

TOMORROW'S JOURNALISM IN THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES



A study of the needs of the media
and independent journalists



Today [...], it would appear that this dialogue between the media and the organizations supporting their development, in both the northern and southern Mediterranean, is more than ever important than it was in 2019 and 2020 when *Sahafa Med* was conceived.

Preamble

More than ever, *listening to journalists in the Arab world.*

In 2018, the first edition of the Assises internationales du journalisme in Tunis brought together nearly 800 journalists from the MENA region, Europe and Africa. It provided an opportunity to discuss and debate the needs and expectations in terms of support and partnerships for journalists in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.

For many journalists from North-Africa, from the Middle East and from Sub-Saharan Africa countries, this major gathering generated a great deal of enthusiasm and hope. Despite the economic difficulties faced by many media outlets, against a backdrop of proliferating false information and mistrust of journalists, it appeared that a renewed media world was possible. Closer to the concerns of citizens, and better adapted to new ways of consuming information.

It was in the wake of this seminal event that the idea emerged of launching an initiative to stimulate exchange and reflection between journalists, donors and organizations supporting media development, in order to think about and build tomorrow's media world in the southern and eastern Mediterranean area. Thus was born the *Sahafa Med* program.

At the time, no one could have imagined that the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic would cause so much economic, political and social upheaval. And in the process, impact the media and journalists in so many ways.

More recently, the attacks of October 7, 2023 and their consequences for the people of Gaza are a major geopolitical shock and a veritable blast for the media.

Since these attacks, more than 60 journalists have lost their lives in Gaza, and the media sector is paying a very heavy price in fulfilling its duty to inform the public.

Informing the public in the Arab countries and in the rest of the world about the conflict is indeed a major challenge, all the more so as manipulations of facts and false information abound, particularly through the social media.

Sahafa Med's initial aim was to open a dialogue with civil society in the southern Mediterranean about its expectations

in terms of information, and to promote support for freedom of expression and independent media as a priority on the agendas of donors in the region.

Today, after the COVID years and against a backdrop of major crisis in the Middle East, it would appear that this dialogue between the media and the organizations supporting their development, in both the northern and southern Mediterranean, is more than ever important than it was in 2019 and 2020 when *Sahafa Med* was conceived.

Despite misunderstandings, obstacles and difficulties, *Sahafa Med* will continue to pursue its initial objective over the coming months. For it is through dialogue that new bases for cooperation can be devised in the service of journalists, to collectively think and build better media and regain the trust of citizens.

In this context, this study, completed in September 2023, provide an overview of the situation of the media and journalism in the various countries of the region, with a view to identifying prospects and courses of action to promote and sustain, through independent media, free journalism at the service of society and the general interest. It also aims to improve the match between the needs of journalists and the programs proposed by donors and organizations in charge of media development.

Based on information gathered between 2021 and 2023 through a number of meetings (Assises in Tours, Brussels and Tunis, national and regional «consultations», ad-hoc meetings, dozens of individual interviews, etc.), this study consists of a regional analysis of the situation of the media and journalism sector in the region, «country chapters» and recommendations aimed at sustaining and strengthening the effectiveness of support programs and projects implemented for the benefit of journalists in the southern and eastern, Mediterranean region.

Over the coming months, these recommendations will be reviewed and adjusted. New dialogue platforms and consultations will be organized to take account of the current upheavals.

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The views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union.

The European Union cannot be held responsible for them.

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This study is also the outcome of the monitoring and analysis work carried out by *Sahafa Med* correspondents, who monitor the changing media landscape in the region's various countries on a daily basis.



METHODOLOGY

This study is unique in that it is the result of a long-term process of dialogue and consultation with beneficiaries and media development players from all the countries in the European Union's southern neighbourhood.

In 2021, the *Journalisme et Citoyenneté* Association set up a network of *Sahafa Med* correspondents who monitor daily media developments in the countries covered by this study (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia) in liaison with local journalists. The correspondents are also in regular contact with the media development players (donors and implementers) who support these journalists and independent media in the region. Thus, as close as possible to the field and journalists, it's a unique network, enabling us to keep a real-time watch on issues relating to the media and journalists.

