Programme for Promoting Safety of
JOURNALISTS

Programme for Promoting Safety of Journalists

Introduction

The decline of media freedom and the rise in threats to the safety of journalists has become a worldwide trend. Media organisations, institutes and human rights watchdogs are concerned over the rising trend of crimes against journalists and trying hard to stop the atrocity, ensure justice and reduce impunity. The worst is still on rise.

According to the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists, more 1,700 journalists have been killed across between 2006 and 2024 over the world, with close to 9 out of 10 cases remaining judicially unresolved[1]. Regarding Bangladesh, 38 journalists have been killed, among them 26 deaths were confirmed as directly related to their work, while 12 cases remain unconfirmed in terms of motive between 1992 and 2025 as quoted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).[2] Many of these murder cases remain unsolved. As a consequence, impunity leads to more killings and is often a symptom of worsening conflict and the breakdown of law and judicial systems. Impunity damages whole societies by covering up serious human rights abuses, corruption, and crime. Governments, civil society, the media, and everyone concerned to uphold the rule of law are being asked to join in the global efforts to end the impunity. As per the latest UNESCO data on

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1. https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/observatory?page=1&hub=66746

2. Committee to Protect Journalists

killings of journalists, the global impunity rate for journalist killings remains shockingly high at 85 percent.[3] Bangladesh is not beyond the statistics.

Bangladesh media landscape has diversified from unban to remote areas. Equally, the crime against journalists has increased significantly and freedom of press has become extremely squeezed. According to World Press Freedom Index 2024[4], Bangladesh has ranked 165th out of 180 countries, which is two notches less than 2023. It also marked Bangladesh as one of dangerous country for journalists. Since the independence in 1971, journalists, media workers and civil society activists have

been struggling hard for safety and security as well as freedom of press and freedom of expression. A huge number of journalists were killed and hundreds of others were injured over the years. But most of the perpetrators escaped away and remain at large. To counter this situation, it needs strong political and social commitment as well as respect to democratic values.

In this day, journalists in Bangladesh are also facing the challenges particularly related with digital security and physical safety. Limited knowledge, less skills and lack of best practices are some of the reasons pushing most of the journalists in risk and

3. https://www.unesco.org/en/days/end-impunity?hub=687

4. https://rsf.org/en/country/bangladesh

dangers. This vulnerability not only endangers individual journalists but also undermines the media freedom and public trust on the press. To resolve the crisis and overcome the critical situation a multi-faceted approach is essential.

Investing in these areas may strengthen the safety issues and resilience of journalists fostering a robust and reliable media domain that can navigate the challenges of the 21st century.

Project Overview

To address these challenges, International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC)-UNESCO is playing a significant role in promoting journalists' safety and combating the impunity worldwide. News Network is now part of this initiative and, with their support, is implementing the project "Programme for Promoting Safety of Journalists" in Bangladesh. It has undertaken measures to tackle the following key issues that include:

1. Rising threats to journalists

2. Weak legal protections against impunity

3. Lack of digital & physical security awareness

4. Impact of media freedom on democracy

5. Bridging the gender gap in journalism

6. Empowering women journalists through exclusive training, fostering inclusivity and diversity in newsrooms

Consequently, the interventions are needed to safeguard the journalists, ensure press freedom, and uphold the democratic values. This project will equip journalists with the skills, knowledge, and supports they need to operate the industry safely and independently.

The project is well aligned with principles of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. We believe that "the safety of journalists and the struggle against impunity for their killers are essential to preserve the fundamental right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedom

Photo Credit: UNESCO

of expression is an individual right, for which no one should be killed, but it is also a collective right, which empowers populations through facilitating dialogue, participation and democracy, and thereby makes autonomous and sustainable development possible".[5]

Objectives

The primary objective of the project is to enhance journalists' understanding of safety-related challenges and equip them with the skills necessary to ensure a free and secure environment for media professionals in both conflict and non-conflict settings. In addition to focusing on the safety of male journalists, the project places special emphasis on the safety of women journalists. It acknowledges that globally, "women journalists and media workers are increasingly facing both offline and online attacks, as well as disproportionate and specific threats. The gender-based violence they endure includes stigmatization, sexist hate speech, trolling, physical assault, rape, and even murder."[6]

The project beneficiaries are the news reporters and media gatekeepers, including editors, executive editors, and news editors, senior newsroom editors in four divisions that include Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Rangpur.

5. https://www.unesco.org/en/days/end-impunity

6. https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/safety-women-journalists?hub=687

Project key activities

1. Project launching ceremony

Official launching of the project will be held in Dhaka with participation from government officials, civil society representatives, and media stakeholders. The objective is to build collective awareness on the project's importance and mobilize support for journalists' safety and media independence.

"In 2022 and 2023, a journalist was killed every four days simply for doing their vital job to pursue truth. For the vast majority of these cases, no-one will ever be held to account. I call upon all our Member States to do more to ensure that these crimes never go unpunished. Prosecuting and convicting the perpetrators is a major lever to prevent future attacks on journalists."

- Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO's Director General.

2. Training workshops for news reporters

Three intensive 3-day training programme will be held for reporters, focusing on critical areas of safety and professional skills. One of them will be organised exclusively for women journalists addressing unique challenges and threats they face, fostering resilience and safety. A UNESCO discussion paper recently pointed out to a sharp increase in online violence against women journalists and revealed how these attacks are now inextricably bound up with disinformation, intersectional discrimination, and populist politics.

3. Interactive Meetings with Media Gatekeepers

Interactive meetings with editors, chief of news and senior newsroom staffs will be held in three district headquarters, aims to

make them aware of their safety, highlight the responsibility of media houses to implement safety protocols, provide legal supports, and foster inclusivity by recruiting more women journalists, address safety practices for journalists, focusing on digital and physical risks and promote human rights, democracy, and freedom of expression in editorial policies.

Expected Outcomes

- Enhance Journalistic Safety: Build a safer working environment for journalists, particularly for female reporters who face unique risks.

- Strengthen Newsroom Collaboration: Foster unity among media houses, union leaders, and journalists to prioritize safety.

- Improve Accountability: Encourage greater government accountability and strengthen the justice system to reduce impunity for crimes against journalists.

- Promote Media Diversity: Increase the representation of women journalists, contributing to a more inclusive media landscape.

Project sustainability and replication

The project promotes sustainability by building institutional capacity, the training of journalists and media gatekeepers will help promote the safety coverage beyond its duration. It advocates for integrating safety protocols into media policies. Collaboration with media organizations, unions, civil society, and legal bodies will strengthen the ongoing advocacy for journalists' safety and press freedom.

Additionally, the project's structured approach allows for scalability, making it adaptable for replication in other regions of Bangladesh and countries facing similar challenges. By fostering a culture of safety and accountability, this initiative will have a lasting impact on independent media and democratic values.

www.unesco.org
www.newsnetwork-bd.org