



UNESCO's Multi-donor
Programme on Freedom of
Expression and Safety of
Journalists (MDP) action in

Palestine

Israel

Jordan

THE BOUNDARIES AND NAMES SHOWN AND THE DESIGNATIONS USED ON THIS MAP DO NOT IMPLY OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENT OR ACCEPTANCE BY THE UNITED NATIONS

Context

Palestinian journalists operate in a particularly high-risk environment due to political instability and security concerns. In addition to facing harassment, threats, and retaliation from elements within Palestine, they also have to deal with pressure from Israeli actors, who at times restrict Palestinian journalists' access to some areas and thereby limit the topics and issues they can cover. Between 2011 and 2021, the UNESCO Observatory recorded 14 killings of journalists in Palestine, 12 of which were reported by Palestine as having been killed by foreign actors beyond their national jurisdiction.

ENHANCING JOURNALISTS SAFETY AND SUPPORTING ELECTORAL COVERAGE

The MDP has made the safety of Palestinian journalists one of its priority areas of intervention. Building on a series of training courses and open dialogues organized by UNESCO with support from SIDA in 2017 between journalists and members of the Palestinian security forces, UNESCO sustained its advocacy efforts throughout 2018 and advanced planning for activities rolled out in 2019.

The year 2019 was marked by two major achievements in advancing the safety of Palestinian journalists and enhancing the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and Issue of Impunity, namely the creation of a Safety Officers Network across several media organizations and the establishment of a national monitoring mechanism, launched in cooperation with the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate and under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Palestine. Both the network and the mechanism were reinforced throughout 2020 and 2021 through series of capacity-building activities and in-house coaching for their respective members.

In addition, safety trainings (on physical, psychological, legal and digital safety) were delivered to scores of journalists during these years, with 2020 trainings also focusing on COVID-19 safety, debunking disinformation, and fact-checking. These trainings were complemented by resources such as a safety guide for reporters in high-risk environments, elaborated jointly with MADA and the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate; and the Arabic translation of the UNESCO handbook "[Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training](#)".

Furthermore, UNESCO ensured in 2019 the integration of its [specialized course on journalists' safety for the Arab region](#) into the curricula of 6 universities in the West Bank and 4 universities in Gaza. UNESCO also ensured the recognition of the courses' "Gender and Safe Reporting" module in all these universities, with the aim of addressing norms and cultural behaviours within the media, a field that remains overwhelmingly male-dominated in Palestine.

In [its semi-annual report covering the first half of 2021](#), the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedom (MADA) recorded 384 violations of media freedom committed by both Israeli and Palestinian actors, the highest number recorded by the organization for the first half of any year since 2012. These violations ranged from physical attacks, arrests and detention, seizure of equipment, assaults on media institutions and homes, to threats and obstructions in reporting. MADA links this increase in media violations to several events, such as displacements of residents in some Jerusalem neighbourhoods, the escalation of the situation in Gaza and Israeli airstrikes in May 2021, along with waves of demonstrations in the West Bank.

In response to the crisis situation in Gaza, the UNESCO Ramallah Office conducted a needs-assessment exercise, provided 15 full safety gear sets to members of the media, and held psychosocial support sessions for 150 young journalists. Activities on psychosocial safety and wellbeing for media workers based in Gaza will continue into 2022.

In addition, the MDP supported in 2021 an assessment of Palestine based on UNESCO's Journalists Safety Indicators (JSIs) in synergy with the IPDC, which is currently being finalized.

Following a decree by President Abbas in January 2021 that legislative and presidential elections would be held in the country in the spring and summer of 2021 for the first time in 15 years, UNESCO Ramallah set out to support the upcoming electoral cycles by building the capacities of local media on electoral coverage and fact-checking. The elections were however postponed by Palestinian authorities, and a new date had not been set at the time of redaction of this report.

Throughout the reporting period, the UNESCO Ramallah Office used international Days as important platforms for advocacy and to build synergies with international partners, as was the case in 2020 with OHCHR and the Offices of the Dutch and Swedish Representatives. These events also enabled local stakeholders to exchange experiences and perspectives and engage in discussions on Palestine's freedom of expression legal framework.

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

In November 2018, during a conference in which UNESCO presented its experience working on media and information literacy and the various activities supported by the organization, the Minister of Education clearly recognized the need to expand work on this issue in Palestine. MIL was henceforth included within the Palestinian official extra-curriculum, and trainings of officials would be financed through the Ministry's budget. Since then, and within the framework of the MDP, UNESCO has conducted continuous collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, and piloted reinforced dialogue among duty bearers and rights holder to enable change in the field of MIL competencies.

