journalists in Arab States - The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) worked with journalists in the Middle East and Northern Africa to investigate various violations affecting the safety of journalists and their ability to do their work.

9 Ibid

OUTPUT 4

Enhance structures for fostering strategic litigation in order to protect environments where the legal frameworks are conducive to an independent, free, and pluralistic media ecosystem.

In brief



42

partners



50

activities



31

countries
(excluding global and regional projects)



178

strategic litigation
actions



73

capacity building
activities



52

tools or
resources



193
advocacy initiatives

Output 4


Under Output 4, the GMDf has supported 42 projects¹⁰ that seek to enhance structures for fostering strategic litigation in order to protect environments where the legal frameworks are conducive to an independent, free, and pluralistic media ecosystem.

In the first Call for Partnerships, 12 partners had at least one of their activities under Output 4. In the second Call, 18 partners had activities under this Output, and in the third Call 12 partners held activities under Output 4. These projects were implemented globally, regionally or locally in 31 countries.

Overall the 42 projects supported under the fund implemented over 50 activities under Output 4.

Since its creation, the partners have initiated **178 strategic litigation actions**. These actions covered:

- ▶ Cases submitted to the European Court of Human Rights regarding the defence of journalists arrested while protesting, the issue of censorship, unlawful detentions and convictions of journalists in violation of their rights to a fair trial, freedom of expression, personal safety and liberty, and restriction of rights, and for ill-treatment in detention.
- ▶ UN special procedures communications' mechanisms to intervene in cases of violence against journalists, with a particular focus on women journalists; and promoting the alignment of national legislation and protection mechanisms to international human rights standards.
- ▶ Litigations undertaken in national Constitutional courts, including in the area of internet shutdowns, internet access, censorship, attacks and arbitrary arrests of journalists, and challenges of repressive laws that arbitrarily and disproportionately target journalists, including defamation laws and others that go beyond the limitations guaranteed in the national constitutions.
- ▶ Litigation petitions submitted in High courts challenging the vires of enactments and rules impacting the freedom of expression of journalists, to the Inter American Court of Human Rights.
- ▶ Complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee regarding defamation laws and SLAPPs.
- ▶ Urgent appeals to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions for cases of journalists arbitrarily detained.
- ▶ Cases submitted to ECOWAS Court of Justice on the violation of the rights of journalists and other media workers, attacks and arbitrary arrests of journalists.
- ▶ Sending letters of interventions, alerts and information notes to ensure sustained pressure and continued public commitment to the submitted litigation cases.
- ▶ *Amicus curiae* in national Constitutional courts, the Inter American Court of Human Rights, concerning cases of attack against journalists, in constitutional reviews of law threatening free speech, on criminal defamation.

 We are very proud of our Legal Unit. The Constitutional Court has given two very important decisions about the probation measures, which are unfortunately used extensively against journalists and others using their right to freedom of expression. These are very rare rulings, and they also set a precedent.”

Barış Altıntaş, Co-Director of MLSA

¹⁰ Please note that one project can cover more than one output.



These strategic litigation actions help to bring national laws and practices in line with international standards on freedom of expression and safety of journalists, build jurisprudence on international standards, and strengthen the accountability of governments to ensure the protection of journalists. Some partners flagged that certain cases might be lost in lower courts to allow all national remedies to be exhausted, leading to the action of bringing these cases in some situations to higher or international courts.

To complement these strategic litigations **73 capacity building** events for lawyers and journalists were undertaken with the objective to enhance their understanding on the subjects such as democracy and freedom of expression. They also covered State's obligations vis-à-vis international standards of freedom of expression and right to information, constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and information, culture of impunity of crimes against journalists and its impact on journalistic freedom. Specific capacity building sessions resulted in publications on, i.e. how to effectively and strategically engage with UN Special Procedures communications mechanisms, or a Practice Guide for Using Strategic Litigation to Enforce the Right to Information and Media Freedom.

Since the last reporting period, 51 strategic litigation cases have been pursued on the topics of: SLAPPs, Internet shutdowns and government-imposed censorship, repressive laws that arbitrarily and disproportionately target journalists, with a view to advance jurisprudence on international standards on freedom of expression, as well as, specific impact on women journalists.