On the occasions of the *Assises du journalisme* in Tours (2021, 2022 and 2023), the *Assises internationales du journalisme* in Tunis (2022) and the *Assises européennes du journalisme* in Brussels (2022), the *Sahafa Med* program also brought together several hundred journalists from the Southern Mediterranean as well as representatives of media development donors and implementers.

In November 2022, on the sidelines of the first *Assises européennes du journalisme*, in cooperation with the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), some 50 representatives of funding agencies and media development players gathered in Brussels for a seminar to collectively reflect on the challenges and prospects for supporting journalism and independent media in the Southern Mediterranean.

In 2022, "national" meetings and consultations were also organized with journalists from Palestine, Jordan, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, and Egypt to find out more about their needs and expectations concerning the support programs aimed at them.

These meetings and discussions were designed to:

- collect information and data on past and current programs,
- gather the opinions and comments of journalists and beneficiaries about these programs,
- identify the current issues and needs of independent media and journalists,
- encourage direct contact and dialogue between media development organizations and beneficiaries,
- identify opportunities and risks to implementing future support programs for independent media and journalists in the Southern Mediterranean.

Over 1,200 journalists from the region and more than 150 representatives of donors and media development organizations have been involved in rethinking on the future of independent media there.

The *Sahafa Med* team was also able to participate in the Global Media Forum organized by Deutsche Welle in June 2022 in Bonn; in the seminar on the economic viability of the media organized in Lebanon in January 2023 by GFMD, UNESCO, the Maharat Foundation, and the Samir Kassir Foundation; in the seminar on the economic viability of the media organized in February 2023 in Tunisia by GFMD, PAMT 2 and the Al Khatt Association; and, also in the Global Forum for a Trusting Internet organized by UNESCO in February 2023 in Paris. The *Sahafa Med* team could also meet and talk in person or remotely with representatives of numerous organizations that accompany and support the media and journalists in the Southern Mediterranean countries.

Through all these events, meetings, and resources, *Sahafa Med* has, since 2021, stimulated dialogue about independent journalism in the Southern Mediterranean. So far, over 1,200 journalists from the region and more than 150 representatives of donors and media development organizations have been involved in reflecting on the future of independent media there, their needs, and the support programs and projects aimed at them.

This study is part of an unprecedented approach aimed at improving the match between the needs of the media and journalists and the programs and projects implemented by donors and operators in order to enhance their effectiveness in consolidating independent media in the Southern Mediterranean. The approach is resolutely and deliberately beneficiary-oriented. It aims to respond to several criticisms leveled at international media support programs, which are sometimes accused of serving the interests of foreign narratives and agendas and/or being disconnected from needs on the ground.

Before finalizing this study and presenting it at the third edition of the *Assises internationales du journalisme* in Tunis in November 2023, the analyses and recommendations contained in this study were presented and discussed in September 2023, in Amman and Tunis, with panels of journalists and local media players. Indeed, it seemed essential that the study's recommendations be presented to and discussed with the beneficiaries before its official publication.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the ever-increasing constraints on media in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and the restrictions on freedom of expression since 2020, many media players, from Beirut to Rabat, continue to promote independent, citizen-oriented journalism. In just a few years, some have even become influential media at the national or regional level, particularly among the younger generation.

Many of these media outlets, often created between 2011 and 2021, have benefited from various forms of support from regional or international organizations, particularly from the European Union, which since 2011 has funded numerous media programs and projects, both regionally and bilaterally.

In a decade, these initiatives have also helped train thousands of young and senior journalists in technical and thematic areas. Over the years, programs to support media education have also developed.

