



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

Working conditions for journalists operating in Palestine are particularly precarious, as they find themselves under pressure from both national and Israeli actors. They are exposed to threats, intimidation, harassment, detention, and physical assaults in a highly volatile political and security context. 15 killings of journalists were recorded in Palestine by [UNESCO's Observatory of killed journalists](#) between 2012 and 2022, 12 of which were reported by Palestine as having been killed by foreign actors beyond national jurisdiction, and two of which occurred in 2022. The killing on 11 May 2022 of prominent Palestinian Al-Jazeera journalist [Shireen Abu Akleh](#) as she was covering an arrest operation by Israeli Security Forces around the Jenin refugee camp drew widespread attention to the situation of Palestinian media workers.

Enhancing the safety of journalists in Palestine has been one of the priority areas of action of the Multi-Donor Programme since 2018. Important achievements were realized in this regard in previous years, such as the setting up of a Safety Officers Network across various media outlets or the creation of a monitoring mechanism. The May 2021 crisis in Gaza, during which [OHCHR estimates 261 Palestinians were killed and over 2.200 were injured](#), and during which Israeli airstrikes destroyed various media offices, led UNESCO's Ramallah Office to provide emergency support to Palestinian journalists through the Multi-Donor Programme. This support included the provision of safety equipment, as well as the organization of psychosocial support sessions for affected journalists, which continued in 2022 and shall continue during the first quarter of 2023 in response to local demand. Within the framework of activities on safety, UNESCO's Ramallah Office has maintained a specific focus on women journalists, creating spaces for them to speak up in an effort to empower them.

In the field of Media and Information Literacy, Palestinian education stakeholders are becoming more aware of the importance of MIL competencies. Through ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and through reinforced dialogue among duty bearers and rights holders to enable change, the first MIL Policy Paper in Palestine was produced and will dovetail into developing a national policy on MIL. In addition, the capacities of young people and youth organizations on MIL were enhanced throughout 2022.



Areas of action and progress

OUTCOME 1

OUTPUT 1: AWARENESS-RAISING AND ADVOCACY

- Together with the European Union and other partners, UNESCO organized a **national celebration of World Press Freedom Day**, which gathered around 400 participants from academia, the media community, educators, duty-bearers and representatives from the UN system. The UN Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator and the UNESCO Ramallah Head of Office published [a joint statement on the threats facing Palestinian journalists](#) on this occasion. The event coincidentally took place on the same day Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was killed.
- UNESCO's Ramallah Office supported the **participation of Palestinian representatives in the regional commemoration of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**, which was held in Tunisia. The event culminated in the adoption of a [Roadmap for Safety of Journalists in the Arab Region](#), which was endorsed by 17 media and journalists' organizations and unions from the region.

OUTPUT 3: ENHANCING JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

- A series of **psychosocial support workshops were held in Gaza** for journalists, including freelancers and young influencers. They were conducted in response to a needs-assessment in Gaza, and were held in cooperation with Filastiniyat and a psychosocial support association. A well-being practical guide for women journalists was also produced in Arabic, which could be translated in English and disseminated across the region.
- UNESCO's Ramallah Office took part in an online **regional consultation on the 10th anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity**. The Office's Communication and Information Focal Point, who leads the implementation of actions in Palestine under the MDP, moderated a session on the protection of journalists and how to holistically support them in the aftermath of violence. The session also featured an Iraqi judge and a safety expert from Gaza.
- Finalization of a **Journalists Safety Indicators assessment** of Palestine, in synergy with the IPDC. The report is pending publication.

OUTPUT 4: POLICY ADVICE AND REINFORCEMENT OF DUTY BEARERS' CAPACITIES

- In collaboration with the Human Rights and Democracy Media Center, the capacities of a cohort of media managers and senior officials were strengthened on the **production of gender-responsive media content**. This was done in an effort to support gender equality through the promotion of media content that rejects all forms of discrimination based on gender and that adequately covers gender-based violence.
- UNESCO's Ramallah Office collaborated with UN Women and SIDA to support **a monitoring study of 5 media outlets and the drafting of a code of conduct to regulate editorial policies from a gender perspective**. The monitoring study was funded by UN Women through SIDA, while the MDP funded a training and the launch of this study.

- In cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Health and UNESCO's Ramallah Office, 36 health cadres from the West Bank and Gaza graduated from a **training programme on information epidemic management** by the Media Development Centre/Birzeit University.
- UNESCO's Ramallah Office supported **the participation of two Palestinian judges in the regional training conference** "*Bringing together the Judges: the Role of Judges in Enhancing Freedom of Expression and the Safety of Journalists in the Arab Region*", which was held in Morocco.

