

Freedom in Hostile Times

Annual Report
2025



THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

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Introduction: A World Turning Against Truth



This report is an annual moment of reflection for the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKF). Each year, it allows us to look back and ahead at once: to assess what has changed, what has endured, and what new demands are being placed on journalism, freedom of expression, and cultural freedom. In 2025, this exercise carries an added difficulty. We are publishing this report at a moment when tragic developments have already begun to unfold in 2026. That reality inevitably shapes the way we read the year that preceded it. It is therefore necessary to examine 2025 on its own terms, and to recognize that many of its developments were already pointing toward the dangers that have since deepened.

Each year, we emerge from this reflection with the conviction that the Foundation has become better equipped to confront the challenges facing journalism and public freedom. SKF has remained relentless in expanding its tools, sharpening its expertise, and adapting its methods as an organization and as a team of professionals. Yet a serious gap remains between the pace at which the Foundation can scale up its capabilities and even reinvent itself at times, and the pace at which the world is changing.

At one stage, disinformation appeared to be the defining threat to journalism and information integrity. In response, we mobilized the full range of capacities available to us: integrating technology and artificial intelligence (AI) into our research practices, upgrading our training methodologies, and diversifying partnerships so that the challenge could be met with depth and seriousness. Soon after, the crisis evolved again. Mass violence against journalists surged, with killings reaching a record high, forcing SKF to strengthen and expand its protection work with a new level of urgency. The conclusion is as stark as it is frustrating: humanity, including parts of the world long assumed to be more democratic, is moving at alarming speed away from many of the social and political gains of the past century. Intolerance is expanding and truth is losing ground. Cruelty is resurfacing in places where the rule of law, greater openness, and institutional maturity should have prevailed.

This raises one of the most pressing questions for our community: what can journalists do, by virtue of the principles of their profession, to resist the reactionary forces reshaping politics, international relations, and public life? What role can they still play in defending reason, truth, dignity, and democratic values in a world increasingly organized around manipulation, violence, and rejection of facts? Yet before that question comes another, even more immediate one: how can journalists and media organizations simply survive this rising tide? Disinformation is no longer only the product of coordinated campaigns; it is also the consequence of a broader institutionalization of contempt for truth. Likewise, the silencing and intimidation of journalists, once associated primarily with autocratic and more unstable political systems, are now becoming normalized in societies that long claimed to embody stronger democratic standards.

This global political shift poses a challenge to journalism on multiple levels. Funding for independent media has been severely cut. Increasing militarization has redirected major streams of public funding away from development and international cooperation. Trade tensions and economic uncertainty are pushing governments to cut external support and reallocate resources inward. Independent journalism, which remains heavily dependent on development financing, is paying a

steep price, alongside civil society organizations (CSOs) more broadly. However, the threat to independent journalism exceeds financial precarity and puts into question the very purpose of journalism as a profession and its role in public life.

The scale of disinformation within the media and information ecosystem has made the production and consumption of knowledge far more fragile. At the same time, advances in AI have introduced risks that touch the essence of journalistic practice. Reporting facts has rarely been more difficult as journalism is no longer a syndicated profession guided by ethical and professional principles and a universal code of conduct. Objective, empirical truth now competes in the public sphere with many, often manufactured, versions of reality designed to distort, inflame, and dominate. These are not alternative interpretations emerging from legitimate pluralism. They are narratives engineered to reshape perception in ways that serve power, vanity, and ideological mobilization. In such a moment, journalism is both profoundly endangered and urgently needed.

Which must make us think, and dig deep, to find the courage and the tools to push back. The agenda, moving forward, is to reclaim the values of truth, freedom, democracy and the most recently depreciated decency and reason. These are the cornerstones of our vision for sustainable development and a humanist future.

SKF Partners in 2025



In alphabetical order:



A Culture of Safety (ACOS) Alliance



Agency for Equality (AE)



BBC Media Action



Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD)



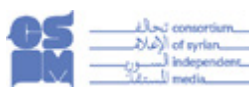
CFI – French Media Cooperation Agency



Civicus



Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)



Consortium of Syrian Independent Media (CSIM)



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs



The Elephant in the Room (EITR)



Equal Rights and Independent Media (ERIM)



European Endowment for Democracy (EED)



European Union (EU)



People deserve to know

Free Press Unlimited (FPU)



French Development Agency (AFD)



Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)



FONDATION BOGHOSSIAN

Fondation Boghossian



GLOBAL
FORUM
FOR MEDIA
DEVELOPMENT

Global Forum for Media
Development (GFMD)



Global Media Registry (GMR)



Gulf Centre for
Human Rights (GCHR)



INFLUEANSWERS
Actively Listening - Rationally Analyzing

InflueAnswers



Information Systems Security
Association (ISSA) France

ICFJ International Center
for Journalists
International Center
for Journalists (ICFJ)



Institut français du Liban



IREX

**JAMES W. FOLEY
LEGACY FOUNDATION**

James W. Foley Legacy Foundation



Journalisme et Citoyenneté (J&C)



Media Diversity Institute (MDI)



Media Freedom Coalition (MFC)



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the Netherlands



National Endowment
for Democracy (NED)



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



Open Society Foundations (OSF)



Pact



Porticus



Reporters Without Borders (RSF)



Rory Peck Trust (RPT)

SIGRID RAUSING TRUST
Sigrid Rausing Trust (SRT)



Southern Lebanon
Cultural Council (SLCC)



Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF)



UMAM Documentation
and Research



United Nations Development
Programme (UNDP)



United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO)



United Nations High Commissioner
for Refugees (UNHCR)



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

United States Department of
State - Bureau of Democracy,
Human Rights and Labor (DRL)



Université Saint-Joseph
(USJ)



Vallaris Consulting

WORLD PRESS PHOTO

World Press Photo

Key Milestones of the Year





January 10

SKF publishes a report titled “[Analysis of the Digital Hate Campaign Against Ragheb Alama](#)” by researcher Jad Hani, exploring how online smear campaigns can turn into real-world harm, as part the “Inclusive Media, Cohesive Society” (IMeCS) program.

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January 21-22

Program manager Christelle El Hayek represents SKF at the EU-funded BBC Media Action-led Brave Media consortium inaugural meeting in London, United Kingdom (UK).

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February 4

Communication manager Jad Shahrour joins the jury of the “Young Voices Countering Gender Stereotypes and Disinformation” video contest on mobile journalism organized by UNDP and Dawaer.

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February 15-16

SKF and World Press Photo organize a masterclass workshop on editing skills for Lebanese photojournalists in Beirut, with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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February 20-28

SKF organizes two back-to-back Hostile Environment and First Aid Training (HEFAT) in Naas, Mount Lebanon, in partnership with ACOS Alliance, RPT, and GCHR, with the support of the ministries of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Netherlands. The HEFAT was delivered by Vallaris Consulting.

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February 24-25

Researcher Jad Hani attends the UNDP Action Coalition for Information Integrity in Elections’ Expert Strategic Dialogue at Casa Árabe, Madrid, Spain, and speaks on a panel titled “Looking Ahead: Emerging Threats to Elections and Democracy.”

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March 3

Executive director Ayman Mhanna joins a panel organized by the American General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University (LAU) on the occasion of International Women’s Day, focusing on the role of civil society and media in accelerating change.

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March 18

Senior researcher Widad Jarboub leads a discussion session for journalism students at Notre-Dame University (NDU), Mount Lebanon, on violations of freedom of speech, threats against journalists, and the importance of building a culture of safety in journalism.

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March 21

SKF and 17 other local and international organizations co-sign a [joint letter](#), initiated by Human Rights Watch, calling the new Lebanese President and government to protect the 2020 Beirut blast investigation from interference and obstruction.

March 24-26

Ayman Mhanna takes part in a closed roundtable titled “Restoring Confidence in Public Institutions After Prolonged Crisis” co-hosted by the Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution and the Institute for Migration Studies at the Lebanese American University’s School of Arts and Sciences at LAU’s New York, USA campus.

March 26

SKF and 59 other media outlets, regional, and international human rights organizations co-sign a [solidarity statement](#) with Megaphone and Daraj against the defamation campaign they are facing.”



March 31

SKF publishes a report titled “[Digital Deception: Lebanon’s Coordinated Media Smear Campaign](#)” by Jad Hani. This report, published with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dives into the digital smear campaign launched against two of Lebanon’s leading independent media platforms, Daraj and Megaphone, at the instigation of the banking lobby.

March 31-April 1

SKF organizes two fundraising representations of theater play “Contractions” directed by board member Rana Khoury at Le Monnot Theatre in Beirut.



April 6

SKF published a report titled “[Impact of U.S. Funding Suspension on Independent Media in Lebanon](#)” by Widad Jarbough, which includes the results of a quantitative and qualitative survey conducted within the Lebanese independent media landscape.

April 11

Ayman Mhanna speaks on a panel titled “Closing Civic Space in Lebanon” organized by the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

April 15

Onboarding workshop for Lebanese photojournalists’ joining the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs-supported [Soora.store](#) online photo- and videography marketplace in Beirut.

April 28

Ayman Mhanna moderates a panel titled “Media and the Judiciary Branch: Journalists’ Responsibility and Coverage of Judiciary Affairs” within “The Judge and the Media” conference hosted by the Ministry of Justice at Phoenicia Hotel in Beirut.

April 28–May 1

SKF takes part in Les Assises du Journalisme in Marseille, France. Program manager Wael Akiki and AE director Rana Khoury co-host a workshop titled “Break The Model: Funding Independent Media in a Broken World” focusing on AE’s contribution to independent media sustainability. Wael Akiki also represents SKF at the SahafaMed “Reimagining Media Development in the MENA Region”, co-organized by J&C and GFMD. Ayman Mhanna moderates a panel discussion on the state of the media sector in Lebanon.

May 16

Ayman Mhanna speaks on a panel titled “Ethics in Conflict Reporting: Framing the ‘Other’” as part of the “Reporting Conflict: Ethics, Voices and Truths” workshop organized by University of Essex, UK.

May 23

SKF and 23 regional and international human rights organizations co-sign a [joint statement](#) denouncing the blocking of news websites in Jordan.

May 27

Ayman Mhanna speaks on a panel around “Disinformation and Democracy: Challenges and Solutions” hosted by the Lebanese chapter of the Francophone Press Union, in partnership with the International Organization of the Francophonie, at USJ, Beirut.

June 1-8

SKF launches the 17th edition of the Beirut Spring Festival (BSF) with an art installation titled “The Dream Manifesto” at Samir Kassir Square in downtown Beirut.

June 3

The EU Delegation in Lebanon and SKF host the 20th Samir Kassir Award ceremony at the Sursock Palace Gardens in Beirut.



June 9

SKF publishes a comprehensive needs assessment of the Syrian media landscape post-Assad by researcher Jaber Bakr. The research was conducted as part of the Brave Media program led by BBC Media Action and funded by the EU.



June 10

SKF publishes its 2024 Annual Report titled “[Truth and Trust Under Fire](#)” and compiled by program manager Samer Abdallah.

June 10-12

SKF produces a theatre play “Jarret Ghaz Spéciale” by Karim Chebli and Sarah Abdo, as part of the 2026 BSF, with the support of the EU-funded Tech for Memory initiative.

June 12-13

SKF organizes a “Fundamentals of Photojournalism in Global Markets” workshop for photojournalists in Beirut, as part of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs-supported Soora.store initiative.