Unfortunately, the impact of this abundance of support - heterogeneous and insufficiently coordinated - has not been sufficiently assessed. Given the political developments of recent years, it is now essential for donors and their implementing partners to redefine and clarify the political objectives of these media support programs and to act, at long last, in a more coordinated and complementary way. This is essential in terms of accountability, both to the beneficiaries of these programs - journalists in the Southern Mediterranean - and to the citizens who fund them through their taxes.

The findings and needs were identified using a unique methodology based on two years of multiple consultations.

Against this backdrop, the *Sahafa Med* study took stock of the difficulties and challenges the media and journalists faced in the Southern Mediterranean countries. The findings and needs were identified using a unique methodology based on two years of several consultations, conferences, and meetings with local players and beneficiaries. This approach is resolutely oriented towards beneficiaries to bring needs up from the bottom. It is intended to respond to specific criticisms leveled at media development programs, whose themes and objectives are sometimes accused of being imposed from above. This seems to be confirmed by the current tendency of some media development players to focus their programs primarily on combating false information, topics such as climate and gender, or media education, to the detriment of support for free, professional, and independent media.

Through interviewing the beneficiaries over the past two years, from Beirut to Rabat, the needs of journalists have emerged around the following principal issues:

- The economic viability, which remains the primary concern of the region's media,
- The socio-economic precariousness of journalists,
- The physical and digital safety of journalists and media,
- Increasing the legal skills of media professionals to influence legislative changes,
- Strengthening and enforcing the laws of access to information,
- Negotiations with digital platforms,
- Support for media managers and executives to improve their management skills,
- Setting up support systems for freelance journalists,
- The development of professional organizations, collectives, and unions in tune with the needs and expectations of independent media and freelance journalists,
- Legal and psychological support for journalists threatened or being in danger,
- Supporting the media and journalists in exile,
- Gender equality in media.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In addition to these needs, which are directly linked to the practice of journalism in the Southern Mediterranean, the multiple consultations, conferences, and meetings organized as part of the *Sahafa Med* program have enabled beneficiaries and players in the field to express their wishes to donors and media development organizations, to improve the effectiveness and impact of media support projects and programs in the region.

Desired expectations relate to:

- The need to make support programs and projects more agile, more flexible, and more in tune with the needs of journalists in the field,
- There is an urgent need to simplify and harmonize administrative and reporting procedures for media funding,
- The need to significantly strengthen coordination between media support players,
- The direct provision of more significant funding to local and regional players to implement programs and projects in support of journalists,
- Sharing and pooling resources, especially needs and impact studies.

Finding ways to ensure that tomorrow's journalism can offer citizens of the Southern Mediterranean countries reliable, free and high-quality information.

Against a backdrop of information chaos, severe restrictions on freedom of expression in the region, and the extreme fragility of the professional media ecosystem, it is now time for everyone - donors, international, regional, and local media development organizations, professional organizations and unions, authorities, media, and journalists - to find ways to ensure that tomorrow's journalism can offer citizens of the Southern Mediterranean countries reliable, free and high-quality information that allow for social cohesion, good governance and development.

SUMMARY OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



- > Pursue actions to reinforce the physical safety of journalists and their families,
- > Support media in implementing internal safety procedures,
- > Promote online and other psychological support systems for journalists,
- > Continue to fund assistance programs to shelter journalists in danger and ensure that their situation is supported and monitored over time,
- > Ensure coordination, information exchange, and complementarity between existing assistance programs,
- > List in a database and provide stronger support and protection for civil society organizations (bar associations, human rights associations, etc.) that are active in the field and carry out concrete actions in favor of freedom of expression and the right to inform,
- > Support the establishment of regional and national freedom of expression observatories,
- > Finally, set up specific support systems for journalists and media in exile to facilitate their reception and enable them to continue producing free and independent information.

THEME 2

ENABLING MEDIA TO STABILIZE AND CONSOLIDATE THEIR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MODELS

The extreme economic fragility of many media today makes them vulnerable. As elsewhere in the world, the major digital platforms are capturing a large proportion of advertising investment, to the detriment of Jordanian, Egyptian, Algerian, and Moroccan media. As a result, journalists in the region are becoming increasingly precarious, making them vulnerable and often unable to access the resources and conditions needed to produce quality information. If citizens are to have access to professional, reliable information, it is essential to improve the economic viability of the media and protect the social rights of journalists.