OUTCOME 2

OUTPUT 4: MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY

- Production of the first MIL Policy Paper in Palestine in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.
- During the reporting period, the UNESCO Ramallah Office marked major activities and advanced in Media and Information Literacy axes. Although challenges and limitations were marked, achievements were not limited but built on previous work's success. UNESCO MIL resources are used extensively as reference and guidance. This is an important highlight since UNESCO resources are considered quality standards in the field. This facilitates the wide and systematic sharing of expertise, information, and data.
- 25 Educators, 25 Journalists, and 25 Duty Bearers developed their capacities in media and information literacy and contributed to the policy paper in preparation for MIL National Strategy.
- 34 pilot schools were involved in integrating the Media and Information Literacy curricula for educators and learners.

Key achievements

- With funding from the MDP, UNESCO's Ramallah Office has supported the inclusion of [UNESCO and IFJ's Model course on the safety of journalists in the Arab States](#) into the curricula of various Palestinian universities since 2019. In 2022, the endorsement of the Ministry of Higher Education was secured for the adoption of the course by 10 universities.
- UNESCO's Ramallah Office has secured the full support of various civil society and human rights organization to the national safety monitoring mechanism which was launched in 2019 with support from the MDP. The mechanism notably centralizes input of various CSOs and the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate to prepare Palestine's answer to UNESCO's Director-General requests for information on the status of judicial enquiries on cases of killed journalists.
- The sustainability of the Safety Officers Network launched in 2019 with support from the MDP is being further supported by other stakeholders, such as the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, IFJ, and local media organizations.
- A joint programme has been established with UNDP on freedom of expression during elections, thanks to fundraising efforts by UNESCO's Ramallah Office.
- There has been a noted increase in the reliability of fact-checking in Palestine. In addition, following various activities on fact-checking, hate speech and disinformation, some duty-bearers were able to identify some of the mistakes they had made in speeches and social media posts.



- The fact-checking platform “[Witness Center](#)”, which had partnered with the MDP in 2021 to conduct trainings on electoral coverage and fact-checking, is now being supported by new donors.
- Partners previously supported by the MDP in Palestine have obtained new sources of funding, including through the Global Media Defence Fund.
- UNESCO Palestine supported taking steps to develop and implement MIL policies and capacity-building strategies.
- 25 Educators, 25 Journalists, and 25 Duty Bearers developed their capacities in media and information literacy and contributed to the policy paper in preparation for MIL National Strategy.
- 34 pilot schools were involved in integrating the Media and Information Literacy curricula for educators and learners.
- The MIL Policy Paper produced in 2022 will serve as a basis to develop a National Policy on MIL.



Challenges, risks and remedial actions

The division of Palestine between the West Bank and Gaza is a continuous risk for the implementation of activities, as plans can change unexpectedly in one part of the country or the other. Furthermore, the possible annexation of territories can influence implementation, but most importantly can have a broader impact on beneficiary groups and partners in Palestine. For example, restricted access to certain areas following the intensification of Israeli law enforcement operations can have an impact on freedom of expression and access to information, as journalists' movements are hindered and so is their ability to cover certain topics.

There is continuous political instability in Palestine, which has implications for the country's legal framework on access to information. While UNESCO supported the development of a draft bill, it has still not been approved by the relevant authorities.

With regards to activities around the safety of women journalists and gender-responsive media coverage, challenging existing norms has been difficult. However, UNESCO's Ramallah Office ensured inclusion of both men and women in all activities at national and regional level (both as participants and trainers/facilitators), as well as paid attention to both genders' needs in terms of safety equipment, ethical guidelines and norms guiding their profession.

In terms of connectivity issues, Israel exercises de facto authority over most telecommunications' infrastructure. This poses risks with regards to implementation and can impact thematic areas that are part of the MDP's mandate.



Forthcoming actions

UNESCO has received various requests from journalists for additional trainings on safety in the field and psychosocial support sessions, which shall therefore be extended to 2023. In addition, several capacity-building activities will be held for women journalists on online and offline risks and safety.

Another area of action will be enforcing safety as a practice across different Palestinian universities, building on actions carried out since 2019 and on the support secured from the Ministry of Higher Education. To this effect, a national training-of-trainers on pedagogy and UNESCO and IFJ's Model course on the safety of journalists in the Arab States will be organized for faculty members.

To encourage the adoption of an access to information law, a national seminar on achievements and challenges related to this law will be organized, together with workshops on SDG 16.10.2.

UNESCO shall continue to work with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, including duty bearers, journalists and youth, media professionals, and university professionals from the media faculty, discussing the way forward to promote MIL and start working collectively on the MIL National Strategy.

UNESCO shall seek the approval and endorsement of the Ministry of Higher Education on the Higher Education Media and Information Literacy Curriculum that was produced to be considered by the majority of Palestinian Universities

Palestine is becoming more aware of the importance of these competencies. therefore, a scoped assessment of media and information literacy among Palestinians and educators and progress on readiness for curriculum integration follow several years of MIL activities implemented will be undertaken.