June 15

Historian and podcaster Ronnie Chatah guides a “Walk Beirut” tour in tribute to Samir Kassir, 20 years after his assassination, as part of the 2026 BSF.

June 16

SKF launches Soora.store, the online market place for Lebanese photojournalists, at Bossa Nova Hotel, Beirut, with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

June 24

Jad Shahrour speaks on a panel titled “Beyond Verification: Ethics, Challenges, and Measuring Impact in Fact-Checking” hosted by UNDP and Dawaer at Beirut Digital District.

June 25

SKF and 25 regional and international human rights organizations co-sign a call on the Egyptian government to immediately end its campaign of transnational repression targeting exiled Egyptian journalist Basma Mostafa, formerly a beneficiary of SKF’s safe hosting program.

June 26

Ayman Mhanna speaks on a panel titled “From Fragmentation to Collective Action: Building Trust and Resilience through Coalitions on Information Integrity” hosted by the UNDP Action Coalition for Information Integrity in Elections, as part of the 2025 Internet Governance Forum (IGF) held in Lillestrøm, Norway.

July 11

SKF elects its new Board of Administrators: Malek Mrowa, president, Hind Darwish, vice-president, Jad Al-Akhaoui, secretary, Sleiman Kassir, treasurer, Maha Yahya and Rana Khoury, members.

June 12-22

BSF director Randa Asmar attends the 2025 theater Festival of Avignon, France.

July 18

Jad Shahrour and researcher Karim Safieddine join the panel titled “Rebellion, Past and Present: Former Student, Activist Still in the Fight” hosted by Mada Network at BHive, Beirut.

July 29–August 1

SKF organizes a “Basics of Investigative Journalism” online workshop for independent media outlets in Beirut, led by Jordanian senior investigative journalist Rana Sabbagh.

August 8

Randa Asmar honored for the her career at her hometown, Arbanieh in Mount Lebanon.

August 13

Ayman Mhanna joins the jury of the Human Rights Tulip, an annual prize awarded by the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs to a human rights defender or organization.

August 27–September 6

SKF hosts “Twenty Years for Freedom”, a photo exhibition curated by Arthur Sarradin, featuring eight Lebanese photojournalists, who have documented social, political, and humanitarian struggles that the Lebanese people went through from 2005 to 2025. The exhibition was held at Art on 56th, Gemmayzeh, Beirut, with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as part of the 2026 BSF.

September 1

Jad Shahrour begins his Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship organized by the U.S. Department of State.

September 8–10

Wael Akiki attends the “Global Gathering – Where Digital Rights Defender Meet” conference hosted by Team CommUNITY in Estoril, Portugal.

September 16

SKF and 13 other Lebanese and international human rights organizations co-sign a [statement](#) calling the Lebanese Parliament to swiftly adopt the draft media law and ensure it upholds the right to freedom of expression.

September 22

Ayman Mhanna speaks on a webinar titled “From Challenges to Solutions: Towards Effective Media Support in the MENA Region” hosted by Deutsche Welle Akademie.

September 23

Widad Jarbough leads a second discussion session with journalism students at NDU on the importance of journalists’ safety, risk assessment, and other safety considerations related to field reporting.

September 26

SKF hosts a roundtable about culture, memory, and divided identities in Lebanon, moderated by Karim Safieddine, as part of a conference titled “Re-imagining Peace and Coexistence in Lebanon: History, Culture, and Shared Values as Pillars for the Future” organized by Academics for Lebanon and the Lebanese Association for History. The roundtable was held within SKF’s EU-funded “Tech for Memory” initiative.



October 15

SKF published a white paper titled “Journalists in the Line of Fire: Lessons from the 2024 War in Lebanon” by Karim Safieddine. This document, produced with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focuses on safety preparedness for journalists, media outlets, and support organizations.

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October 17

Karim Safieddine speaks at the EU-funded “Trails and Tales” cultural heritage initiative closing ceremony at the Lebanese National Library, Sanayeh, Beirut.

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October 20-21

Christelle El Hayek represents SKF at the annual ACOS Alliance meeting in London.

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October 23

Widad Jarbough leads a discussion session with journalism students at Antonine University titled “Why Journalist Safety Matters: Preparing the Next Generation of Reporters”.

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October 27

Widad Jarbough speaks at a conference on ending impunity for crimes committed against journalists, hosted at NDU.

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November 8

Jaber Bakr leads focus group sessions in Damascus, Syria, focusing on the challenges related to the Syrian media landscape during Syria’s transitional period, as part of SKF’s support to the CSIM.

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November 9

SKF publishes a report titled “Public Perception of Independent Media in Lebanon” based on qualitative research by IPSOS, as part of the “Market Innovation for Independent Media” (MIIM) program.

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November 12

Ayman Mhanna speaks on a panel titled “The Pro Bono Landscape in the MENA Region” as part of the PILNet Global Forum for pro bono legal practice in Rome, Italy.

.....

November 17-26

SKF organizes two back-to-back HEFAT and two safety refresher sessions in Naas, in partnership with ACOS Alliance, RPT, and GCHR, with the support of the ministries of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Netherlands. The HEFAT was delivered by Vallaris Consulting.

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November 21-23

Ayman Mhanna takes part in the Halifax International Security Forum in Nova Scotia, Canada.

November 27-December 1

Nadine Moubarak represents SKF at the MENA-focused United Nations Special Rapporteurs Consultation Meetings, organized by GCHR in Istanbul, Türkiye.

December 5-7

Wael Akiki and Widad Jarbough represents SKF at the annual Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) conference in Amman, Jordan and take part in sessions focused on media sustainability and journalist safety in the MENA region.

December 9

SKF hosts a workshop, led by Widad Jarbough, with journalists and CSOs to discuss Karim Safieddine's white paper "Journalists in the Line of Fire: Lessons from the 2024 War in Lebanon", with the support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

December 10

Widad Jarbough speaks on a panel titled "The Rule of Law as a Daily Reality: Human Rights, Justice, Freedom, and Accountability", organized by the Lebanese Ministry of Culture in Beirut.

December 17

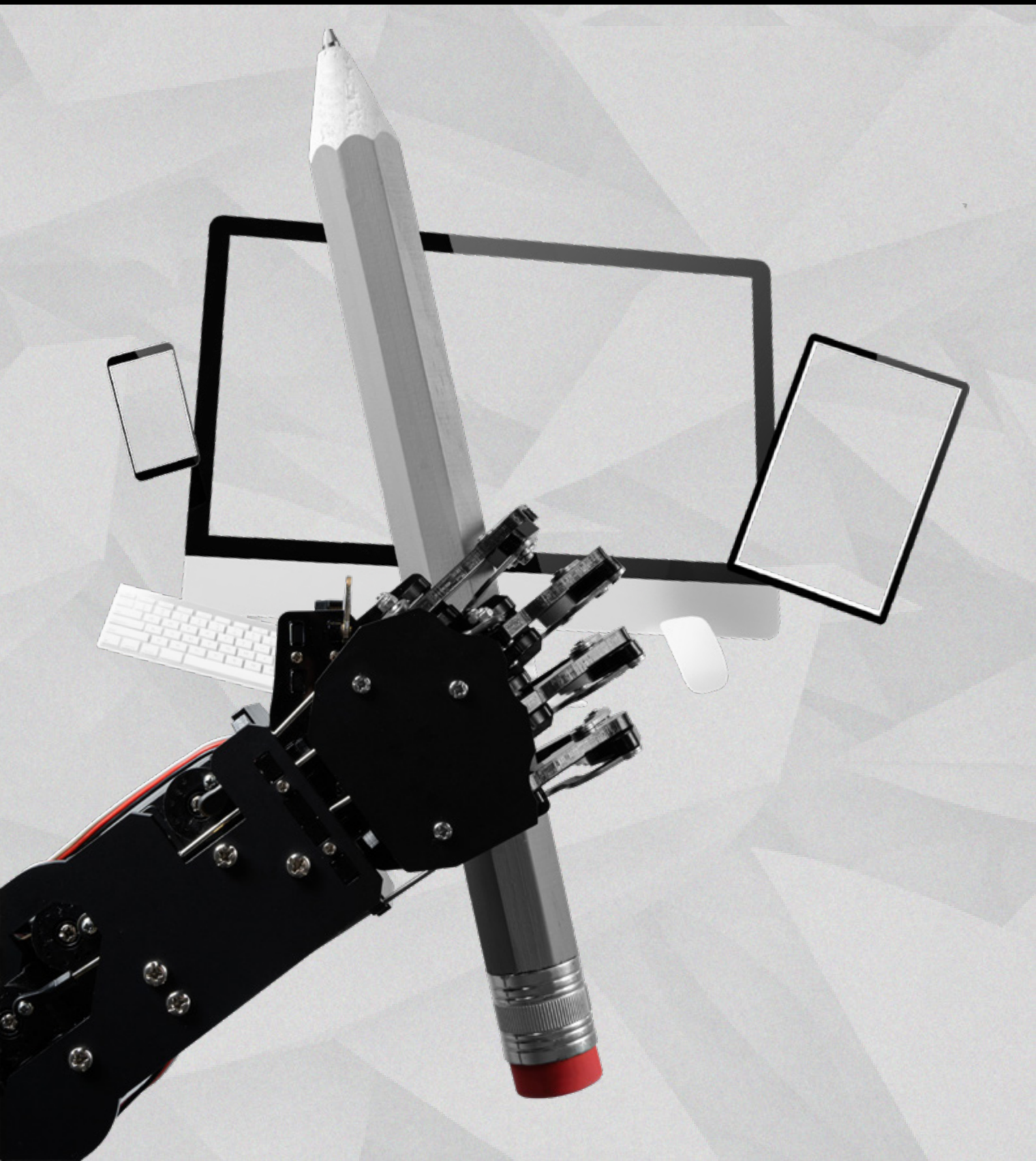
SKF co-signs, alongside 34 other regional and international human rights organizations, an [open letter](#) addressed to Yemeni authorities denouncing the continued detention of Yemeni Journalist Naseh Shaker, who was arrested in November 2023 en route to his participation in a HEFAT organized by SKF in Lebanon.



December 18

SKF publishes a report titled "The Mario Moubarak Outrage Cycle" authored by InflowAnswers founder Ralph Baydoun. This report, published with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explores the social media campaign launched on religious grounds against standup comedian Mario Moubarak.

**Media Development in an Irrational World:
Empowering Truth, and Inclusion**



In 2025, SKF deepened its support for independent media across the region at a time when journalism faced growing political, financial, and technological pressures. Through mentorship, investigative journalism grants, targeted financial support, and new shared infrastructure, SKF helped partner outlets strengthen organizational capacity, improve digital security, advance journalistic quality, and build greater resilience. This work spanned Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia, while also supporting the Consortium of Syrian Independent Media (CSIM) in reinforcing governance, legal readiness, and institutional alignment.

During the year, SKF also launched the Independent Media Resource Hub, a new mechanism offering independent media free access to state-of-the-art equipment and workstation applications, and developed, in partnership with the International Committee for Journalists (ICFJ), a foundational journalism curriculum tailored to citizen journalists and activists. Alongside these efforts, Agency for Equality (AE), SKF's sister organization focused on generating income opportunities for media outlets through advertising and related services, expanded its regional footprint and revenue streams despite sector-wide budget cuts. Taken together, these initiatives reflected SKF's strategy: to reinforce the resilience, editorial integrity, sustainability, and public value of independent media in an increasingly irrational environment.