CRISIS RESPONSE MECHANISM

In brief

In Ukraine: nearly

→ 2000

journalists supported through capacity-building and trainings

In Afghanistan:

→ 497

journalists have been trained on physical and psychological safety, conflict sensitive reporting and journalism best practices, out of which 30% were women journalists

In Sudan: Over

→ 80

journalists and media workers received financial grants, relocation support meeting their most urgent needs and allowing them to continue their jobs

In Haiti:

→ 60

journalists received security trainings; and 30 Personal Protective Equipment sets distributed

In October 2021, following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, realizing the urge to respond quicker to crises, and following a detailed concept proposal by UNESCO, the GMDF Steering Committee approved the establishment of a Crisis Response Mechanism (CRM). The aim is to allow the Fund to quickly provide support to journalists and media in distress in countries experiencing unforeseen or sudden major crises affecting media community (e.g. conflict outbreak, revolution, regime change / coup d'état).

Actions targeted by the CRM include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ initiatives aimed at supporting journalists' immediate safety in times of extreme crisis (including basic living support, assistance in the submission of application for asylum in neighboring countries, and safe houses for journalists at risk);
- ▶ security trainings for journalists (online and offline);
- ▶ the provision of emergency legal assistance where functional and impartial justice systems exist;
- ▶ support to investigative journalism on the ground to denounce violations against journalists and media;
- ▶ support to journalists inside and outside the crisis, including "exile media" to start working again and continue reporting on the crisis.

“ This programme has become a beacon of hope, a lifeline during the darkest times. It is a sanctuary where we can work without fear. It provides a conducive environment for work and study. Basic amenities like internet allow me to stay connected, it also gives me the peace to introspect, regroup and rethink my future.”

Freelance journalist from Khartoum, Sudan

The CRM allows for a quick response to requests for funding in the context of time-sensitive and unpredictable situations having an impact on media freedom, defined as emergencies by the resolutions of the UN Security Council or other relevant UN instances (i.e. the UNESCO Executive Board) and which do not allow to wait for the cycle of GMDF Calls for Partnerships.

Since its creation, the CRM has helped implement initiatives to provide emergency assistance to journalists, in partnership with UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and the Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP), in **Afghanistan, Haiti, Sudan and Ukraine**, resulting in the following:

In Ukraine¹¹:

- ▶ Nearly **2000** journalists supported through capacity-building and trainings;
- ▶ Over **90** journalists trained on documenting and investigating crimes against journalists;
- ▶ Establishment of a searchable news resource to foster collaborative investigations and;
- ▶ Launch of a digital course covering psychological, digital and physical safety, “For the Record – How to Document Stories from a war zone” with over **100** journalists trained;

In Afghanistan:

- ▶ **497** journalists have been trained on physical and psychological safety, conflict sensitive reporting and journalism best practices, out of which over 30% were women journalists;
- ▶ Over **90** women journalists have received emergency financial grants;
- ▶ Over **35** women media workers have secured employment in media houses.

In Sudan:

- ▶ **Over 80** Sudanese journalists and media workers received financial grants, relocation support meeting their most urgent needs and allowing them to continue their jobs;
- ▶ Provided **220** individual psychological support sessions to journalists;
- ▶ **1** in-depth needs assessment of journalists.

In Haiti:

- ▶ **60** journalists received security trainings;
- ▶ **1** survey conducted on the threats journalists are facing, to inform future programmes;
- ▶ **30** sets of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) distributed to journalists.

Since the last reporting period, the Crisis Response Mechanism has continued supporting the projects currently being implemented in Afghanistan, Haiti, Sudan and Ukraine.

11 These activities were co-funded by the MDP, IPDC and the Japanese Funds-in-Trusts and complementary to the safe spaces initiative spearheaded by IPDC.

UNESCO GLOBAL PRIORITY AFRICA

In brief



36

partners
in Africa



In
21

countries



20%

of the projects supported
by the Fund

Since 2014, one of UNESCO's two global priorities is Global Priority Africa, in response to Africa's current development challenges. The goal is to release the full potential for the development of the continent. UNESCO, as per its Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2029) remains committed to supporting African States, the African Union and regional communities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and the goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Since its creation, the Fund has supported a total of 36 projects in Africa¹². This represents approximately one third of the projects supported by the Fund.

In the last (fourth) call for Partnerships, the Global Media Defence Fund pursued momentum, with a significant 57% increase in partnerships in Africa from the prior year.

