

The global network for independent media since 1950

IPI Strategy & Theory of Change (2023-25)

A critical, independent and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy

Nelson Mandela, IPI World Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, February 1994

"The International Press Institute (IPI) is a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists who share a common dedication to quality, independent journalism. Together, we promote the conditions that allow journalism to fulfill its public function, the most important of which is the media's ability to operate free from interference and without fear of retaliation.

Our mission is to defend media freedom and the free flow of news wherever they are threatened."¹

Throughout its 70 years, the IPI global network, supported by the solidarity of its members, has defended journalists from attacks and promoted quality, independent journalism. Today, it is a growing association of senior media professionals committed to media freedom that spans nearly 100 countries. They work cooperatively to shape local and global debates on policies affecting the media and to push back against those seeking to restrict the free flow of news and information in order to protect political, economic or other interests.

This Strategy and Theory of Change for 2023-2025 is a road map and a guide for IPI's work in the coming three years and has been designed with the overall goal of supporting media freedom and independent journalism. Based on this Strategy, annual workplans will be developed to address evolving circumstances.

¹ About IPI

CHALLENGES

Independent journalists uncover truth and hold the powerful to account. They bring us critical news and information that makes our societies safer and our democracies stronger. Today, independent journalism is facing multiple challenges: rising authoritarianism and hostility to media freedom as well as the disruption of media by the digital transition and economic threats. Openly autocratic regimes are brazenly widening their crackdowns on critical voices, often with complete impunity. Independent journalists increasingly face draconian legal restrictions and threats to their liberty and safety.

New types of threats to press freedom have emerged in recent years, some less visible but no less pernicious. This includes illiberal media capture by state and other vested interests through regulatory and economic pressure and market manipulation. Vast new state surveillance powers are undermining the ability of journalists to do their jobs freely and safely and protect the identities of their sources.

Safety and impunity

The IPI data shows that 831 journalists and media workers have been killed in the past decade, making journalism one of the world's most dangerous professions. Media and reporters covering abuse of power, crime, corruption, environmental destruction, protests, and war are at the highest risk of physical violence and other forms of retaliation by authorities. Compounding this violence is the fact that the vast majority of journalist killings go unpunished. This impunity fuels further violence, weakens democracy, and harms everyone's right to receive and impart information.

Legal and administrative threats

Legal or administrative measures to restrict free media have always been part of authoritarian regimes' toolbox. IPI's work shows that legal harassment of journalists and media is on the rise, with governments passing restrictive new measures – including cybercrime, "fake news", or other laws – or abusing existing legislation to target independent news and critical voices. As a result, hundreds of journalists are behind bars for their work and numerous others are facing lengthy prosecutions or administrative harassment. This harassment also casts a wider chilling effect

across the media. Authorities have also taken advantage of emergency situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, to enact legislation curbing the free flow of public-interest news.

Digital threats

The online space, once a haven for journalists in authoritarian regimes, is being suffocated through repressive laws, digital attacks, surveillance, and smear campaigns targeting journalists. Authoritarians have also grown savvy at exploiting digital tools and platforms to restrict information, spread disinformation and state propaganda, sowing mistrust in the press and other critical public institutions, and threatening the foundations and functions of liberal democracy on a global scale. Meanwhile, democracies in every part of the world have struggled to meet the challenge of curbing rampant digital disinformation and state propaganda while also preserving and protecting essential freedom of expression rights.

Uneven digital transition

In order to fulfil their critical democratic and social function, independent media must be financially sustainable, able to engage audiences, and able serve the needs of their communities. The disruption brought by the digital transition has seriously challenged their ability to do so.

The good news is that journalists, editors and publishers are increasingly meeting the challenges – both opportunities and threats – of the disruption by the digital transition. At the core of the disruption is the battle for attention, forcing journalism and the media to find new ways of telling stories - including through a renewed focus on investigative journalism - and designing new products to deliver those stories. At the same time, the substantial disruption of the old business model has pushed media to develop new paths to sustainability that look to their audience for support.

However, both the disruption and the innovation response are unevenly distributed. Local and regional media face particular challenges. The essential transition infrastructure that facilitates the transition is largely based in global media centres, particularly in North America.

Collaboration and solidarity

Journalism is inherently both globalised and networked. IPI was founded to give structure to that network across the community of senior journalists, editors and publishers to build global collaboration and solidarity. Today, as the threats to free journalism are increasingly global, this solidarity is more crucial than ever – to collectively push back against growing threats to media freedom and to defend independent journalism as a fundamental pillar of democracies based on common values and standards.