Mentorship for Resilient and Ethical Media

SKF believes that sustained, one-on-one mentoring and coaching deliver far greater impact and efficiency than one-off, PowerPoint-powered group workshops, allowing for deeper skill-building, practical problem-solving, and long-term organizational growth.

In 2025, SKF's mentorship programs supported a diverse group of independent media outlets in strengthening organizational development, digital security, and journalistic excellence. Media outlets [Al-Rawiya](#), [Ana Hon](#) and [L'Orient-Le Jour](#) advanced toward their [Journalism Trust Initiative \(JTI\)](#) certification, with [L'Orient-Le Jour](#) eventually acquiring the certification. [Badil](#) and [Spot-Cast](#) strengthened digital safety practices under expert guidance. Tailored assessments and recommendations helped [Badil](#) improve its operational systems, while [Raseef22](#) and [Megaphone News](#) benefited from organizational restructuring support. [Ana Hon](#), [Silat Wassel](#), [Beirut Today](#), [Naqd](#), and [No2ta Feminist Lab](#) joined an editorial mentoring program in collaboration with TRF.

Beyond individual media organizations, SKF continued its work with the [Consortium of Syrian Independent Media \(CSIM\)](#), a coalition of four Syrian independent media organizations: [Al Jumhuriya](#), [ARTA](#), [Enab Baladi](#), and [Radio Rozana](#). This support focused on helping CSIM implement structured governance, align institutional practices, strengthen legal and operational readiness, and map their media landscape in post-Assad Syria. Through these efforts, SKF contributed to more transparent, accountable, and values-driven media governance across the region.

Amplifying Public Impact through Investigative Journalism

In 2025, SKF managed six investigative journalism grants, enabling Lebanese outlets to report on critical issues such as governance, social justice, environmental accountability, and state performance. The grants followed a rigorous multi-stage process that included preselection, expert review, and production support covering investigative reporting, multimedia storytelling, and editorial mentoring. SKF also worked to ensure that the resulting investigations reached audiences through articles, documentaries, visual explainers, and social media, while advocacy efforts helped translate findings into public awareness and policy relevance.

The investigations addressed several public interest issues: Ana Hon published a [documentary](#) and a [web-based timeline of events](#) on the systematic misuse and continued reliance on unlawful detention procedures, particularly through the so called “303 Contact Reports”, used by security services despite the Prime Minister’s repeated ban; Badil published an [investigative report](#) about Lebanon’s \$257.8 million World Bank water loan and whether it represents a development solution or a new debt trap; Daraj published an [investigative article](#) and a [video](#) examining the architecture behind Lebanon’s financial collapse and the actors behind it; [Manateq published four articles](#) and [two videos](#) on the systemic collapse of the Lebanese state in Southern Lebanon; Naqd published a [documentary](#) and an [article](#) the dual-prison system of Roumieh; Polyblog developed a documentary on the institutional design of environmental corruption, showing how crises are exploited for political survival – the documentary was not published.

Regular follow-up and technical guidance helped maintain high journalistic standards, while also strengthening the outlets’ capacity to contribute meaningfully to informed public debate.

Safeguarding Sustainability

SKF’s support to independent media follows a three-track approach: financial support, reduction of operating costs, and revenue diversification.

SKF’s **Financial Support to Third Parties** (FSTP) provided vital support to independent media operating in an increasingly challenging environment. The broader program combines financial and technical assistance to strengthen organizational capacity, business development, marketing, and audience engagement, with the aim of improving long-term viability.

In its first round, 21 outlets from Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia were invited to apply. Following rigorous individual and collective assessments by a dedicated selection committee with varied expertise, five outlets – [Awan Media](#), [Blue TN](#), [Khateera](#), [Shezo Media](#), and [Yaluna](#) – were selected across the three countries. Through this structured and accountable support, SKF helped these organizations sustain operations, strengthen internal systems, and continue producing credible reporting in a shrinking, competitive media environment.

In 2025, SKF made a strategic investment in the creation of the Independent **Media Resource Hub**, a one-stop-hub for journalism-related hardware and software, designed to give independent media outlets easy, free, and reliable access to high quality production, post-production, and safety equipment.

SKF launched its largest procurement of equipment to date, covering a wide range of sound, lighting, filming, and photography tools, advanced production software, and personal protective equipment, including ballistic vests, helmets, and individual first aid kits. Together, these assets form the Resource Hub: a workstation and warehouse where media outlets can borrow advanced equipment and use in-house computers and software to edit and enhance their content. The Resource Hub is intended to help independent media produce high-quality work without bearing the heft cost of owning the necessary tools. SKF's main aim is to significantly reduce production costs for independent media confronted to the funding crunch.

In parallel, **Agency for Equality** continued its operations into its fourth year since its launch in 2022, expanding its support to independent media in Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and Syria, while preparing to enter Morocco.

Building on its original model of helping media outlets generate revenue through branded content and campaign marketing services, AE further developed new income pathways by monetizing the in-house production capacities of partner media and securing direct service contracts with external clients. Demand for AE's expertise also grew, with private sector actors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations requesting consulting services and tailored support for their teams and beneficiaries. Clients increasingly valued AE's competitive pricing, its expertise, and its distinctive advantage of working closely with digital media across the Arab region.

Although the 2025 institutional funding crisis affected AE, as it affected the wider independent media ecosystem, it also created new openings, as many organizations retained marketing budgets that matched AE's cost structure and service model. AE's objective remained constant: to strengthen the financial sustainability of independent media by connecting them to viable advertising and marketing opportunities while continuing to develop innovative income-generating approaches.

Solidarity through Visibility

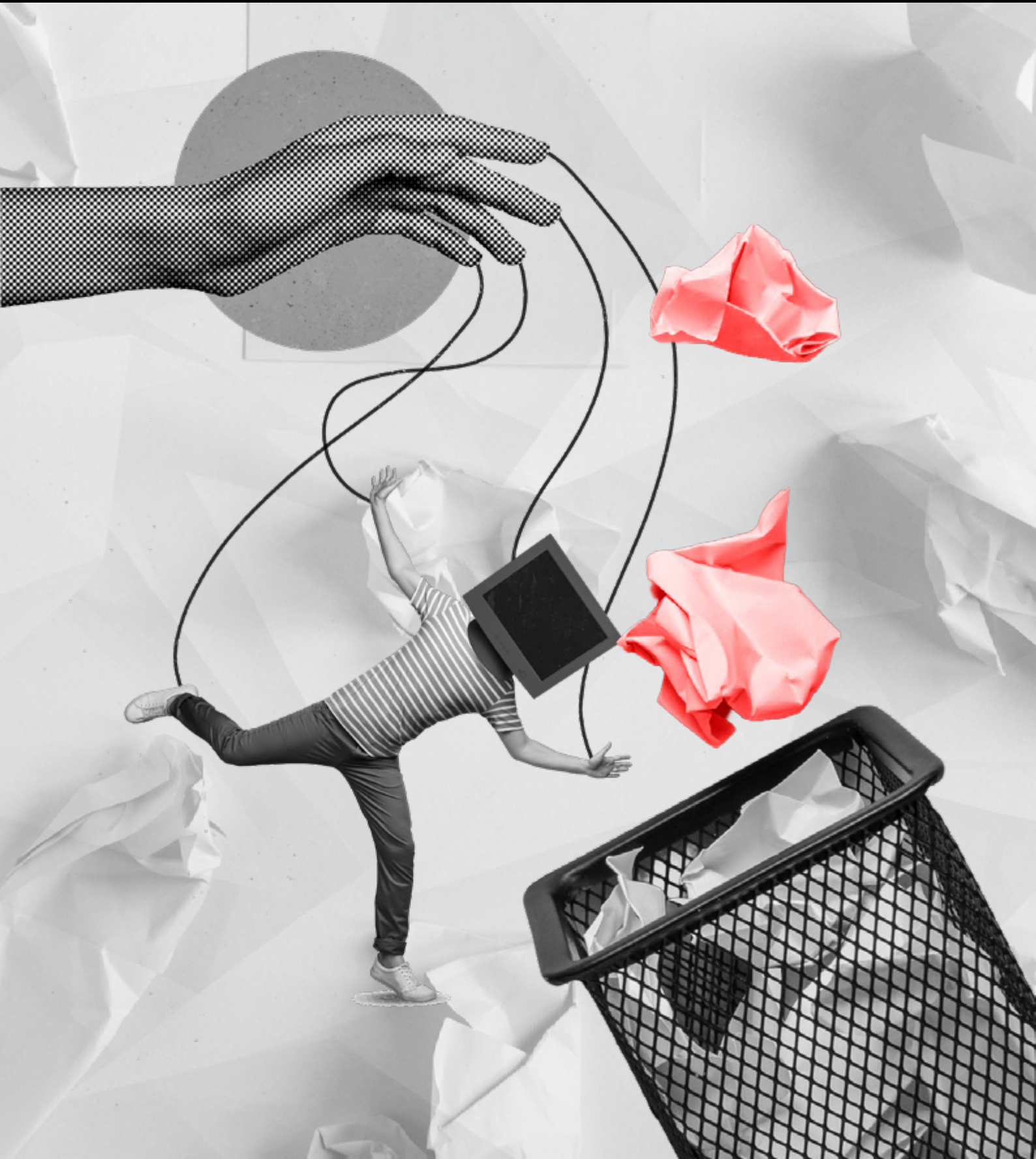
In Lebanon and across the region, people are trying to make sense of politics, crises, and everyday life within an information ecosystem shaped by two forces that work against the public interest: politically backed media networks and social media algorithms that reward outrage, speed, and repetition over accuracy and context. In such an environment, independent journalism faces a double challenge: producing verified reporting with limited resources, then ensuring that it reaches audiences without being drowned out by coordinated manipulation, disinformation, or partisan amplification.

Skroll Media was built as a practical response to this reality. As a curated news and content aggregator, it is designed to make credible independent journalism easier to discover and follow in one place. Skroll's value lies in reducing the "search cost" of finding reliable reporting, helping independent media reach wider audiences beyond platform-driven bubbles, and supporting healthier public debate by expanding access to plural, evidence-based journalism.

By the end of 2025, Skroll had integrated more than 20 independent outlets¹ from Lebanon, Jordan, Tunisia, and the wider MENA region. This growth reflected both audience demand for trusted sources and independent publishers' willingness to collaborate on ecosystem-strengthening solutions. During the year, the platform also broadened its range of voices and formats by onboarding French-language outlets, outlets focused on cultural coverage, and its first Lebanese sports outlet. This mattered because public-interest information extends beyond politics to include culture, community, and everyday life. In a region where disinformation and political pressure can narrow public debate, reliable access to independent journalism becomes a civic need, not a luxury.

¹- L'Agenda Culturel, Ana Hon, Awan, Badil, Beirut Today, Beyrouth 360, Blue TN, Cedar Sports, Manateq, Megaphone, Muwatin Media Network, Naqd, Raseef22, Al-Rawiya, Shezo Media, Sifr, Silat Wassel, Sowt, Spotcast, and Yaluna.