- > Maintain significant, non-earmarked, and flexible financial support mechanisms (core-funding), which are multi-year and not tied to the beneficiary's completion of a "project" (as defined by donors), for independent media and freelance journalists,
- > With a view to sustainability, support profit-making media committed to social and environmental responsibility,
- > Support, coaching, and training programs for media executives and managers to help them transform their media and generate revenue for them,
- > Strengthen the institutional players and professional organizations involved in the socio-economic dimension of the media sector,

THEME 1

PROTECTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ENSURING THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Free and independent information cannot exist without freedom of expression and safety for journalists. However, the situation on these two fronts has deteriorated significantly over the past two years in most countries in the region. We, therefore, need to encourage and support the establishment of support mechanisms to preserve the freedoms and safety, both physical and digital, of the journalists who work on a daily basis from Ramallah to Algiers, via Beirut, Alexandria, and Misrata, to produce quality information that serves the public interest and citizens. Professional journalists are also the best bulwarks against information manipulation and false information.

- > Clearly and openly reaffirm our support for the principle of freedom of expression for journalists and all citizens,
- > Make development aid programs conditional on respect for and protection of freedom of expression,
- > Ban exports and sales of cyber-surveillance equipment to countries that use it against journalists,
- > Develop actions to strengthen the digital security of media and journalists (information systems, data servers, communications, etc.) and create a pool of regional cyber-security experts,

SUMMARY OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- > Consider the creation of "basket funds" funded by different donors, with the aim of supporting independent media and journalists,
- > Support media managers in setting up methods and frameworks for working with journalists that respect their social rights and guarantee their ability to produce quality information.

THEME 3

IMPROVING THE MEDIA'S INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT TO MAKE IT MORE CONDUCTIVE TO QUALITY, RELIABLE INFORMATION

Media in the Southern Mediterranean today suffer from an institutional environment that has not prioritized producing and disseminating free, reliable information for citizens. Today, the major digital platforms do little to encourage the development of professional, independent media in the Southern Mediterranean. On the legislative front, laws and regulations are often obsolete and/or restrictive and not conducive to the broader dissemination of free and reliable information in the public interest. In the name of the fight against false information, some recent laws even work against the development of independent media. Media professionals are often at a disadvantage, mainly due to a lack of legal skills, both in their negotiations with platforms and in their discussions and involvement in debates on legislative issues. Raising skills and developing knowledge of media and digital law issues should, therefore, be a priority to enable the various players to contribute, each in their respective roles, to changing the institutional framework to make it more favorable to quality information.

- > Develop the legal skills and knowledge of media professionals (media managers, journalists, etc.),
- > Set up training programs for magistrates in media and digital law, enabling them to familiarize themselves with the sector of media and journalism,
- > Create task forces of lawyers who can be swiftly mobilized when needed,
- > Reinforce the teaching of law in journalism faculties and schools,
- > Introduce media law modules into university law courses,
- > Support the creation of a web application to compile legislation and case law relating to media and journalists' rights in the region,
- > Strengthen, consolidate, and update the knowledge of political institutions in charge of media-related public policies (regulatory bodies, parliaments, etc.),
- > Develop and consolidate regional pools of lawyers specializing in media law and labor law relating to journalists,
- > Support free online and face-to-face legal advice systems for the media and journalists (media law and labor law),
- > Set up a regional network to monitor, collect, and exchange information and practices on media laws in the countries of the region,
- > Develop the legal advocacy skills of media players,
- > Promote regional exchanges on access-to-information laws to make their application more effective in countries where they exist,
- > Support media and journalists in the Southern Mediterranean countries in their negotiations with platforms by studying the possibility of extending certain agreements negotiated by the EU with GAFAM to players in the region.