Meanwhile, the complexity of reporting subjects and the cross-border nature of the world's biggest challenges, from climate change to health to technology, makes journalistic networking central to a free media. The IPI global network has been disrupted by the financial decline of the media industry and by the fragmentation and changing nature of news media outlets. In response, IPI has been mapping the new global media ecosystems and working to deepen membership as the network expands beyond traditional media to encompass digital and start-up media, freelancers, and journalism and media institutions.

The need for a sense of belonging to a global community of news professionals committed to core journalistic principles that IPI, alone, delivers makes IPI's mission to foster solidarity ever more pressing.

Cross-cutting approach

Journalism has slowly and belatedly become more representative of the audiences that it serves. This journey to diversity, however, remains incomplete. At the same time, voices previously underrepresented in the media, such as women and minority or other vulnerable groups, face growing attacks intended to harass or silence them. These developments call for a prioritization of support to journalists who are part of these groups, as well as those journalists covering especially dangerous beats such as corruption, politics, or the environment.

THEORY OF CHANGE

IPI's vision rests on the principle that open, democratic societies can only truly exist and thrive if people are able to freely access independent news and information in the public interest. This has fueled the organisation's mission to defend and enhance the role of journalism and the values of media freedom throughout its more than 70 years history.

In order for journalism to fulfil its public function, we need:

- An environment where journalists and media can work freely and safely
- A financially sustainable media ecosystem with the means and resources to deliver public-interest news and withstand external pressures
- Media outlets that can innovate to engage audiences and serve the needs of their communities
- Collaboration and solidarity among media to meet the challenges of the moment

IPI's theory of change is therefore based on the following four pillars:

- Evidenced-based advocacy for press freedom
- ⇒ Support to independent media
- Empowering media to embrace innovation and navigate the digital transition
- Driving collaboration and solidarity among media

IPI is uniquely situated to drive this change as a global network of editors, publishers, and journalists who share a common dedication to independent, fact-based journalism, who can present a united front in demanding that states fulfil their duties to protect journalists and uphold media freedom principles, and who can facilitate an exchange of experiences and best practices for media sustainability and impact.

Environment where journalists can work freely and safely

A key focus of our advocacy work globally is holding states and private actors to account when they do not fulfil their obligations and commitments to protect human rights and press freedom.

Over the next three years, IPI will strengthen our relationships with civil society allies globally, while also intensifying our direct engagement with governments, and multilateral bodies and mechanisms, particularly the UN, the European Union, the African Union, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE. We will also continue to engage with governments who have committed to protect press freedom as members of formal or informal groups that protect media freedom and freedom of expression such as the Media Freedom Coalition, the IFEX network, the Freedom Online Coalition and the Group of Friends of Safety of Journalists. We will:

- → Hold governments, institutions and private actors accountable to their human rights obligations.
- Monitor and report media freedom threats and violations globally, in close coordination with IPI members, as well as international and local media freedom and human rights organisations.
- Carry out evidenced-based advocacy that drives change, with support of IPI members and National Committees.
- ➡ Works with civil society partners to coordinate responses to media freedom violations and threats.
- Work directly with governments, multilateral bodies and mechanisms to promote an environment supportive to media freedom and take action against those who violate it.

Robust independent journalism

IPI will contribute to a more resilient news ecosystem, fostering media pluralism and building confidence in journalism as a public good. Along with training, mentoring, fellowships and networking opportunities, we will broaden our model of "cascading grants" that channel public and philanthropic money to media without compromising editorial independence and provide a lifeline for teams of journalists working across borders or in hostile media environments.

Our strategy also rests on journalism itself as a first line of defence against efforts to weaken the independent press. On the one hand, we seek to give journalists themselves the tools to mitigate risks ranging from legal threats to myriad forms of harassment. On the other, we aim to empower journalism, and especially investigative journalism, to research and expose coordinated efforts by states and other powerful actors to spread disinformation and sow distrust in independent media.

Across the world, journalists, editors, and publishers are working to build (or, in some cases, rebuild) a dynamic, responsible media that engages their communities in news and information that meets their needs. The media they're creating leverage trust to empower people within communities to tell their stories to one another, to give a voice to the rights of their community, and to fight the spread of mis- and dis-information.