Lebanon's Information Crisis



SKF's research in 2025 pointed to a deeper problem than a sequence of isolated violations, controversies, or sectoral pressures. The various reports and studies SKF published showed that Lebanon's information space is being reshaped by three converging dynamics: the deliberate manipulation of digital discourse, the growing fragility of independent media as institutions, and the weakening of the norms and protections that allow journalists and cultural actors to operate freely. The central lesson is that the threat to freedom of expression no longer lies only in censorship in its classical sense. It lies equally in distortion, coordinated intimidation, economic attrition, and the erosion of public trust.

The case reports on online campaigns targeting [Megaphone and Daraj](#), singer [Ragheb Alama](#), and standup comedian [Mario Moubarak](#) each illustrated a different facet of this transformation. The report on the smear campaign targeting Megaphone and Daraj documented patterns consistent with coordination: synchronized posting, repeated narratives, suspicious profile behavior, and amplification aligned with broader political and media interests. The significance of this finding goes beyond those two outlets to show that digital attacks against independent media are no longer marginal or spontaneous phenomena. They are increasingly part of wider struggles over political legitimacy, financial interests, and control of public narratives. It also suggests that actors with very different political agendas are now converging around similar methods: the coordinated amplification, reputational targeting, and narrative disciplining previously documented in campaigns driven by pro-Hezbollah networks have also begun to appear in campaigns aligned with banking interests.

The Ragheb Alama and Mario Moubarak cases reveal, in a related fashion, that outrage can be weaponized, stripped from context, and scaled rapidly across platforms until it produces consequences that exceed the original incident. In one case, a coordinated campaign escalated toward threats and property damage; in the other, an edited performance clip became the raw material for a nationwide religious and political controversy. What these episodes teach is that the Lebanese digital sphere has become highly vulnerable to narrative hijacking. Content no longer needs to be false in every detail to be politically weaponized. Decontextualization, selective editing, emotional triggering, and concentrated amplification are often sufficient. This places journalists, artists, and public figures inside a media environment where reputational harm can be produced faster than facts can be established and where moderation consistently loses ground to escalation.

At the same time, the studies SKF published in 2025 made clear that the challenge is also one of endurance. The report on the [impact of the U.S. government funding suspension](#) showed how fragile the operating model of independent media in Lebanon has become. Budget freezes translated into immediate risks of layoffs, reduced coverage, and possible closure for outlets that already function under severe structural constraints. The professional implication showed that editorial independence cannot be defended in the abstract while the institutional bases of that independence remain precarious. A media sector that is permanently forced into emergency mode will struggle to invest in investigation, safety, technology, retention, or audience development. Sustainability becomes therefore part of the democratic infrastructure of press freedom itself.

The research around [public perception of independent media](#) added a further layer of complexity. It found that Lebanese audiences remain highly informed yet deeply distrustful, that news consumption has increasingly become a coping mechanism in a climate of fear and uncertainty, and that trust is often shaped less by institutions than by lived experience, peer circulation, and immediate emotional resonance. It also showed that the idea of “independent media” itself remains unstable in public understanding, often associated with authenticity or neutrality more than with editorial and financial autonomy. This matters politically and professionally because it means that producing serious journalism, while necessary, is not sufficient. Independent media must also explain themselves better: how they work, how they are funded, what standards they apply, and why independence is a method and discipline rather than a slogan. In a fragmented environment, credibility has to be built continuously and demonstrated concretely, especially when under attack by well-funded political and banking actors. The support for and trust in independent media outlets dropped significantly since SKF conducted a [previous study](#) on this topic in 2019–2020.

The [white paper on journalists’ safety](#) during the 2024 war, published in 2025, brought the sharpest reminder that this information crisis is also physical. It showed that emergency responses remain largely reactive, that safety resources and legal protections are limited, that local outlets routinely deprioritize safety costs under financial pressure, and that impunity remains entrenched. It also stressed that shrinking donor support is weakening an already fragile ecosystem for physical, digital, psychosocial, and legal protection. Here too, the lesson is broader than wartime safety alone. A press sector that operates under threat without robust ad hoc systems will inevitably narrow its ambitions, absorb risk unevenly, and leave the most vulnerable journalists exposed. Safety cannot remain an optional add-on or an ad-hoc intervention. It has to be institutionalized in newsroom culture, budgets, contracts, training models, and donor expectations.

More broadly, SKF’s research in 2025 provided the evidence that the appropriate response cannot be limited to monitoring violations after the fact, nor to defending freedom of expression only at the level of principle. The challenge now is more systemic. It requires:

- Better detection of coordinated digital manipulation;
- Stronger legal and advocacy capacity to push back against abusive complaints, intimidation, and hate speech;
- More sustained investment in newsroom sustainability and business resilience;
- Clearer communication with audiences about what independent media is and why it matters; and
- Far more serious embedding of safety into the professional architecture of journalism.

In that sense, the reports SKF produced in 2025 were attempts to read the logic of a changing environment. Their common message is that Lebanon's media crisis, already defined by partisan ownership, legal pressure, or episodic violence, is also defined by scalable manipulation, unstable trust, and survival risks for individuals and institutions doing serious journalism. The response must be equally multidimensional: political, professional, technological, legal, and economic. Otherwise, independent media will continue to be asked to play a democratic role with tools and protections that are dramatically below the level of the threat.

Lebanon: Escalating Risks and a Defenseless Right to Report



In Lebanon, 2025 confirmed that the threat to media freedom comes from the convergence of war, impunity, political polarization, and economic fragility. What emerged over the course of the year was not simply a high number of violations, but a harsher operating environment in which journalism became more dangerous physically, more vulnerable legally, and more exposed digitally, precisely as the resources needed to protect it were weakening.

The most consequential feature of the year was the normalization of risk. Danger became embedded in the ordinary conditions of journalistic work. Along the southern border, reporters and camera crews operated in an environment where exposure to Israeli fire, threats, and surveillance became part of the routine of coverage rather than an exceptional breakdown of protection. More than eight incidents targeting media crews were recorded. This pattern affected correspondents, photographers, and journalists from local institutions, as well as Arab and international outlets. These incidents were documented across border towns such as Mays al-Jabal, Houla, Dhayra, Maroun al-Ras, Kfar Kila, and Kfar Shouba. The level of danger escalated further with the use of drones in August and September, marking a qualitative shift that culminated in the killing of journalist Mohammad Shehadeh, director of the “Hona Lebanon” website, when an Israeli drone targeted his car on the Zahrani road. This development shifted the risk from potential injury to a direct threat to life and was reinforced, toward the end of the year, by direct threats against journalists covering the border, as happened with photographer Courtney Bonneau of “Middle East Images” and independent photographer Ali Ezzeddine.

Beyond Israeli attacks, a significant share of restrictions on media work was imposed by partisan networks. This was evident in a series of incidents targeting media crews from various institutions. A crew from LBCI in Deir Mimas was physically assaulted, insulted, and had its camera confiscated, while its broadcast vehicle was nearly destroyed after the team was chased. Another LBCI reporter, Rana Jouny, was prevented from covering events in Arabsalim and expelled from the area amid insults. Workers at the “Liban Lait” dairy factory in the Bekaa assaulted a crew from Al Jadeed TV and confiscated their phones and camera.

Yet the 2025 Lebanese media freedom landscape cannot be understood through geopolitical and partisan dynamics alone. Pressure on journalists also intensified inside the country through a combination of intimidation, harassment, procedural abuse, and social incitement. Physical assaults, obstruction of coverage, confiscation of equipment, and targeted threats showed that hostility to journalism had spread across multiple arenas. What is striking is not only that these incidents occurred, but that they reflected a broader weakening of the social and institutional boundaries meant to protect media work. Violence against media and cultural professionals increasingly appeared as a tolerated method of constraining coverage. The intimidation of Dima Sadek and Hussein Khreis, and the incitement campaign against Mario Moubarak, all point to the same reality: in Lebanon today, verbal intimidation, reputational targeting, and physical risk often belong to the same continuum.

One of the most important developments of the year was the continued expansion of what may be called procedural punishment. In principle, legal recourse should provide due process and clear jurisdictional limits. In practice, however, the multiplication of summons, referrals, interrogations, and complaints before bodies such as the Anti-Cybercrime Bureau, the Criminal Investigation Department, and various judicial police units, rather than direct referral to the Publications Court, turned procedure itself into a mechanism of pressure. The significance of this trend lies less in the outcome of any single case than in the cumulative effect of forcing journalists, editors, researchers, and media platforms to spend time, money, and emotional energy navigating institutions that should not have primary authority over press-related expression. When journalists are repeatedly summoned before security agencies or investigative bodies with questionable competence, the process itself becomes the penalty. In 2025, this pattern was visible in cases involving Megaphone, Jean Kassir, Samer Frangieh, Qassem Jaber, and Layal Alekhtiar, among others. Notably, the year also saw an increased role for financiers and bankers as complainants, including multiple cases filed by banker Antoun Sehnaoui against the Daraj website and other journalists, alongside complaints from municipalities, members of Parliament, and lawyers. In response, a clear and consistent stance emerged among several journalists, who refused to appear before security agencies and chose to be represented by legal counsel while insisting that such cases be referred to the Publications Court as the competent authority for press-related matters.

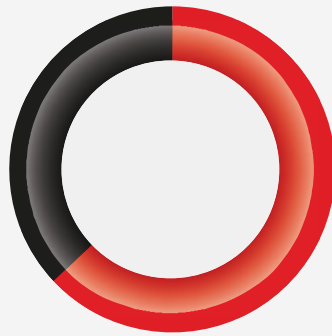
This matters because it reveals a change in the political economy of pressure on journalism. The older Lebanese model was already shaped by political patronage, partisan media, and selective legal enforcement. The pattern documented in 2025 points to something broader: a growing willingness among different centers of power to use both institutional channels and public pressure to contain critical reporting. These actors may differ ideologically and politically, but their methods increasingly converge. Smear campaigns, legal complaints, security referrals, and public intimidation now form part of the same repertoire of control. The result is a public sphere in which journalists do not merely face disagreement or criticism, but organized attempts to raise the professional, legal, and personal cost of independent reporting.

Violations by state actors also included raids, arrests, and confiscation of equipment. General Security raided the home of writer and journalist Wissam Saadeh, confiscating his computer, phone, and passport before interrogating him. Investigative journalist Hajer Knio was detained for hours at Beirut Airport before being questioned about her social media posts. Comedian Mario Moubarak had his phone confiscated by General Security at the airport amid the online smear campaign against him, before it was returned following the intervention of the Minister of Justice. The Lebanese Army detained Mahdi Krayem, a correspondent for Manateq Net, while he was working near the Tyre Nature Reserve, before releasing him. In Mays al-Jabal, journalists Laith Maarouf and Hadi Hoteit were arrested and handed over to the army for questioning before being released.

What 2025 ultimately revealed is that the right to report in Lebanon is being eroded through accumulation. No single violation, lawsuit, assault, or ban fully defines the year. The deeper significance lies in the way these pressures reinforce one another. Border risk makes field reporting more perilous. Weak safety funding leaves journalists less protected. Digital incitement raises the likelihood of offline harm. Procedural abuse turns institutions into tools of deterrence. Economic and political actors alike have become more willing to punish scrutiny. There have been signs of goodwill among Lebanese authorities, including from the Prime Minister and the ministers of Justice and Information, but the scale and seriousness of the violations, both quantitatively and qualitatively, require more than goodwill: they require legislative change and consistent enforcement against perpetrators of violations.