“ Thanks to the monitoring of the aggressions against the journalists [...], and in particular against women journalists [...], we remain a center of reference for the defence of women journalists and human rights defenders threatened or attacked for their work in the territory of Beni, Lubero, as well as in the cities of Butembo and Beni.”

Rose Kahambu Tuombeane, founding member of the Collectif des Femmes Journalistes

¹² This doesn't include the global or regional projects.

UNESCO GLOBAL PRIORITY GENDER EQUALITY

In brief



3,021

women journalists
supported i.e.

40 %

of all journalists supported
under the Fund



310

women lawyers, almost

25%

of all lawyers supported
under the Fund



15%

of the projects specifically
focused
on women journalists

In line with UNESCO's Global Priority Gender Equality, the organisation is committed to making a positive and lasting contribution to women's empowerment and the promotion of equality between women and men across the Organization's mandate. The GMDF is implementing gender-responsive and gender-transformative good practices and prioritizes actions that give particular attention to the specific threats against the safety of women journalists online and offline (gender-specific risks), and which enhance the capacities of women journalists, news rooms and media organisations to protect them against and deal with harassment and violence.

As part of this approach, all partnership proposals seeking funding under the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Calls for Partnerships mainstreamed gender throughout the development and implementation of the action they propose, in accordance with a gender-responsive¹³ and/or a gender-transformative approach¹⁴. As such, partnership proposals that failed to mainstream gender were not preselected, as Gender Equality constituted a condition for eligibility, while those that had a gender transformative approach were prioritised.

¹³ A gender-responsive approach requires for the implementation strategy of the action to include evidence-based gender analysis identifying and acknowledging the existing differences and inequalities between women and men, including inequalities in participation rates and in deriving benefits. The action should identify specific mechanisms or activities that would help bring about help in the desired direction (targeting and benefiting a specific group of women and men to achieve the goal of the action), addressing the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of women and men.

¹⁴ A gender-transformative approach implements actions to address underlying causes of gender inequalities. The implementation strategy of the action must include evidence-based gender analysis not only identifying and acknowledging the existing differences and inequalities between women and men, but also the underlying causes and factors of systemic character producing or influencing these differences and inequalities. In addition of identifying mechanisms or activities that will (i) address the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of women and men, the action must (ii) challenge existing discriminatory policies and practices and influence radical change in social, economic, and political contexts supporting or influencing such policies and practices.

“ This decision recognises that online violence is a phenomenon that increasingly affects the privacy and security of women journalists, setting an important precedent for addressing the differential impact of online violence on women journalists within the political exercise that currently jeopardises women’s participation in the public sphere and democratic life.”

Diana Santos, Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa

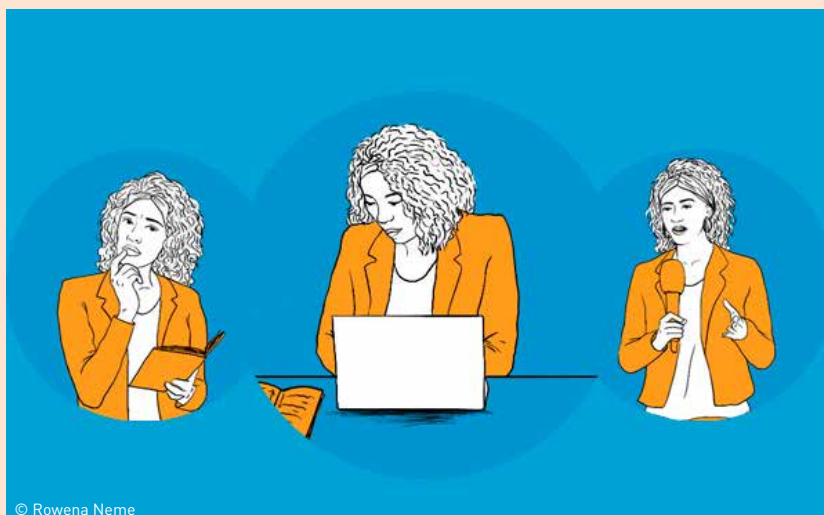
This approach was in line with UNESCO/GMDF’s strategy to further advance gender equality since the 2020 Call, where candidate partners were required to demonstrate how they would ensure gender sensitivity throughout the inception and implementation of the projects they proposed. All Implementation Partners Agreements formalized with partners preselected out of the second and third Calls included a reinforced Gender Equality clause.