SUMMARY OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THEME 4

SUPPORT THE RENEWAL OF COLLECTIVE ACTION TO PROMOTE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND JOURNALISTS' RIGHTS AND ENCOURAGE EXCHANGES AND NETWORKING

Collaborative editorial projects have grown in recent years, often with great success. They enable media outlets and journalists to confront other practices and engage in ambitious projects, sometimes with a regional or even international scope. Moreover, beyond “collaborative” journalism, new forms of collective action by media and journalists have begun to emerge in the region (new unions, associations...) to protect their rights and interests or sometimes to break a sense of isolation while working in challenging environments. This is particularly true for freelance journalists. These initiatives and collaborations bring hope and support the work of the media and journalists who produce free, high-quality news.

- > Support new forms of collective action by the media and journalists to defend their social rights and promote the concept of “social protection” for journalists, regardless of their status,
- > Build the capacity of unions and professional organizations in the media sector and strengthen the leadership and skills of the new generation of leaders in these organizations,
- > Enable freelance journalists to be better represented,
- > Support the creation of a kit for freelance journalists, including model contracts to be signed with the media that employ them or commission reports from them,
- > Encourage the development of legal assistance for journalists who are threatened or prosecuted (funding of lawyers' fees, etc.),
- > Support the development of collaborative platforms and initiatives, particularly editorial (investigation, local news, etc.), between groups of media or journalists,
- > Support media or journalist networks that encourage concrete collaboration between players (collaborative investigations, mutual training, content sharing, etc.),
- > Support platforms and forums for transnational meetings and debates for journalists and media professionals to make them genuine meeting places and incubators of ideas.

THEME 5

REINVENTING TRAINING FOR JOURNALISTS AND ENCOURAGING MOBILITY AND NETWORKING

In the age of artificial intelligence and the development of distance learning, the training methods and approaches used by journalists in the Southern Mediterranean region must evolve profoundly to adapt to today's challenges and tools. Furthermore, without investment and resources dedicated to training, this field has often been “outsourced” to

external and international organizations via development programs. To be more in tune with needs and realities on the ground, the development of actors and training offers based in the Southern Mediterranean is a priority. However, the development and renewal of training for journalists in the region must not lead to a withdrawal, and exchanges of practices and knowledge must continue to be encouraged, notably through events and schemes promoting mobility, such as study trips, twinning, and scholarships.

- > Enable journalists in the region to access a “right to lifelong training” by reinventing the methods and mechanisms of continuing training and by encouraging and supporting the creation and development of local structures: more qualitative and quantitative training, more specialized training, certification training, etc.,
- > Support the development of training courses for journalists and media in the region on issues and tools linked to the development of artificial intelligence,
- > Identify existing media and journalism training courses, teaching resources, and trainers,



SUMMARY OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- > Support the development of local continuing education opportunities (training centers, training of trainers, etc.),
- > Develop the training of trainers in the region and provide long-term support for the trainers trained,
- > Encourage the media to develop action plans and strategies for training their teams,
- > Provide training support directly in the media (“action training”),
- > Adapt training content to local practices and country contexts,
- > Encourage and support mobility and large-scale exchanges between journalism school students and teachers,
- > Consider updating the journalism school curriculum developed by UNESCO,
- > Enable media managers and executives from the Southern Mediterranean countries to meet and cooperate with their international media counterparts, notably at major international trade fairs, symposia, forums, and conferences dedicated to media and journalism.

IN ADDITION TO THESE FIVE THEMATIC PRIORITIES, HELP THE MEDIA RESPOND TO THREE URGENT SOCIAL ISSUES: MEDIA LITERACY, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND GENDER EQUALITY.