Violations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Arbitrary Dismissal	1			13									14
Arrest				1			2						3
Confiscation/ Destruction of Equipment	2		1		2		2					2	9
Cultural Censorship		1		1	1		1						4
Deportation	1												1
Detention							1						1
Interrogation	3				1		3			1		1	9
Job Obstruction	8	6			2				2	1		1	20
Killing								1					1
Legal Action	1	1	2	1	5	8	4	3	2	7	3		37
Media Censorship					1	1				1			3
Online Censorship				1			1	1					3
Online Harassment and Hate Campaign		1	1					1			1		4
Physical Assault/ Injuries	5		1		2		1					2	11
Summons	4	3	1	5	4	2	5	1	3	3	6		37
Threat			1		1	1	1	2	1		1	2	10
Total	25	12	7	22	19	12	21	9	8	13	11	8	167

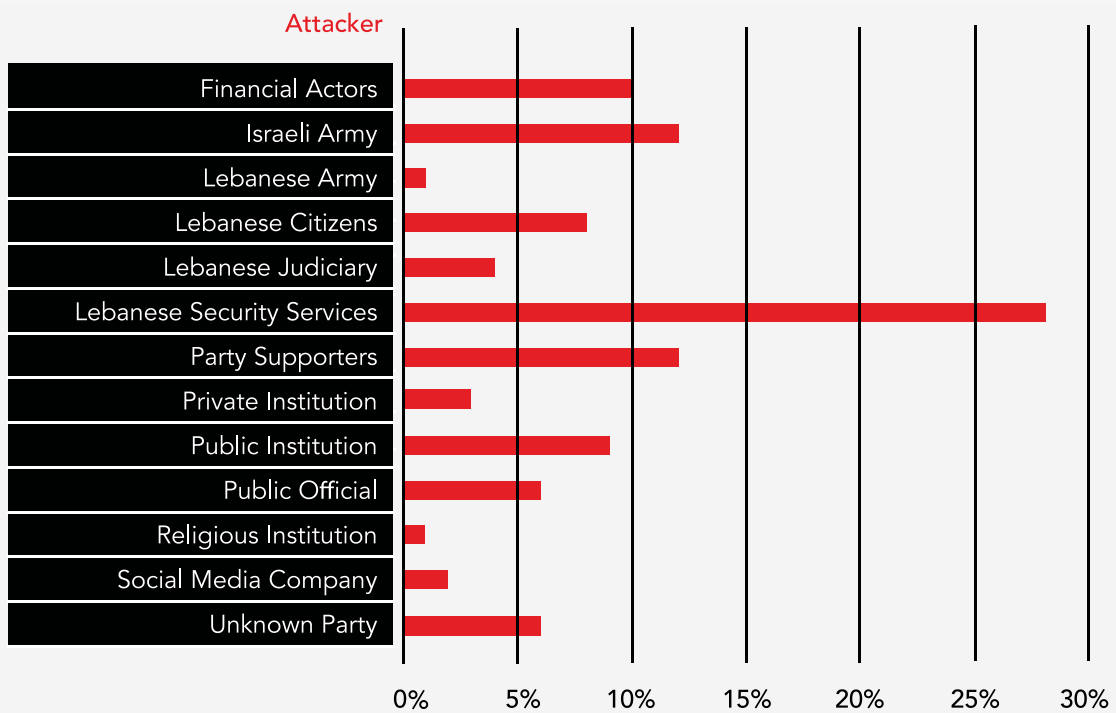
Victims of Violations by Gender



63% Male

37% Female

Violations by Responsible Party



Palestine: Repression, War, and the Right to Speak Up



Gaza: A Hollow Truce and Famine-Stricken Coverage

Residents of the Gaza Strip breathed a sigh of relief when a truce between Israel and Hamas was announced on January 15, 2025, and came into effect on January 19. That relief proved short-lived. The truce lasted only about two months before Israel effectively ended it with a surprise bombardment at dawn on March 19, 2025, causing hundreds of casualties among Gaza's population, killed and injured alike. With the resumption of the war, the direct targeting of journalists and photographers intensified sharply: 76 journalists and photographers were killed by the Israeli army, including 40 journalists and 36 photographers, while 66 others were injured. The vast majority of these casualties occurred between March 18 and October 10, 2025, the date on which the final ceasefire agreement was signed.

During the intensive bombardment of the Strip, the Israeli army also killed eight artists, as well as three writers and poets, after targeting their homes and places of displacement across different areas of Gaza. It also adopted a clearer and more direct pattern in targeting journalists, publicly accusing some of affiliation with Palestinian armed factions before assassinating them in drone strikes. Among the most notable cases was the killing of several journalists and photographers working for Al Jazeera, including correspondents Hossam Shabat and Anas Al-Sharif, photographer Mohammad Abu Ouda, independent journalist Hassan Aslih, and Reuters photographer Hossam Al-Masri. These killings followed an Israeli statement naming some of them, alongside others from Al Jazeera, and accusing them of affiliation with Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Missiles and bullets were not the only tools used against Palestinians in Gaza. The Israeli army tightened the siege on the Strip and blocked the entry of aid and food supplies, leading to a famine that peaked in June and July. The effects were felt by the entire population, including journalists, photographers, and their families. Prices for the remaining food and water rose to extreme levels, while most people were unable to afford them, contributing to widespread malnutrition and emaciation. As conditions deteriorated, many journalists were no longer able to continue working, and some were documented collapsing during coverage. Following raids on ships participating in maritime convoys attempting to break the blockade on Gaza, the Israeli army arrested dozens of Arab and foreign journalists on board, along with activists and medical teams. Among these ships were the "Madeleine," "Handala," and "Sumoud." Israel escorted them to the port of Ashdod, detained those on board, and then proceeded with their deportation.

On the other hand, three violations were recorded by security forces affiliated with the Hamas government in Gaza, consisting of assaults and the prevention of coverage. Independent journalist Saleh Al-Jaafarawi was also killed by gunfire from an armed group while covering clashes between that group and Hamas security forces in Gaza City.

The year 2025 in Gaza reflected a grim reality of direct killings and systematic targeting of journalists and photographers, combined with a tightened siege and famine that exhausted society and severely restricted the ability of media workers to continue their work. Between assassinations and public incitement, arrests linked to blockade-breaking convoys, and the more limited violations committed by Hamas-affiliated security forces, an extremely dangerous media environment took shape, one that constrained coverage and physically and psychologically exhausted those working in the field.

West Bank: Journalism Facing Military Violence, Settler Attacks, and Political Repression

Palestinian media crews closed 2025 after enduring hundreds of assaults by both Israeli forces and settlers, making the West Bank one of the most challenging environments for media work. Hardly a day passed without an attack, arrest, or obstruction targeting a journalist or photographer. Violations, however, were not limited to Israeli forces and settlers. Media crews also faced abuses by Palestinian Authority security forces, including arbitrary arrests and repeated obstruction of coverage. As a result, field journalists found themselves trapped within a triangle of pressure that narrowed their space for action and turned routine reporting into a high-risk undertaking.

The direct physical targeting of media crews was the defining feature of 2025. It took multiple forms, including live ammunition, attempted vehicular ramming, sound bombs, tear gas, and severe beatings. Field evidence shows that Israeli forces deliberately targeted journalists and photographers with gunfire. The repeated use of live ammunition, whether resulting in injury or in near misses, points to an expansion of the “light trigger” policy in the West Bank to include media crews, despite official claims that it is applied only to those deemed a threat.

This violence was not limited to gunfire. Israeli forces also used vehicle ramming as a direct method of assault, turning military vehicles into instruments of potentially lethal force. The repeated targeting of journalists and the constant threat of such targeting aimed to create deterrence, pushing media crews away from the scene and making them hesitate before returning. Even when journalists survive such attacks, the experience often leaves deep psychological scars, trapping them in a silent struggle with fear and reinforcing the sense that everyone is a target and that no safe space exists for complaint or emotional release.

The intent to inflict maximum harm cannot be separated from the repeated targeting of journalists’ tools of work. Attacks were frequently accompanied by the destruction of equipment, the confiscation of memory cards, the deletion of footage, tampering with mobile phones, and even the destruction or burning of vehicles. For years, Israel has effectively operated on a brutal premise: no image of the crime, therefore no crime. This logic has been enforced through the systematic prevention of documentation in many parts of the West Bank, by threatening journalists and forcing them away from sites of violence. In that context, the prevention of Palestinian journalists and photographers from covering events became almost constant

throughout 2025. From the far north of the West Bank to its far south, Israeli forces and settlers rarely allowed media crews to work freely. This reflects a clear attempt to impose a media blackout, making the denial of coverage one of the defining features of the year.

Administrative detention remained one of Israel's harshest tools against Palestinian journalists and photographers, forcibly removing them from the field and exposing them to grave violations in detention, some of which may amount to war crimes. These included starvation, medical neglect, torture, and sexual violence ranging from harassment to rape, practices that are increasingly reported as recurring inside Israeli prisons in a climate of international silence widely perceived as tacit acceptance. In this context, the testimony of journalist Sami Al-Sa'i stood out, as he described sexual assaults he endured during detention in 2025 at the hands of Israeli prison guards. At the same time, many journalists, both men and women, remain unwilling or unable to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered in detention because of trauma, lack of psychological readiness, and the social stigma attached to such violations. These crimes have long been surrounded by denial and silence, reinforced by social and psychological barriers and by the absence of adequate support for survivors.

At the same time, settler violence and intimidation emerged as among the gravest threats to the work of Palestinian media crews. Many journalists and photographers were subjected to violent assaults that at times put their lives at direct risk, including beatings with firearms, batons, and sharp tools by groups of settlers. Some required months away from the field to recover from their injuries. Palestinian journalists have come to recognize that the safety measures they rely on while covering Israeli military incursions offer little protection against settler attacks, which often resemble coordinated gang assaults directed collectively at media workers.

The third side of this "triangle of fear" was the Palestinian Authority's security apparatus, which continued to pursue arrests and summonses based on weak and often politically motivated accusations. One of the most common charges was "possession of weapons," a pretext frequently invoked during arrests when the actual motive related to journalistic work. Interrogations routinely focused on journalists' professional activities, what they published, their sources, and their funding, alongside direct threats to stop covering peaceful protests critical of the Authority.

The year 2025 recorded hundreds of violations affecting the freedom and safety of Palestinian media crews in the West Bank. What emerged demonstrated the consolidation of an environment in which journalism itself became one of the most dangerous professions.

Inside the 1948 Territories: The Legislative Entrenchment of Media and Cultural Repression

The year 2025 witnessed a marked escalation in restrictions and violations targeting Palestinian journalists, photographers, and artists in the 1948 Territories. These measures no longer appear as isolated field incidents but are increasingly embedded in regulatory, security, and judicial processes that create a more restrictive environment for Palestinian and Arab media and cultural work through field decisions, legal prosecutions, and limits on broadcasting and coverage. A notable example is the case of journalist Saïd Hassanein, who faced severe legal persecution, including prolonged house arrest and technical restrictions that effectively paralyzed his ability to work.