Palestine can be considered as one of the Arab countries that has made important achievements in Media and Information Literacy in various fields, through the activities and programs of universities, civil and media institutions, training centres, and some relevant government institutions. There has been a clear interest in media and digital safety since the beginning of the MDP implementation period, and progress in this field is exemplary.

UNESCO has been spearheading the work on MIL through the development of a National Strategy for Media and Information Literacy, which has been initiated through a large participatory and consultative process. This document aims to provide policy guidance, on one hand, and to introduce the media education curriculum to schools and universities based on the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Policy Guidelines and Model Curriculum, on the other hand.

Besides, UNESCO ensured that young people and youth organizations enhanced their capacity on MIL and will further raise awareness on its relevance.

OUTCOME 1: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Areas of action and progress

AWARENESS-RAISING AND ADVOCACY

World Press Freedom Day 2019 was celebrated in collaboration with OHCHR under the theme “Role of journalists and media in ensuring democratic participation in Palestine”. Participants discussed policy recommendations aimed at promoting broader and greater press freedom in Palestine, together with methods and measures to ensure such freedoms are recognized as part of the democratic participation process.

The 2019 celebrations of IDUAL were held within the framework of the Arab Regional Digital Inclusion Week at An-Najah University, with additional support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Sessions organized by UNESCO reinforced awareness on the importance of access to information for good governance and the rule of law, on the provisions of Palestine’s cybercrime law, and on regional and international perspectives on guaranteeing freedom of expression online. The event also saw the launch of the World Trends In-Focus report “Access to Information: A New Promise for Sustainable Development”.

In 2019, in cooperation with the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, UNESCO organized a one-day discussion titled “One year after applying the Cybercrime Law: Challenges and Opportunities”. The discussion provided an opportunity to exchange perspectives on the Cybercrime Law and its impact on the work of journalists, activists and media outlets, as well as on regional and international perspectives on guaranteeing freedom of expression online, in line with international covenants and agreements, and with reference to UNESCO’s ROAM principles.

2020 commemorations of IDEI were held under the theme “The Palestinian Reality and International Comparisons of Freedom and Violations Against Journalists”. They were marked by discussions among journalists, media representatives, and academics on comparing Palestinian laws with international standards on freedom of expression offline and online.

A joint celebration of WPFDD and Human Rights Day was organized in December 2020 in collaboration with the Offices of the Dutch and Swedish Representatives as well as OHCHR. It took the form of a high-level webinar highlighting freedom of expression online and offline, along with the role of human rights defenders. This event was an occasion to build synergies and to provide a platform for Palestinian journalists to share their experiences on health risks, confinement, and other COVID-related risks.

Dedicated programmes on tackling challenges in access to information and disinformation were broadcasted on local radio stations, and video messages from Palestinian journalists on their experience in times of the pandemic were shared.

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day 2021, UNESCO Ramallah produced a video highlighting the experiences and challenges of journalists in the field, with special attention to women journalists.

In observance of International Women's Day, UNESCO Ramallah joined forces with UN Women and Radio Philistia to broadcast programmes about [the role of women in the media](#), challenges faced by women journalists, and the [role of media in providing useful information for society](#). Following this initiative, an agreement was signed with UN Women to deepen collaboration on media and gender.

ENHANCING JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

In 2019, UNESCO facilitated the creation of a Safety Officers Network and strengthened the capacities of its members from various media organizations. Its readiness to face safety threats was reinforced throughout 2020 and 2021, notably through meetings and visits to media outlets to follow-up on previously issued recommendations, in-house trainings, along with specialized training sessions on COVID-19, organized virtually in both Gaza and the West Bank, with additional support from OHCHR and local NGOs.

In 2019, a national mechanism for the monitoring of the safety of Palestinian journalists was launched, in cooperation with the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate and under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Palestine. This mechanism was further supported in 2020 and 2021 through series of trainings for relevant stakeholders in the West Bank and Gaza, in cooperation with OHCHR and local NGOs. A notable result of this initiative has been the submission of reports by Palestine in response to the Director General's request for information on the status of judicial enquiries into the killings of journalists.

National commitment towards the implementation of the UN Plan of Action was strengthened throughout 2019 through various capacity-development activities in line with international standards on the safety of journalists as well as international treaties signed by Palestine pertaining to freedom of expression and UN standards for monitoring and reporting.