Since its creation, the Fund has supported¹⁵:

- ▶ 3,021 women journalists, representing almost 40% of all journalists supported under the Fund;
- ▶ 310 women lawyers, almost a quarter of all lawyers supported under the Fund.

Since the second Call for Partnerships, over 15% of the projects focused specifically on women journalists.

➤ **Gender-Based Violence Against Women Journalists Recognised in Colombian Courts:** Over the past two years, la Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (Foundation for Press Freedom, FLIP) in Colombia, supported by the Global Media Defence Fund, has undertaken legal initiatives to counter gender-based violence targeting women journalists.



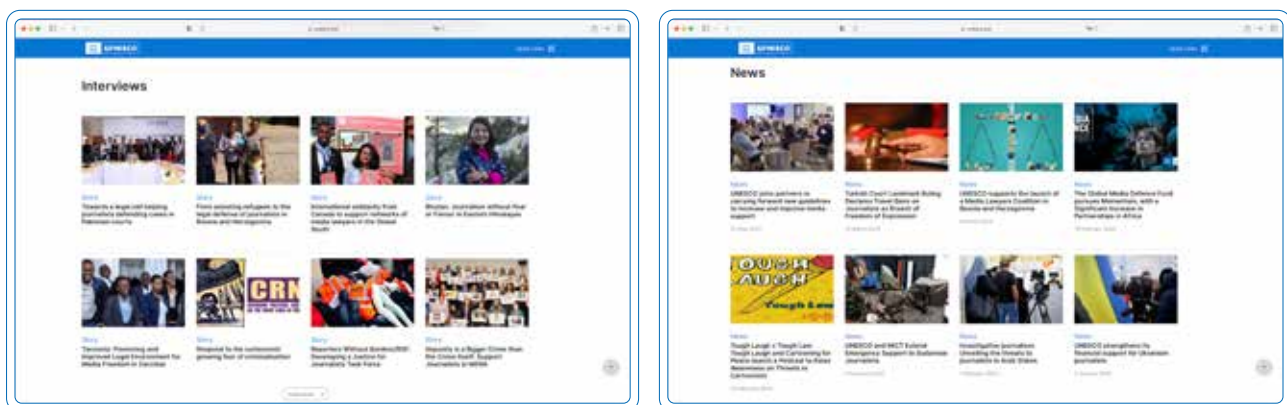
¹⁵ Please note that partners have not always systematically disaggregated data per gender.

COMMUNICATIONS AND VISIBILITY

UNESCO considers visibility as a key aspect for a successful implementation of the Global Media Defence Fund – not only as a means of reaching out to potential beneficiaries, but also to ensure local ownership and enhancing the long-term impact of the actions implemented under the programme. To guarantee this, the GMDF developed a thorough communication plan.

GMDF on the Web

At its inception, the UNESCO Secretariat worked on the production of a area to be dedicated to the GMDF on its website. A visual identity for the GMDF was also developed (with a UNESCO/GMDF logo available in all six official UNESCO languages). On this website, engaging content was published through an approach based on a series of 12 interviews and 30 success stories from the Fund. Impact stories are regularly published through the [GMDF's webpage](#). These stories are also disseminated to relevant networks, including through the bimonthly Newsletter of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which reaches over 7,000 subscribers; and through the Media Freedom Coalition newsletter. A promotional video and a number of short animated clips were produced in 2020. A 12-page informational brochure and a leaflet specifically targeting potential donors were also created in 2020 and are updated every year.



In order to ensure the visibility of the projects implemented under the GMDF, the terms of reference of the Call for Partnerships systematically request for candidate partners to allocate a percentage (ideally 5%) of the total grants to communication and visibility activities. News are also regularly disseminated by partners through their own online platforms and social media.

Calls for Partnerships

UNESCO designed a specific visual identity and campaign for all GMDF Call for Partnerships, which included dissemination to networks and partners and posts throughout UNESCO's (and some of the GMDF donors') social media channels, with messages and communication materials available in English, French and Spanish. The Spanish versions were developed for the third Call for Partnerships, to increase the dissemination of the Call.

Communications and visibility

In some cases, UNESCO has used commemorative dates to increase the visibility of the Fund’s Calls, such as for the launch of the second Call for Proposal during 2022 World Press Freedom Day Global Conference, which was held in Punta Del Este (Uruguay) between 2-5 May 2022. On the occasion of the closing plenary the head of the Canadian Delegation to the Conference, in the double capacity of funding donor as well as co-chair of the MFC, announced the opening of the 3rd Call. The Conference brought together more than a thousand participants in-person and an additional 3000 online.