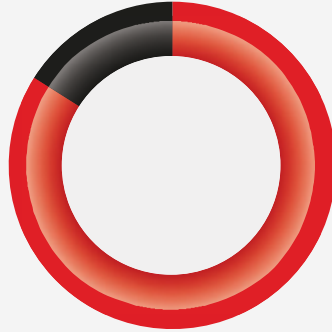
Expulsion from Al-Aqsa Mosque also emerged as a central tool of geographic and professional isolation, affecting numerous Palestinian journalists and photographers in an effort to exclude them from one of the most politically and religiously significant sites of coverage. These measures were accompanied by direct physical assaults by Israeli police and settlers during field reporting, including beatings and violent dispersal tactics, as well as public incitement campaigns led by right-wing groups and Israeli political and media figures. Such campaigns portrayed Palestinian journalists as traitors and inciters, helping create a broader climate in which attacks against them could be justified and normalized.

At the legal level, 2025 stands out as a turning point in the shift from temporary emergency measures to entrenched legislation institutionalizing censorship and repression. The Knesset passed laws granting broad powers to shut down media outlets and block websites without effective judicial oversight, making it easier to extend bans on Arab channels, raid media offices, and impose unprecedented restrictions on journalistic work. This was accompanied by tighter military censorship over field coverage, including the confiscation of equipment and interruptions to broadcasts, within an official discourse that increasingly demonized Palestinian journalism and framed it as a security threat.

This approach extended beyond the media sphere into the Palestinian cultural and artistic field. It included raids on cultural institutions, bans on artistic and cinematic performances, and the arrest of artists. What emerged was a deliberate linkage between laws officially aimed at preventing incitement and a much wider range of cultural and artistic expression carrying identity-based or national significance. The implication is broader than censorship of news alone. It points to an effort to suffocate the wider space of Palestinian expression, memory, and representation.

Violations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Arrest	9	7	9	5	5	5	6	3	4	54		5	112
Confiscation/ Destruction of Equipment	3	1	2		2	4	4	1	4	3	3	2	29
Cultural Censorship		2	1	1					1		2	1	8
Deportation									2	49			51
Detention	2	8	9	2	13	10	6	4	4	5	5	4	72
Detention Extension	4	1	4	2		1	4			3	2	2	23
Interrogation	2	8	6	2	5	11	1	1	3	4	2	3	48
Job Obstruction	41	18	24	25	15	34	19	11	23	23	13	28	274
Killing	10	8		8	14	8	12	15	9	2		1	87
Media Censorship	8	2			2	3					1	1	17
Online Harassment and Hate Campaign	2	2			1					1	1		7
Physical Assault/ Injuries	3	13	2	18	25	17	17	10	7	7	8	5	132
Prison Sentence	2			1	1						1		5
Summons	2	1	4	1	2	5					2	2	19
Threat	2	2			6	3	3				1	8	25
Torture		1	8										9
Total	90	74	69	65	91	101	72	45	57	151	41	62	918

Victims of Violations by Gender

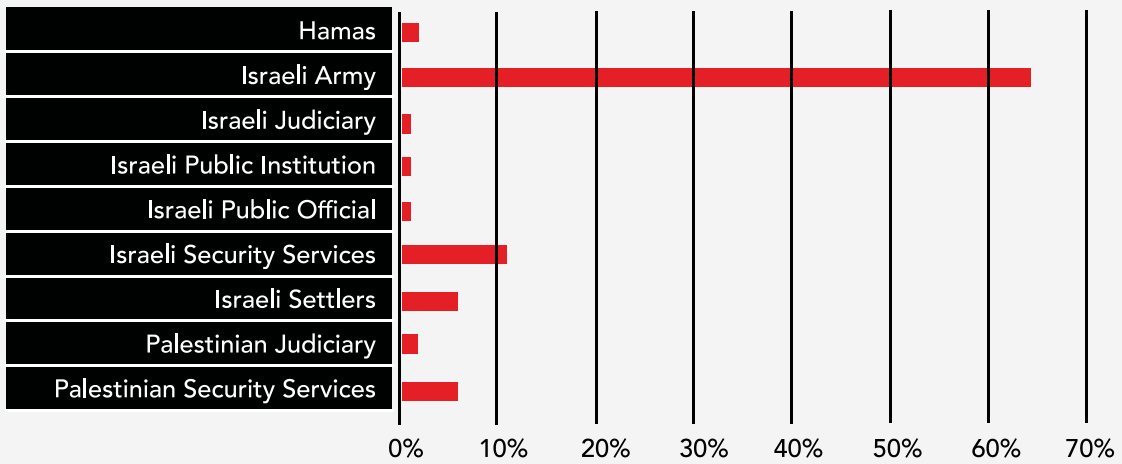


84% Male

16% Female

Violations by Responsible Party

Attacker



Syria: The Aesthetics of Liberation and the Unfinished Reality of Justice



“Take a selfie here” is a phrase painted on many of the walls at the Nasib border crossing between Syria and Jordan, often accompanied by drawings of flowers or the state flag, formerly known as the revolution’s flag. The image immediately catches the eye: a pleasant gesture reinforced by the courteous treatment of travelers by passport officers. It stays in the mind as something Instagrammable, a clean and carefully curated frame.

Graves and Justice

With time, the country begins to resemble that phrase painted on a spotless wall: bright white paint, vibrant flowers, and beneath them a ground saturated with the dead, waiting at the threshold of transitional justice. Every day, a new mass grave appeared. Journalists from international news agencies rushed to al-Qutayfah in the Damascus countryside to take photographs and broadcast reports, only for everyone to discover that the grave had been moved to the desert area in al-Dumayr in an “earth relocation” operation. Pens and cameras then rushed to al-Dumayr, passing on the way the graves of Najha, al-Tadamon, and several other cities and towns across the country, endlessly, without reaching any end to this vast accumulation of Syrian remains across generations.

The media, for its part, violated the sanctity of these graves as crime scenes, filming and broadcasting live before influencers completed the spectacle in the ugliest possible way: carrying bones and skulls and putting on trial those they assumed to be criminals in the graveyard itself, without a court, without a process, without anything. It was an obscene scene, deeply revolting. Soon after, the transitional government announced the establishment of the National Committee for Transitional Justice and the National Committee for the Missing. They too felt, in a sense, like the flowers at the Nasib crossing and the phrase painted beneath them: “Take a selfie here.”

“Dreamy promises” may be one way to describe the past year, yet the scale of the catastrophe far exceeds any reassuring promises. In March 2025, armed confrontations erupted in Syria’s coastal regions after former Assad loyalists launched attacks against the new government forces. Once Interior Ministry personnel were killed in the first phase of the fighting, parts of the Sunni public mobilized in support of the new authorities, and the coast descended into bloody chaos. This was followed by government promises of accountability for those responsible for the violations. Some individuals were arrested and brought to trial in Aleppo, but those proceedings satisfied no human rights activists and, in both form and effect, once again resembled the bright mural at Nasib: “Take a selfie here.”

The clashes in the coast had been preceded by complex military operations in Deraa, though this somehow escaped serious media scrutiny, for reasons as difficult to explain as the flowers painted on Nasib’s walls. Then, after the coast clashes, came the confrontation in Suwayda, which nearly escalated into a regional war for the first time since 1973, after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cast himself as the protector of the Druze and his army bombed the Syrian army’s General Staff headquarters in the heart of Damascus. A building was reduced to rubble in Umayyad

Square while an ever-widening rift opened between Suwayda and Damascus. The violations committed against civilians there are beyond shameful. And again, came promises of accountability, investigations, and newly formed committees. For the first time in contemporary Syrian history, the idea emerged of investigating the killing of a Syrian by government forces, whether on the coast or in Suwayda. For the first time, senior government figures were heard acknowledging that violations had taken place and that those responsible would be held accountable. Even so, it still felt like the same phrase on the wall: “Take a selfie here.”

Yet these episodes are only one part of a much wider Syrian reality. Looking back at the cameras and pens that rushed to cover the mass graves, to document the violations on the coast and in Suwayda while neglecting Deraa, and then moved on to Aleppo and from there to the Jazira region to cover the clashes between the transitional government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, Syria has become an exceptional testing ground for journalism, especially for international agencies and major regional media institutions.

The New Syrian Media Landscape

The current authorities do not want to appear, in the eyes of the media, as though they are putting Assad’s clothes back on. They have therefore opened the door to “everyone” to work in Syria. Yet at the same time, they have made the work of independent Syrian media organizations more difficult by delaying the adoption of a modern media law aligned with Syria’s new political reality.

Some supporters of the new authorities have also engaged in a kind of cyberwar against opposition journalists. Journalists whose views diverge from dominant narratives no longer fear arrest and prosecution as much as they fear digital mobs capable of launching smear campaigns against them. This is particularly true for women journalists. Many now practice self-censorship before writing or publishing anything they believe might provoke those groups. Nor are such groups limited to government supporters; sects and ethnic communities have their own extreme loyalists as well.

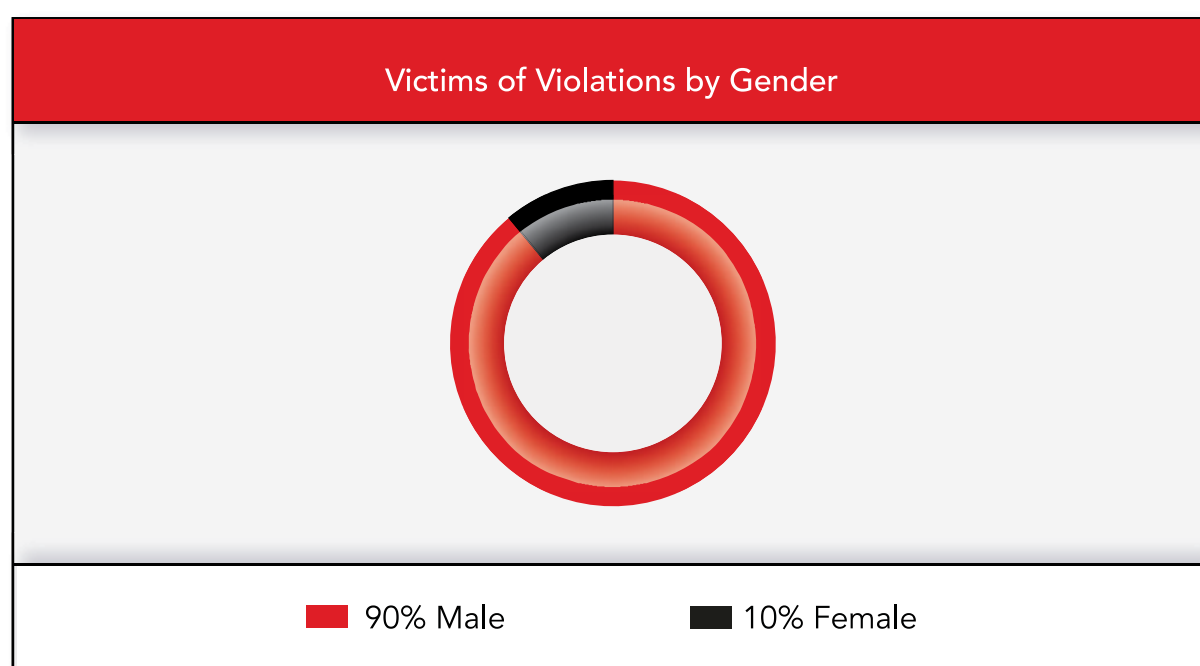
And yet cameras, live broadcasts, and media institutions continue to operate from the heart of Damascus, covering military operations, political meetings, and public activity. State television itself has aired interviews with fierce opponents confronting the government live on air with harsh accusations. The Minister of Information has intervened repeatedly to follow up on journalists’ conditions, at times performing the role that professional unions, now in a near-clinical state of paralysis, ought to play. This too evokes the mural at Nasib: “Take a selfie here.”