A safety guide for reporters in high-risk environments was issued in 2020 in Arabic in collaboration with the Media Development Center (MADA) and the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate to support media in their coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As an immediate response to the escalation of the situation in Gaza in May 2021, UNESCO Ramallah conducted a needs-assessment, purchased and distributed 15 full safety gear sets, and provided psychosocial support sessions for 150 young journalists.

Support provided to the preparation of a JSI assessment of Palestine, in synergy with the IPDC. The JSI assessment will result in an evidence-based baseline to pinpoint significant matters that show or impact upon the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in Palestine.

POLICY ADVICE AND REINFORCEMENT OF DUTY BEARERS' CAPACITIES

The MDP supported the inclusion of UNESCO and IFJ's model course on the safety of journalists into the curricula of 6 Palestinian universities in 2019. This built on a 2018 initiative supported by SIDA and the "Networks of Mediterranean Youth" project (NET-MED Youth) funded by the European Union, which saw Palestine become the first country in the Arab region to pilot this course.

As part of UNESCO's 2020 efforts to combat disinformation, and particularly in times of COVID-19, the Ramallah Office held interactive training sessions introducing the Arabic version of the UNESCO handbook "Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training". The sessions, which took the form of trainings-of-trainers (TOT), paid particular attention to providing participating journalists with the tools to deal with the "disinfodemic" and debunk manipulated information.

A series of trainings was organized in 2020 in relation to press freedom under emergency laws and new regulations enforced by Palestinian authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other trainings included news verification and fact-checking, countering disinformation, solutions-based journalism, and gender sensitive coverage.

In support of the electoral processes which were foreseen to take place in 2021 before being indefinitely postponed, 2 training workshops for journalists on electoral coverage and fact-checking were organized in partnership with the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate and the Witness Center, with participation from Palestine's Central Election Commission. They were followed by a training session on media coverage mechanisms during elections and relations with journalists for media coordinators of the electoral lists participating in the elections. This was done in cooperation with the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, the Palestinian Observatory for Professional Verification and Control (Kashif) and the Independent Commission for Human Rights.

Key achievements

- Creation of a national mechanism to monitor the safety of journalists in cooperation with the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate, launched within the framework of 2019 IDEI commemorations under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Palestine. The following year, the UNESCO Ramallah Office succeeded in reinforcing UN coordination and in creating multistakeholder coalitions for the implementation of the UN Plan of Action by getting OHCHR on board to further support the mechanism, along with local NGOs.
- Establishment of the very first network focusing on the safety of Palestinian journalists from the West Bank and Gaza. This network was created in 2019 to contribute to safety in the field (especially during emergencies) and to coordinate responses when journalists face attacks. This was the result of increased understanding and enhanced skills related to the physical safety of journalists, a feat which was achieved through training of safety officers within media organizations. It was further reinforced in 2020 and 2021 through in-house trainings of its members based on previously issued recommendations, in addition to trainings on COVID-19 safety.
- Successfully provided emergency response to the COVID-19 crisis by developing a safety guide in Arabic together with the Media Development Center (MADA) and the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate; organizing series of trainings on news verification, disinformation and solution-based journalism in times of COVID-19; and launching the Arabic version of the UNESCO handbook "Journalism, 'Fake News' and Disinformation: A Handbook for Journalism Education and Training".

- Supported the smooth running of Palestine's upcoming electoral cycles by reinforcing the capacities of around 60 local members of the media on professional electoral coverage and fact-checking. In parallel, media coordinators of electoral lists were trained on relations with the media and coverage mechanisms. Once new dates for the elections are set, beneficiaries of these capacity-building sessions will contribute to providing access to reliable information to the Palestinian public.
- Responded to the emergency situation in Gaza in 2021 by providing safety gear to members of the media as well as psychosocial support for 150 young journalists.

OUTCOME 2: MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

Areas of action and progress

In 2018, preparatory activities were conducted, including the selection of schools to pilot MIL trainings, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, and the selection of trainers. The Ministry of Education further selected the topics to be discussed during the pilot classes, with a focus on digital security, disinformation and fake news.

Through collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, UNESCO and its national partners have capitalized on this momentum to deepen the understanding of MIL, with the objective of including it officially within school curriculum.

Thus, UNESCO produced in 2019 the first policy document: the National Media and Information Literacy Strategy in Palestine, based on the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Policy Guidelines and the MIL Curriculum.