Following a study launched by UNESCO on the violence against environmental, the Global Media Defence Fund has been identified as having the possibility to play an important role for addressing the gap and reinforce the legal defence of environmental reporters. On the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day 2024, UNESCO’s Director-General launched a Global Roadmap to Address Climate Disinformation, which would include a thematic Call for Partnerships with a particular focus on supporting projects that bolster the legal defence of environmental journalists and/or media organisations, as well support investigations connected to cases of impunity and violence against environmental journalists.

With its multi-stakeholder approach, and with organisations and journalists from all across the world participating, these two events served as a platform to launch the Call and raise awareness for the work of the Global Media Defence Fund.

Conferences



13th Global Conference on Investigative Journalism, Gothenburg, Sweden

Since its creation, the GMDF has gained important visibility at various conferences. The most notable ones are:

The third Global Conference on Media Freedom hosted in Tallin in 2021. UNESCO organised the event “Showcasing the Global Media Defence Fund”, which brought together beneficiaries from the first and second Call for Partnerships from countries such as the Philippines, Brazil, the United Kingdom and Nigeria, to highlight the achievements of the work of the GMDF on the ground. The event was opened by Mr. Tawfik Jelassi, the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, and was attended in in person and online by over hundred representatives from the donors, the MFC’s delegates as well as the GMDF partners and saw a renewed commitment to the work of the GMDF. The event also served as an opportunity to exchange with some

of the GMDF partners to learn more about the needs they have identified on the ground and that the Fund has helped tackle, as well as about the lessons learned, the challenges they have faced, their recommendations on how to enhance the impact of the GMDF, while calling on existing and potential donors to pledge voluntary contributions to the Fund.

On 3 and 4 November 2022, the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of Austria in cooperation with UNESCO and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) held the conference “Safety of Journalists: Protecting media to protect democracy”, to mark the 10th anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in Vienna. Throughout this conference, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Italy, Germany made pledges to support the Global Media Defence Fund. It was also referred to, with specific mention to the Crisis Response Mechanism, in discussions on journalists at risk in Ukraine and Afghanistan.

Since the last reporting period, the GMDF backed the largest-ever Investigative Journalism gathering at the 13th Global Conference on Investigative Journalism which took place on 19-22 September 2023 in Gothenburg, Sweden. with UNESCO’s Global Media Defence Fund among its thirty partners and sponsors. The event counted 2000 participants from 140 countries, underscoring the vitality of the investigative journalism community. During the conference in Gothenburg, UNESCO held its first in-person, closed roundtable among partners of the Global Media Defence Fund, with a specific emphasis on supporting investigative journalism that addresses the issue of impunity for crimes against journalists. Partner organisations showcased their accomplishments and recounted their experiences, as well as the challenges and best practices they have encountered in the field of investigative journalism in different regions. The session served as a valuable platform to discuss successful strategies and techniques for overcoming obstacles faced during investigative work. It also aimed to offer recommendations on how the Global Media Defence Fund can better implement its objective to support investigative journalism that contributes to the reduction of impunity for crimes against journalists while enhancing the safety of those engaged in this crucial work.

The GMDF was also put in the limelight at the high level session ‘Media Freedom as a Catalyst of Open Government, Dialogue, and Accountability’ during the Open Government Partnership Global Summit in Tallinn, Estonia (6 September 2023). This session, supported by UNESCO and co-organised by The Media Freedom Coalition Secretariat and Open Government Partners, underlined the intertwined nature of these fundamental principles. The session highlighted how open government reforms can empower journalists and media organisations to fulfill their essential roles. They cited numerous examples, often supported by the Global Media Defence Fund.



Finally, the GMDF was also showcased at the 13th Annual PALU Conference 2023, bringing together non-profit organisations, journalists, media organisations, including from Africa.

SUSTAINABILITY

UNESCO has since its creation undertaken the administration of the GMDF with the view of ensuring the sustainability of the actions supported under the Programme beyond the initial implementation period and to maximise results.

Projects supported under the Fund have been specifically tailored to the needs of each context and designed to involve national duty bearers and right holders every step of the way. Actions in the Workplan are planned and implemented in complementarity and synergy with other initiatives implemented by the GMDF partners, UNESCO, and relevant local, regional and international actors.