Beyond these purely media-journalistic issues, and given the changes underway in many media around the world, *Journalisme & Citoyenneté* - drawing on its network and experience in monitoring changes in the media and the profession of journalism - also recommends developing resources to support initiatives concerning the following three urgent issues:

- > **Media education:** With Jordan set to host a major international forum on media education organized by UNESCO in October 2023, it seems essential to invest much more in this field, which does not only concern the media but must also rely on the mobilization of education players. Except for Jordan, where a political will has been expressed to promote the expansion of media education, this subject does not yet seem to be a real priority in the region, either for the media or those involved in education.
- > **Climate change:** a topic largely absent from the region's media for a long time, it is beginning to emerge thanks to a few players launching specialized media or creating dedicated sections. But there's still a long way to go. However, given the high stakes associated with climate change in this part of the world, it's a safe bet that journalists will soon be making their presence felt. So, we need to anticipate this moment and prepare journalists and the media to cover these issues.
- > **Equality between women and men:** much progress has been made in recent years in the region's media on this issue. Lines have moved. But here, too, nothing can be taken for granted. Even if women journalists are less and less reluctant to assert their rights, even if subjects concerning the place and rights of women in society are increasingly covered by the media, support for all those working in this field must continue.

It goes without saying that “media” investments to respond to these three emergencies only make sense if there are free, professional media and journalists who have the environment and capacity to produce reliable information in the service of citizens and the public interest. Donor actions favoring media education, climate journalism, or gender equality in the media cannot, therefore, replace support for professional, independent media and journalists, which must remain the primary objective of media development programs. Thus, objectives relating to climate, gender, or media literacy must be decoupled from those that aim to support quality, free and reliable information. Obligations, injunctions, and other editorial conditionalities linked to these three emergencies, which would be imposed on media benefiting from donor media development support programs, are to be proscribed.

SUMMARY OF NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

○ REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DONORS, MEDIA DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS, MEDIA, AND JOURNALISTS

Changes in the media's political, economic, and technological environments have profoundly altered the sector, its balance, and journalists' practices. Accordingly, and as mentioned during the many exchanges over the past two years on which this study is based, the relationship between journalists and the media and those who support them needs to be radically rethought. The aims of the projects - the existence of media producing reliable and valuable information for citizens - must be put back at the heart of the objectives. This must be reflected both at the political level, in the positions taken by donors and media development operators, and at the operational level, by adapting the procedures for implementing media support to the practices and realities of the media and journalists, and not the other way round, as is increasingly the case. To make programs and projects more effective and relevant, donors and their implementing partners need to understand and facilitate the work of the journalists and media they support. Relations between all players must be respectful, balanced, and based on mutual trust. The following recommendations, addressed to media development players (donors, operators), are as important, if not more so, than the preceding thematic recommendations.

- > Formulate a clear, transparent, and assertive narrative on the objectives pursued by donors and their partners in funding and implementing programs to support journalists and independent media in the region,
- > Make support programs and projects for the region's media and journalists more agile, more flexible, and closer to the needs of players on the ground by systematically basing the justification for programs and projects on existing needs studies - or, failing that, on studies yet to be carried out - and by banishing top-down objectives and conditionalities, particularly thematic ones,

- > Facilitate the setting up of shared back-office structures for fund management and reporting, on which beneficiary media can draw,
- > Enhance transparency in media support and grant allocation processes,
- > Support reflection on the role of public media and their place in media support programs,
- > Set up mechanisms for beneficiaries to assess the practices of donors and international media development organizations to strengthen their accountability,
- > Put in place effective and sustainable structures and mechanisms for coordination and information sharing (including needs and impact studies) between actors supporting the media in the region,
- > Reduce or eliminate funding for implementing partners who refuse or evade coordination processes,
- > Consolidate and strengthen the capacities of regional and local media development players and systematically integrate them into the implementation of actions,
- > Significantly develop resources dedicated to measuring the impact of media development projects and programs in liaison with research centers and organizations,
- > Significantly streamline and simplify the funding application, management, and reporting procedures imposed on beneficiary media, who today devote far too much of their time and resources (compared with their editorial activities) to this type of activity for donors and their implementing partners.



ON AIR

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SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS FROM
SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN
COUNTRIES