This policy paper was further developed until the first half of 2021 and is now in the process of being adopted for establishing a MIL National Policy. This very effective paper also led to the establishment of a MIL Thematic Group within the Education sector groups in the Ministry. This is the first step towards the adaptation of the UNESCO MIL Curriculum for Teachers for systemic implementation of concrete MIL activities in Palestine.

During the reporting period, UNESCO organised several trainings and workshops to increase MIL capacities of relevant policy makers and stakeholders. For example, in 2019, 68 Public relations officers from different Ministries benefited from MIL capacity trainings. In 2021, during the first National Media and Information Literacy Conference, nine civil society organizations, media experts, educators and students participated in the conference. About 250 persons attended in both the West Bank and Gaza.

UNESCO also worked closely with youth organizations. In 2019, three youth organizations were empowered in the field of MIL. In 2020, 40 young Palestinians from 5 universities (3 in the West Bank and 2 in Gaza) were trained to become MIL multipliers and trainers, with the target of raising awareness on MIL with at least 300 media students inside these universities.

UNESCO increased the impact of MIL with media outlets. In November and December 2021, in collaboration with the Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation (PYALARA), UNESCO conducted orientation meetings with three selected radio stations in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza, to improve their knowledge of MIL, enhance their editorial strategies, develop codes of conducts, and produce new programs.



Key achievements

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR 2

132 Public Relations Officers from different ministries were equipped with advanced knowledge of MIL policy best practices through national consultations and training workshops.

UNESCO supported the cooperation across multiple Ministries to ensure a more integrated approach and sustainable development of MIL in Palestine.

The first National Strategy for Media and Information Literacy in Palestine was developed. It was initiated through a large participatory and consultative process and will lead to introducing the media education curriculum to schools and universities.

The Ministry of Education has added media and information literacy to the school curriculum.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR 3

98 young Palestinian trainers inside 5 Palestinian universities (3 in the West Bank and 2 in Gaza) enhanced their MIL knowledge and capacities.

UNESCO and partners are working towards MIL inclusion in school curricula, with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education piloting it in 24 schools. The formalization and integration of MIL curricula in Palestine is thereby underway.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR 4

10 youth organizations and 55 youth leaders were equipped with improved competencies in MIL and the development of MIL guidelines.



Challenges, risks and remedial actions

The political instability of Palestine and the severe degradation of its security context (particularly in Gaza in 2021) have caused challenges and delays in the implementation of activities. Restricted access to the Jordan Valley in 2020 following the rising presence of Israeli law enforcement also created concerns for the safety of journalists, freedom of movement, and the possibility of covering certain issues. In the face of these adverse circumstances, the UNESCO Ramallah Office persevered in raising awareness about the importance of ensuring journalists' safety as well as of reinforcing its network of safety officers.

On top of this, frequent government reshuffles also caused delays and required UNESCO Ramallah to revise its timelines and shift the dates of several activities. The elections which were foreseen to take place in 2021 and were subsequently postponed, while a highly positive step, will most likely mean another government reshuffle. This could cause further delays for the approval and implementation of the Access to Information Law. In addition, uncertainty around the dates of the elections has disrupted plans to further support the electoral process by building the capacities of media professionals.

Another challenge faced was the lack of internal coordination within certain partner organizations, which caused further delays in the organization of activities. To remedy this issue, a local professional trainer was recruited in 2019 to help with the coordination that should have been done by other partners.

In 2020, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a number of activities being conducted online. As Israel exercises de facto authority over a majority of telecommunications infrastructure, this also impacts connectivity in Palestine. Unstable Internet access throughout the country therefore impeded some participants from taking part in trainings and webinars, and partners from attending some meetings.



Forthcoming actions

2022 activities in Palestine will continue to reinforce the implementation of the UN Plan of Action and will come to enhance the implementation of the Hague Commitment to Increase the Safety of Journalists, to which Palestine is a signatory.

Psychosocial support for journalists in Gaza will continue in 2022. This will be complemented by trainings on trauma reporting for journalists, in addition to a guide for journalists on self-care and wellbeing.

The safety of women journalists will be given particular attention through capacity-building sessions on online and offline risks and violence. This activity was initially planned in 2021, but was delayed due to selection and contracting issues.

During the Global MIL Week 2021, UNESCO Ramallah and Al-Quds Open University launched a new project on 'Assessing Media Institutions Strategic Management and Extending Media Literacy in the Palestinian Higher Education'. This project was successfully granted financial support by the IPDC, complimented by MDP funds. It will undergo three phases until December 2022: a) Assessing media institutions through research and study; b) Capacity building sessions; c) Development of a Media and information Literacy Curriculum for Higher Education institutions.