The flexibility given by the resort to Implementation Partners Agreements (IPA) enabled the adjustment or reprogramming of project activities as needed, thereby responding to delays or to the evolution of the local socio-political context, as well as to potential (and sometimes, unexpected) opportunities arising from project implementation. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine disrupted what planned pre-war with a selected Ukrainian partner. Lockdown measures adopted as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, affected the timely completion of an in-person event for media lawyers and journalists in the country, key to the local ownership and future sustainability of the action.

As the sustainability and exit strategies vary in consideration of each of the projects and activities undertaken by UNESCO and its implementation partners, all partnership proposals submitted since the 2nd Call for Partnerships were required to go beyond the level of activities and seek long-term, sustainable change – making sustainability potential one of the key criteria for the assessment and evaluation of the partnership proposals. All candidate partners were required to describe how their project will be sustained in the long term, specifying the different aspects in which the projects have to be sustained in the long run to sustain its impact. In addition to the above, a specific, updated clause related to sustainability was included in the Implementation Partners Agreements formalised within the framework since the second Call for Partnerships, committing partners to employ their best efforts to ensure that the results and impact of their action are sustained beyond the closure of the period funded by the GMDF.

Since the creation of the Fund, UNESCO has been ensuring that the implementation of the GMDF is synergised and/or complemented with other initiatives implemented by the Organization and its implementing partners, including vis-à-vis the UNESCO Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists. The support given to partners providing pro bono legal assistance to journalists in need of legal protection, or to those conducting trainings for media lawyers to strengthen their capacity to defend journalists before relevant administrative institutions and courts of law, for instance, complemented the work carried out under UNESCO's flagship initiative to train the judiciary and the security forces, the Judges' Initiative. With lawyers better equipped to defend journalists, on the one hand, and with judges and law enforcement officers better prepared to apply the law in line with international human rights standards, on the other hand, these complementary actions have enhanced their impact in ensuring the protection of the fundamental rights journalists and other media workers.

The GMDF continued to pursue sustainability through the framing of its activities and partnerships within the framework of the wider action undertaken by UNESCO and its partners to advance the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN IMPLEMENTATION, REMEDIAL ACTIONS

	Key Challenges and Risks in Implementation	Remedial Actions
	Description of the challenge/risk(s) per category	Mitigation measure or strategy
Output 1	Postponement/Reprogramming of several activities of the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom due to in the first years, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and in further years, further delays incurred due to amongst other things the restructuring of the IBAHRI team, and the reorganisation of the membership of the Panel.	<p>Amendment and extension of the partnership agreement (IPA) with IBAHRI (in May 2020 and September 2020).</p> <p>Organization of virtual events for the launch of three (of a total four) Enforcement reports in November 2020.</p> <p>Amendment and extension of the first IPA with IBAHRI till August 2022 and new IPA as of Autumn 2022.</p>
Output 2,3,4	<p>High number of proposals submitted under the first Call for Partnerships posed two issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The longer-than-planned assessment period (also due to the overstretch of staff within the CI/FEJ Section); and • The lack of funds to support all preselected proposals. 	<p>Streamlining of the budget and activities funded.</p> <p>Reduction of the maximum size of grants from USD \$60,000 to \$30,000-35,000 (depending on the geographic scope of the projects).</p> <p>Increase of the global budget envelope to be distributed under the first Call.</p> <p>Launch of the contracting process with preselected partners in two phases: one with the top 24 preselected proposals, and a second one with the remaining 20, in order to align the contracting process with the reception of additional instalments from donors.</p>
	Limited number of partnership proposals submitted under the first GMDF Call for Partnerships addressing the specific risks faced by women journalists.	<p>Mainstreaming of Gender Equality throughout partnership proposals enhanced from "gender sensitivity" to a gender-responsive or a gender-transformative approach.</p> <p>Additional score to proposals making a significant contribution to gender equality through the implementation of their proposed actions, addressing the specific threats faced by women journalists and/or targeting women journalists as the main beneficiaries of the action.</p>
	Underrepresentation of certain regions of the world among the partnership proposals submitted under the GMDF Call for Partnerships.	<p>Prioritization of proposals coming from or with a focus on Africa.</p> <p>Special attention to proposals coming from or with a focus on regions underrepresented under the GMDF 1st and 2nd Calls for Partnerships.</p> <p>Special attention to proposals coming from or with a focus on Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States.</p> <p>Dedicated information meetings for prospective partners under the 4th Call in the underrepresented regions.</p>