All of this is an opportunity to open the door to a new and vibrant news media ecosystem. It also faces challenges that demand supportive interventions. Transition infrastructure support for news media has largely been rooted in and focused on developed economies in North America and western Europe leaving a real need in other parts of the world.

There is a need to:

- Draw on, and thereby strengthen, our global network to prepare news media to take on the challenges, allow them to share, understand, and learn from one another's steps and stumbles, and give them access to expertise, mentoring, and community support.
- Support media to develop a vision and sense of mission that matches audience/community needs with an appropriate journalism focus.
- ► Level up access to the information, training, network support, and funding essential to building sustainable media.
- Ensure that donors and the media support community (particularly in developing countries and regions) understand the unique contribution of news media, particularly new voices in digital accountability journalism, investigative and local media, and the particular pressures they face.
- ⇒ Leverage the relationship of trust and, with an audience-centred approach, rebuild confidence in news media and lead the fight against misinformation and disinformation.

Solidarity and collaboration between journalists

Amid the new media landscape and common challenges, the strategy of the IPI global network is to facilitate solidarity among the global journalism community and provide a platform where media professionals can share experiences, ideas, and solutions.

We will focus on securing a united voice in the fact of attacks on media freedom and journalistic values, as well as providing venues for reciprocal support, skills development and exchange. This engagement will be built on the principles of the craft that understands the appropriate meeting point of journalism and advocacy. It also needs to understand real world constraints of time and resources and the danger of certain restrictive environments.

IPI has developed a crucial and unique role as a "intermediary organisation" for media funding. We have proven that it is possible to, channel taxpayer and philanthropic funding from a wide range of donors to news outlets and freelancers without compromising editorial independence, and this model will remain a core part of our strategy to support media going forward. Such funding allows journalists to conduct the kind of ambitious cross-border investigations required to tackle complex stories that transcend borders.

HOW WE EFFECT CHANGE

IPI is at the forefront of a civil society movement tackling the global crackdown on independent journalism and raising the alarm on the consequences for open, societies and democratic values. As a global media freedom organisation with members in nearly 100 countries, IPI advances and promotes media freedom principles and standards with the backing of a professional media community across a diverse spectrum of regions and backgrounds.

In the three-year period covered by this strategy IPI aims to capitalize on an emerging public awareness about the importance of independent journalism and media freedom to advance our and our members' demands for an environment conducive to the production of quality, rigorous journalism.

- ⇒ Monitoring and Advocacy
- Supporting Independent Journalism
- → Media Innovation
- Networking and Membership

Monitoring and Advocacy

IPI will monitor and expose ever-more sophisticated means of suppressing the free flow of news and using the evidence to push for change, including through multi-stakeholder initiatives, international human rights mechanisms, and timely public campaigns. We will also increase our engagement and solidarity with peer media freedom CSOs working in repressive environments that face a severe risk of retaliation for their courageous work to expose attacks on journalists. This will mean strengthening existing and creating new partnerships and coalitions, particularly in countries and regions where media freedom is under strain amid weakening respect for democracy and human rights.

Our members will play a significant role as they will guide us in ensuring that our advocacy efforts are credible, fact-based, and support local needs. We will also strive to empower journalists, editors and publishers to defend their rights, particularly when it comes to digital or online harassment. Our monitoring and advocacy work will continue to focus on attacks against vulnerable groups, including gendered attacks; attacks against journalists

based on their ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics; and attacks against journalists covering dangerous beats, such as climate and politics.

IPI will also continue work to support the first Africa-wide effort to systematically collect data on media freedom violations and attacks on journalists, strengthening its partnership with the Digital Platform for Safety of Journalists in Africa, while also separately expanding strategic partnerships with Africa-based CSOs to jointly carry out evidenced-based advocacy to push back against traditional and emerging threats to media freedom on the continent.

IPI will take its work to counter digital threats into the next level, building on the success of our work under the Ontheline programme. We will expose digital threats to journalists, independent media, and media freedom NGOs globally, and work with core local and international civil society partners and networks, including members of the IFEX network, the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network, and the Freedom Online Coalition (all networks to which IPI belongs), to carry out evidence-based advocacy targeting governments and corporations to counter digital threats to media freedom.