Broadly speaking, few doubt the government’s good intentions or its genuine effort to protect the media, despite its sidelining of experienced Syrian media professionals and its reliance on teams that still require far more training and practice, whether in relaunching the state-owned TV station, Damascus Radio, the second-oldest Arab radio station, or other media projects. It is attempting to do what it can. Those intentions deserve recognition. But Syria still needs clear and explicit laws that

protect media institutions and media workers, contribute to developing the sector, and place real priority on combating hate speech and disinformation, both of which have become as ubiquitous in Syria as air and water.

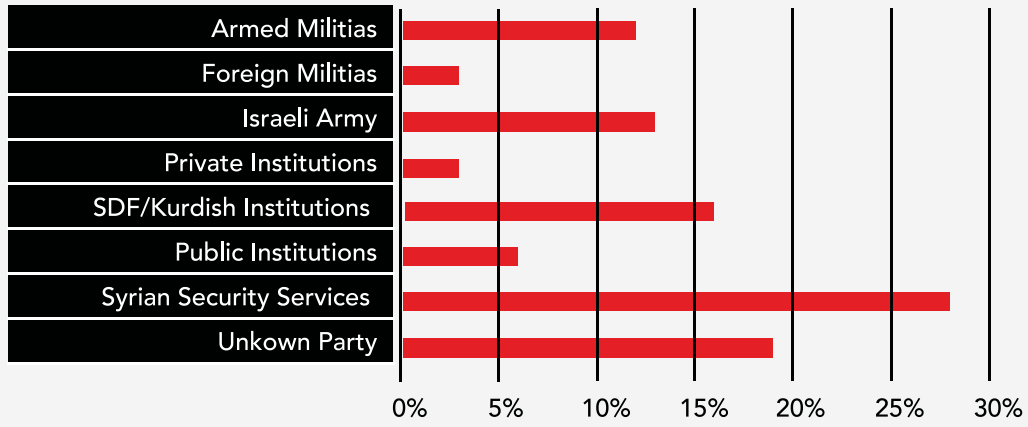
Only then can the freshly painted wall be torn down, the traces of the past erased, and a new, solid pillar built, one on which Syrians can draw their own memories and write beneath them, at last and without irony: "Take a selfie here."

Violations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Dec	Total
Arrest	2			3	7	1	3		2		2	20
Confiscation/Destruction of Equipment	1		1				1					3
Cultural Censorship		1		2								3
Detention	2											2
Job Obstruction						2						2
Kidnapping	1	1										2
Killing	1		1		1		1	1				5
Physical Assault/Injuries	1		4		5		1			1		13
Summons						1	1					2
Torture							1	1				2
Total	8	2	6	5	13	4	8	2	2	1	3	54



Violations by Responsible Party

Attacker



Jordan: Freedoms Lost between Parliament, Court Rooms, and Administrative Control



2025 was no ordinary year in Jordan's media landscape. Newspapers were not shut down, screens were not entirely blacked out, and no formal state of emergency was declared. Yet what unfolded was a gradual and cumulative narrowing of the space for free expression, until the practical limits imposed on journalists became far tighter than those suggested by constitutional guarantees.

The case of journalist Ahmad Hassan al-Zoabi offered a revealing entry point into the nature of this moment. Replacing a prison sentence with an electronic ankle bracelet did not change the underlying reality: a Facebook post was enough to bring a journalist before the courts and secure a conviction. The significance of the case was therefore not only legal, but symbolic. It sent a clear message that digital expression, even when it takes the form of political opinion in a public context, remains highly vulnerable to punishment.

The assaults on correspondents inside Parliament likewise tested the authority of the legislature and its ability to protect journalistic work within its own premises. The absence of an official apology or any clear accountability sent a troubling signal. Even the institution that should have been among the safest and most protected spaces for political reporting could no longer be assumed to offer meaningful protection.

Cases of detention and the enforcement of prison sentences in older defamation files also recurred. When judicial proceedings intersect with personal risk in this way, the message becomes sharper still: words may cost a journalist not only professional security, but personal liberty and safety as well.

On the administrative front, the role of the Media Commission became more pronounced through publication bans, website blocking, and license revocations that were later reversed. What this reveals is the fragility of the legal environment governing digital media, where a single administrative decision can place the continued existence of an entire outlet at risk. A later reversal does not erase the damage of the initial decision; it merely entrenches a climate of uncertainty.

Publication bans in particular expanded across political, university, and criminal cases. In principle, such bans may be justified as a means of protecting the course of justice. But their increasing use, extending to both media outlets and social media platforms, raises a more fundamental concern: how does an exceptional measure become routine? And at what point does a publication ban cease to be a narrowly defined legal instrument and become instead a broader mechanism for managing public discourse?

Even the professional unions were not free from controversy. The Jordan Press Association's warnings against those it described as "impostors," alongside the imposition of fees on online outlets, opened a wider debate over who has the authority to define a journalist in an age of digital and open media. The issue is no longer merely regulatory. It touches the core of professional legitimacy itself: whether union membership remains the decisive marker of journalistic status, or whether digital transformation requires a broader and more flexible understanding of the profession.

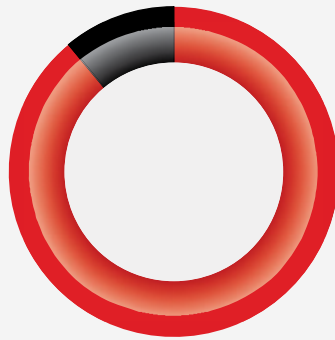
The paradox is that this landscape has unfolded alongside an official discourse affirming the importance of media and its role in reform and modernization. Yet reform cannot be fully credible in an environment where journalists weigh the consequences of every sentence before publishing it. Freedom of expression is not a political luxury. It is a social safeguard. As it narrows, rumors spread more easily, unprofessional platforms gain ground, and public trust deteriorates.

2025 is a year that exposed the difficulty of reconciling state-centered notions of security with the requirements of meaningful freedom. The question now is whether restriction will continue to function as the default approach, with solidarity appearing only in reaction to each new case, or whether this moment will prompt a more serious rethinking of the relationship between authority and the press, on the basis of partnership rather than suspicion.

The answer to that question will shape not only the future of journalists in Jordan, but the future of the Jordanian public sphere itself.

Violations	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Arrest		1		1	2	1				1	6
Confiscation/Destruction of Equipment		1									1
Cultural Censorship	1										1
Detention		1									1
Fine	1										1
Job Obstruction			2							1	3
Media Censorship			2	13	1		1	1	1		19
Online Hate and Harassment Campaign	1	1	1			1	2				6
Physical Assault/Injuries					1						1
Prison Sentence		1									1
Summons						1					1
Total	3	5	5	14	4	3	3	1	1	2	41

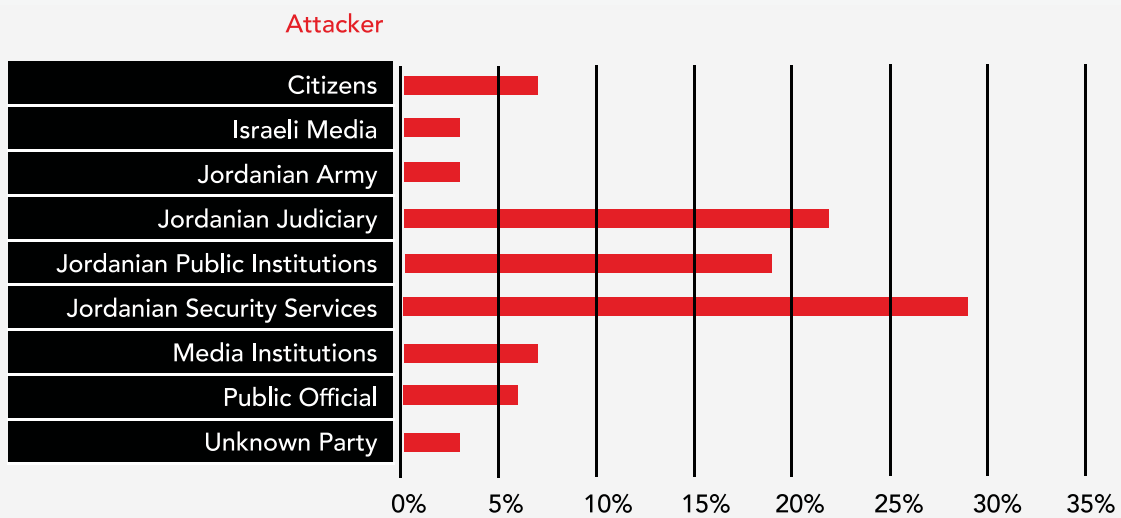
Victims of Violations by Gender



89% Male

11% Female

Violations by Responsible Party



Journalism in Action: Safety, Preparedness, and Professional Survival



Journalists' safety extends far beyond physical protection. It also includes digital security, legal protection, psychological well-being, and the socio-economic conditions that allow media workers to remain in the profession with dignity. Whether a journalist is physically injured, targeted online, summoned by the authorities, or worn down by burnout and financial precarity, these challenges reduce their ability to report the truth. SKF's safety work is therefore designed as a comprehensive response to the layered risks journalists face on a daily basis.

In 2025, 64 journalists completed a four-day **Hostile Environment and First Aid Training** (HEFAT), equipping them to assess field risks, prepare accordingly, and respond to emergencies with life-saving skills. An additional 20 journalists attended a one-day refresher course to maintain and strengthen skills acquired through previous SKF HEFAT sessions. SKF also continued to provide free **access to Personal Protective Equipment** (PPE), including vests, helmets, and first-aid kits, which journalists can borrow for field assignments.

SKF's approach to safety also aims to institutionalize preparedness as a core professional competence rather than an ad hoc response to crisis. To that end, SKF built partnerships with 15 universities across Lebanon that offer degrees in journalism, media, and communications. SKF is currently working with these universities to integrate safety modules, originally designed by the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation for US universities and adapted by SKF to the Lebanese context, into existing academic curricula. This effort reflects a broader conviction that safety must be taught early, systematically, and as an integral part of journalistic formation.

That same commitment extends to younger audiences. In partnership with the EU Delegations in Lebanon and Jordan, and in collaboration with ISSA France, SKF designed an interactive program for students aged 14 to 16, focused on digital safety, media and information literacy, and responsible online conduct. The initiative translates complex issues into accessible and age-appropriate content, helping young people navigate digital risks more confidently. In 2025, this outreach reached 501 students across 18 schools in five Lebanese districts.

Safety, moreover, also has an economic dimension that is too often overlooked, especially in the case of photojournalists. Many work freelance, absorb high levels of field risk, invest heavily in costly equipment, and remain among the least protected segments of the media profession. For them, safety is inseparable from the ability to generate income, maintain equipment, and continue working without being pushed into deeper precarity each time a crisis erupts. This is where **Soora.store** forms part of SKF's broader safety ecosystem. By creating a marketplace through which Lebanese photojournalists can sell their work more effectively and transparently, Soora helps strengthen the economic resilience of a profession that is frequently exposed, underpaid, and undervalued. In that sense, Soora is both a media development initiative and a form of socio-economic protection, one that recognizes that sustaining photojournalists' livelihoods is part of sustaining their safety and, ultimately, the public's access to visual documentation.