Challenges and Risks in Implementation, Remedial Actions

Key Challenges and Risks in Implementation		Remedial Actions
Description of the challenge/risk(s) per category	Mitigation measure or strategy	
Lack of experience of some candidate organisations in submissions to international grant mechanisms.	Yearly updated Application Form created to provide a clearer and capacity building approach to the submission of a partnership proposals, facilitating the comprehension of different requirements and the GMDF Outputs.	
Lack of understanding of the nature of the Outputs covered by the Call for Partnerships.	<p>Measures to facilitate the comprehension of the GMDF Outputs and/or to encourage the submission of proposals supporting underrepresented Outputs are continuously assessed by UNESCO.</p> <p>Detailed description of the GMDF Outputs, with concrete examples, provided in the Terms of Reference of the Call for Partnerships.</p>	
Delays in the completion of negotiation and contracting processes with preselected partners under the GMDF Calls for Partnerships, also due to staff shortage.	<p>Continued exchanges with and backstopping of preselected partners to ensure a shared vision of programme/project objectives, approaches, and activities.</p> <p>Reassignment within the team of the Section of the Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists.</p>	
Duplication of or overlap with existing work.	Synergies and coordination are ensured with other initiatives, GMDF partners and NGOs working in the countries targeted by the projects supported by the GMDF. Permanent monitoring and coordination with partners on the ground is ensured against possible duplication/overlap with existing work.	
Changes in the political and socio-economic situation in a target country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous exchange with partners on the evolution of the situation on the ground and proposing reprogramming where needed. • Assessment of potential activation of the GMDF's Crisis Response Mechanism where applicable. 	
Slow progress in the implementation of the proposed activities.	<p>Activities are accompanied with a clear strategy and timeframe for implementation. Instalments foreseen in the IPA are linked to tangible outputs to be approved by UNESCO.</p> <p>Development of improved guidelines for partners' reporting.</p>	
Communication and visibility	Untapped communication potential on the impact of the GMDF's partnerships and activities	<p>GMDF showcase event at the Tallin Media Freedom Conference in February 2022, in the Open Government Partnership Global Summit in Tallinn, Estonia in September 2023, at the 13th Global Conference on Investigative Journalism in September 2023 in Gothenburg, Sweden and finally an organised panel session at the Global Media Forum in June 2024.</p> <p>Visibility to the GMDF during relevant UNESCO CI's events and conferences (e.g. launch of the 3rd Call for Partnership on the occasion of the 2022 World Press Freedom Day Global Conference)</p> <p>Recruitment of a dedicated GMDF staff focusing on outreach, reporting and knowledge sharing</p> <p>Updated communication Plan, including coordination with MFC Secretariat's coms team</p> <p>Creation of content on the impact of the Fund, through news stories, disseminated on UNESCO's website and through partners such as the MFC Secretariat</p> <p>Identification of key events to sponsor by the Global Media Defence Fund</p>

LESSONS LEARNT

Since its creation, UNESCO has identified the following lessons:

1. The Global Media Defence Fund represents a network of organisations working on bolstering the legal defence of journalists and enhancing media freedom worldwide. Some of the projects selected out of the GMDF Calls for Partnerships have been interacting with each other in a complementary or synergistic manner. Liaison between GMDF partners has thus been facilitated by UNESCO wherever possible. However, there is still room to strengthen this coordination and collaboration.

In the survey conducted amongst GMDF partners in 2024, 23% responded increasing networking amongst partners should be an area of priority for the Fund.