All of these efforts are driven by the same objective: to help build a culture of safety that protects not only the individual journalist, but the long-term viability of the profession itself.

2025 Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press



& 20

SAMIR KASSIR AWARD

FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS



AWARDED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

20TH EDITION
2025

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE SAMIR KASSIR FOUNDATION

The 2025 edition of the **Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press** carried a weight that went beyond the usual significance of this EU-awarded prize. It marked twenty years since Samir Kassir's assassination and took place at a moment when journalism across the region had become even more indispensable and more dangerous. In that sense, the anniversary was a reminder that the conditions Kassir wrote and fought against have evolved, multiplied, and in many places become more lethal.

Since 2006, the Award has been presented annually to honor journalists from North Africa, the Middle East, and the Gulf whose work addresses democracy, freedom, accountability, human rights, and civic participation.

The competition for the 20th edition of the Award was launched on February 25, 2025, with a new advertisement, alongside a powerful video message featuring the EU Ambassador to Lebanon, Sandra De Waele, the Acting President of the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKF), Malek Mrowa, and several former laureates. The message highlighted how, for two decades, the Samir Kassir Award has served as a beacon of press freedom across the region, and how it continues to honor journalists whose commitment to truth persists despite deadly risks and relentless censorship.

The competition was launched on February 25, 2025, with the winners announced on June 3, in Beirut, in a ceremony held one day after the 20th anniversary of Samir Kassir's assassination. The 2025 jury brought together Ali Amar (Morocco), Antoine Haddad (Lebanon), Mina Al-Oraibi (Iraq), Jean-Pierre Perrin (France), Paul Radu (Romania), Natalia Sancha (Spain), and Lina Sinjab (Syria). In a year marked by war, repression, and deepening attacks on independent journalism, the jury's work reflected the Award's continued insistence that serious reporting still deserves public recognition, regional visibility, and institutional protection.

This edition also confirmed the Award's continued relevance in numerical terms. A record 372 journalists from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen took part in the competition. Of these, 125 competed in the Opinion Piece category, 157 in the Investigative Article category, and 90 in the Audiovisual News Report category. Those figures matter for more than celebratory reasons. They show that despite censorship, violence, exile, shrinking resources, and growing precarity, journalists across the region continue to invest in rigorous public-interest work and continue to see the Award as a meaningful platform through which that work can be acknowledged.

What gave the 2025 edition particular force, however, was the substance of the winning entries. The three selected works displayed clear technical quality and, together, captured three central features of the region's present: the moral burden imposed on societies living under extreme violence, the afterlife of dictatorship in the bodies and lives of survivors, and the stolen temporality of childhood in a country shaped by endless war. In that sense, the winners represented the kinds of truths journalism in the region must still fight to make visible.

In the Opinion Piece category, Palestinian journalist **Badar Salem** won for her article, *On the Normalisation of Sumud in Gaza*, published in Romman Magazine on July 19, 2024. Her piece challenged one of the most deeply entrenched narratives surrounding Gaza: the idealization of steadfastness as an unquestioned virtue. Instead of celebrating resilience uncritically, Salem interrogated how the glorification of 'sumud' can become a burden placed on the victims themselves, masking trauma, normalizing unbearable suffering, and denying people the right to vulnerability, care, and dignity. The article stood out because it refused easy moral language. It asked what happens when a society under annihilatory violence is praised mainly for its endurance, and whether that praise can become another way of failing to fully see its pain. In honoring this article, the Award recognized a form of opinion writing that goes beyond taking a position; it unsettles an entire emotional and political vocabulary that has become normalized in public discourse on Palestine.

In the Investigative Article category, Egyptian journalist **Marina Milad** won for her investigation, *"I Have Become Shameful": Syrian Women Leave Prison with a "Stigma"*, published in Masrawy on February 25, 2025. The investigation examined how women who survived detention under the Assad regime emerge into a new cycle of pain marked by stigma, silence, and social rejection. Its strength lay in its refusal to treat imprisonment as the endpoint of abuse. Instead, it documented how torture, sexual violence, dehumanization, and the fear surrounding them continue outside prison walls, including through the social treatment of women survivors. The result was an investigation that expanded the frame of accountability. It showed that repression does not end when a prison door opens, and that the violence of dictatorship can survive in social attitudes, denial, and the absence of meaningful support systems. In awarding this piece, the Samir Kassir Award affirmed the importance of investigative journalism that follows trauma beyond the headline event and into the structures that prolong it.

In the Audiovisual News Report category, Syrian journalist **Khalil Alashavi** won for a report portraying *Childhood in an Ongoing War* in Syria. The report was aired on the Tiny Hands platform on March 15, 2025. After years in which Syria has often been narrated through military and geopolitical frames, Alashavi's work returned attention to how the war has shaped, and in many cases deformed, childhood itself. By centering the experience of children growing up in a conflict without horizon, the report captured the long duration of Syrian suffering in a way that is at once intimate and political. It reminded audiences that war involves destruction in the present tense as well as the slow restructuring of memory, expectation, fear, and normality for those who come of age inside it.

Twenty years after Samir Kassir's killing, the Award remains one of the most visible ways in which his name continues to stand for something larger than memory. It stands for a demanding idea of journalism: intellectually serious, ethically grounded, regionally engaged, and unwilling to surrender either to fear or to simplification. In 2025, that idea mattered as much as ever to support a profession under threat and to resist erasure, falsification, and resignation.

2025 Beirut Spring Festival: Twenty Years for Freedom



The 17th edition of the Beirut Spring Festival carried a particular emotional and political weight. In 2025, the festival was shaped by the commemoration of twenty years since the assassination of Samir Kassir, under the banner “**20 Years for Freedom.**” This framing gave the edition a coherence that turned the festival into a space of memory, public presence, and cultural resistance at a moment when freedom across the region, and even the world, remains under pressure.

The festival opened on June 1, 2025 with **The Dream Manifesto**, an artistic installation by Roy Dib at Samir Kassir Square in downtown Beirut, which lasted until June 8. Presented as a tribute to Samir Kassir, Gisèle Khoury, and Elias Khoury, the installation drew directly on Kassir’s language of freedom and public imagination through his evergreen article “[The Dream Manifesto – بيان الحلم](#)”. Its location mattered as much as its content. By returning to Samir Kassir Square, the festival reaffirmed the Foundation’s long-standing conviction that memory should remain visible, shared, and rooted in the city rather than confined to ceremony. The opening, attended by Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, also included an address by Culture Minister Ghassan Salamé and by French writer and journalist Jean-Pierre Perrin, who reflected on the book he is writing, a memoir of Samir’s wife and late SKF founder, Gisèle Khoury, thereby linking the anniversary of Samir Kassir’s assassination to the wider intellectual and moral circle that helped shape SKF’s cultural and political identity.

From June 10 to 12, the festival presented **Jarret Ghaz Spéciale** at Théâtre Le Monnot, written and directed by Sarah Abdo and Karim Chebli, featuring Cynthia Karam and Joseph Zeytouni. The play engages shared Lebanese-Syrian trauma under Baathist rule, while exploring memory, reconciliation, and xenophobia. This made the production especially meaningful within the 2025 edition: it extended the festival’s commemorative spirit into a theatrical exploration of Lebanon’s unresolved violence and fractured histories, within SKF’s EU-funded **Tech for Memory** initiative. Through this production, SKF demonstrated the need to connect memory to contemporary artistic creation, and freedom to the difficult work of confronting inherited trauma.

On June 15, the festival offered a different form of tribute through **The Samir Kassir Beirut Walking Tour**, designed by historian and story-teller Ronnie Chatah and organized by SKF. Starting from the old L’Orient-Le Jour building in downtown Beirut, and going through the Grand Serail, Bank Street, the Parliament, St George Cathedral, Martyrs’ Square, and concluding in Samir Kassir Square, the walk brought participants through a Beirut tied to Samir Kassir’s writing, memory, and political imagination. The significance of this event lay in its refusal to treat commemoration as static. The tour restored movement to memory. It turned the city itself into an archive, and invited participants to engage with Beirut as a place where history, freedom, and loss remain entangled. Years after Ronnie Chatah – whose father, Mohammad Chatah, was also assassinated in a car bomb attack in downtown Beirut – stopped organizing such tours, this return gave the walk an added resonance. It was both an homage and a reclaiming of urban memory.

The festival’s final major moment came later in the summer, from August 28 to September 6, with the exhibition **20 Years for Freedom** at Art on 56th in Gemmayzeh. The exhibition commemorated two decades since Samir Kassir’s assassination by honoring Lebanese photojournalists whose work documented the country’s struggles, hopes, and defining moments from 2005 to 2025. Curated

by award winning Lebanese-French journalist Arthur Sarradin, the exhibition located freedom in the labor of those who have recorded Lebanon's ruptures and transformations over twenty turbulent years. It also reflected SKF's growing commitment to photojournalism as both documentation and public testimony, in line with the Foundation's broader work on safety, professional support, and economic sustainability for visual journalists. Far from serving as a simple retrospective, the exhibition framed photography as a form of civic memory and as a witness against erasure. Participating photojournalists included: Hussein Baydoun, Tamara Saadé, Hasan Shaaban, Jamal Saïdi, Marwan Tahtah, Carmen Yahchouchi, Mohammad Yassine, and Rabih Yassine.

Closing Reflections at the Time of Publication



As this report reaches publication in 2026, many of the trends documented in these pages have already sharpened. The pressures described here continued to deepen in 2026, across multiple fronts: war, disinformation, political intimidation, economic recession, and the normalization of contempt for truth. That is what gives this report its uneasy double function. It is a record of one year and a warning about the one that follows.

The crisis facing journalism, which reached in 2025 unprecedented complexity, transcends countries, political systems, and methods of repression. It is broader, more adaptive, and more systemic. It can take the form of direct violence, legal harassment, digital manipulation, economic suffocation, reputational targeting, or public fatigue. It can come from governments, armies, parties, financial interests, armed groups, online networks, or from the wider collapse of standards that once gave truth a measure of protection. Journalism is being pressured at the level of survival, credibility, and public meaning all at once.

And yet the case for defending it only grows stronger. When war strikes, when public life becomes more violent, more deceptive, and more unstable, the need for rigorous reporting, ethical clarity, and independent documentation becomes greater. Journalism remains one of the few professions that links courage to verification, public service to scrutiny, and memory to accountability. Its defenders therefore carry a responsibility that is institutional, professional, and civic at once.

This is where SKF locates its work. The task is to protect journalists, strengthen independent media, document violations, and help sustain a public sphere in which truth still has a fighting chance. That task has become harder and more urgent at once. The value of this work lies in refusing to accept intimidation as normal, disinformation as inevitable, precarity as permanent, or silence as the price of survival.

The story told by this report is difficult. It is also unfinished. What comes next will depend in part on military outcomes, laws, institutions, funding choices, and political will. It will also depend on whether enough individuals and organizations continue to insist that civilian protection, freedom of expression, independent journalism, and cultural freedom are conditions of any society that hopes to remain recognizably human.



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