2. The Fund has demonstrated over the past 5 years that it has real impact, whether at international, regional or local level. It has identified and is addressing a gap, especially when bolstering smaller organisations dedicated to defending freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. However, the visibility of the Fund has not reached its full potential. This visibility must continue, whilst being tailored to the specific context of implementation of GMDF projects, on the basis of a Do-No-Harm principle. In some countries, partners –in consultation with UNESCO– have decided to keep a low profile on the project or certain project activities as a safety measure to ensure the security of both beneficiaries and the partners' teams.
3. The initial decision to launch a single Call for Partnerships covering all pertinent Outputs (2, 3 and 4) instead of a single Call per Output ensured a great amount of flexibility and allows candidate partners to submit holistic partnership proposals covering more than one Output (or all three of them). This approach also enables UNESCO to reallocate resources from the underrepresented Outputs to those that were more significantly covered by the proposals.
4. The Fund has demonstrated continued flexibility and responsiveness to the changing worldwide situations, with as a key example the creation of the Crisis Response Mechanism, thanks to the Steering Committee. This has been key to the success of the Fund.
5. The relevant elements for the purposes of the (narrative) project reporting was identified as a potential issue for grassroot GMDF partners, who are not always familiar with Results Assessment Frameworks or the reporting requirements of international organisations. In order to streamline the process of project reporting for partners, the GMDF developed and continue to update for every Call for Partnerships templates that have been shared with GMDF partners since. The resort to templates has had a noticeably positive impact, significantly facilitating the work of our partners when it comes to project reporting, improving the quality of the reports, and enabling the GMDF team to standardise, to a certain degree, the information obtained by the means of project reporting.

Lessons Learnt

6. The Global Media Defence Fund's outreach is another one of its key strengths. It has been able to support partners from around the world, even in remote areas. To continue expanding this outreach, the approach of adopting measures to encourage the submission of projects by stakeholders from underrepresented regions has been a successful one. The decision of giving special attention to project proposals from partners from or targeting countries in the Arab States region and Asia and the Pacific resulted in a tangible increase in the number of proposals in these regions under the 2021 and 2022 Calls. This was also exemplified by an increase in proposals received from Africa under the 2023 Call.
7. Finally, the process to apply to the Fund is known to be complex and administratively demanding. The capacity-building approach to the documents required to submit a partnership proposal to the GMDF seems to have been helpful in attracting a higher number of grassroots organisations, and facilitating the application process by providing clear and to-the-point explanations, accompanied with examples, to the different sections of the Call's Terms of Reference and Application Form. Additionally, the requirement of submitting all relevant supporting documents as part of the full partnership proposal has made the contracting process faster in most cases, avoiding potential delays related to the obtention of these documents at the moment of communicating the results of the preselection process.

WAY FORWARD¹⁶

Taking into account the lessons learnt, interactions with beneficiaries and other stakeholders, some avenues to consider to take the Fund forward:

1. Consolidating avenues for more systematic collaboration amongst GMDF partners and 'community':

There is a real potential in creating strong local and regional networks to enhance the capacity of organisations, and share best practices. Liaison between GMDF partners has been facilitated by UNESCO wherever possible. UNESCO will continue fostering these networks and seek to enhance where possible the collaboration amongst partners. This could include leading on organising meetings at regional level, or when possible uniting partners of the Fund at international conferences, including World Press Freedom Day or the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, as well as in a continuous level creating a GMDF 'community'.

2. Diversify the modalities of the Call for Partnerships: The Fund needs to remain innovative in its approach to support media freedom and the legal defence of journalists. To complement the regular Call for Partnerships, and in order to address targeted issues that journalists are facing whilst doing their job that are covered by the Fund, thematic Calls will be launched tailored to address particular challenges, with the first one for journalists reporting on environmental issues. The initiative to develop specific thematic calls on the safety of environmental journalists, identified at high risk, which could be followed by other themes is a way of ensuring this on-going responsiveness.

In the partners' survey conducted in 2024, 34% said it would be helpful for a thematic call to focus on women journalists, specifically on legal assistance and strategic litigation; 30% said it would also be important to have a specific thematic call on Investigative Journalism. The following additional themes were also recommended:

- Digital rights;
- Journalists victim of war crimes;
- Minorities;
- Support for research and assistance on issues not related to threats and attacks, i.e. providing legal support to create a media outlet, strategic counseling for online threats.

3. Further enhancing collaboration with the wider UN system: With the partnership with IBAHRI coming to an end at the end of 2024, the Fund will seek to further foster and consolidate its inter-agency collaboration with particularly OHCHR, to increase the joint impact on the ground and develop an increased holistic approach to the legal defence of journalists.

¹⁶ The way forward will be finetuned and further developed once the conclusions of the external evaluation of the Fund are received and dependent on the availability of funding.



unesco

United Nations
Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

Communication and Information Sector
Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists Section
Global Media Defence Fund

7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP France

 gmdf@unesco.org

 www.unesco.org/global-media-defence-fund

Follow us

@UNESCO #DefendMediaFreedom #ProtectJournalists #EndImpunity