Objectives:

- ⇒ To ensure that journalists globally can work freely, independently, and safely by strengthening and bolstering civil society responses to attacks on media freedom through evidence-based advocacy.
- To advance and support international, regional, and multilateral human rights standards and mechanisms protecting media freedom and the safety of journalists. This includes strengthening regional and multilateral mechanisms and initiatives aimed at holding states accountable for their commitments and obligations to protect media freedom and the safety of journalists, including to those standards established in the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists.
- To build a strong network of local, regional, and international partners to respond to national-level restrictions to media freedom and independent journalism and help advocate for domestic legislation and policy reforms that enable and safeguard media freedom.

- To extend and enhance partnerships with national and local news organisations working in media hostile environments to report on media freedom issues and attacks against journalists.
- → To expose and counter digital threats to journalists, independent media, and media freedom NGOs globally.
- → To increase the number of annual media freedom missions led by IPI to countries and regions where international public pressure holds significant leverage potential.

Supporting Independent Journalism

A cornerstone of IPI's mission is to provide support for the development of independent media, be it through training and grant-giving or exchanges within our global community of members. The digital disruption of the past two decades, the COVID-19 pandemic and the overall deterioration of media freedom worldwide has had a devastating effect on the resources available to produce journalism, particularly investigative journalism across borders, ever more necessary in a globalised world where watchdogs must be prepared to follow stories across frontiers.

Through its flagship Investigative Journalism for Europe (IJ4EU) programme, IPI has pioneered a model for disbursing donor money — without fear of editorial interference — to encourage cross-border collaboration between journalists investigating subjects in the public interest. Combining relatively large grants with training, mentoring, legal assistance and networking opportunities, IJ4EU has significantly strengthened the role of watchdog journalism in Europe. IPI intends to take this model to the next level by setting up similar granting and support schemes beyond European borders.

Our global strategy will continue to place an extra emphasis on environments hostile to independent media and will rely on IJ4EU's tried-and-tested funding model combined with beefed-up measures to help journalists fend off legal threats, cope with harassment, access the tools they need and develop investigative capabilities. We will do so by continuing to develop partnerships with peer organisations, strengthening the legitimacy of a consortium-led grant-giving scheme and solidifying the principle of

editorial independence that has come to be the hallmark of our work in this field.

We will also try to address the unique needs of women journalists and journalists from minority backgrounds, who are especially vulnerable to financial precarity and press freedom violations, as well as media outlets of all sizes and non-profit investigative organisations, particularly if working in restrictive media freedom environments. IPI will also seek to provide support to exiled journalists, particularly those that reach European shores escaping serious threats in their home countries. We envision doing so by developing structured programmes of collaboration between established media outlets in Europe and journalists in exile, through fellowships and grants for the production of collaborative journalism projects.

Last but not least, IPI will expose how coordinated online harassment campaigns increasingly target journalists and fact-checkers and empower newsrooms to investigate and expose these campaigns as deliberate efforts to damage trust in media and manipulate public opinion.

Objectives:

- ➡ To develop a cross-border investigative journalism scheme at a global level, particularly addressing the needs of investigative journalists working in hostile conditions with a focus on the global south.
- ⇒ To Provide the funding, training and legal assistance to allow investigative journalists to work independently but in a supportive environment.
- To protect investigative journalists under threat by giving them access to a robust support system that enables them to continue pursuing their professional activities as well as by giving them access to a wide network of media freedom organisations that can facilitate collective action to safeguard their independence.
- → To provide networking and learning opportunities for individual journalists in exile who operate outside of newsroom structures, while bolstering media pluralism and diversity across Europe.
- → To forge creative capacity and resilience among exiled journalists to continue producing public-interest journalism.

- To expose how coordinated online harassment campaigns increasingly target journalists and fact-checkers to deliberately damage public trust in media
- → To empower journalists to better investigate and expose disinformation and the drivers and actors of disinformation.
- To extend training for editors and news managers working in hostile environments to create a culture of safety within newsrooms, including through the implementation of risk assessment and safety protocols, peer-support mechanisms.
- ⇒ To establish an independent media defence fund to provide practical on-the-ground support
- → To make the case to donors for long-term, systemic support for independent media rather than short-term, project-based funding.

Managing media transition

The IPI global network is committed to helping the global media community to meet the challenges of the moment - both opportunities and threats - of the digital transition. This includes facilitating change and levelling up understanding and opportunities of the transition in news media. Specifically, in this strategy period, IPI will:

- Expand our existing hands-on digital transition support programs (Transition Accelerator program for existing media and Emergent Incubator for new media ventures) to create opportunities for news media, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- Create opportunities to support news media leaders and entrepreneurs to know and understand their audience and design news media products that serve their needs.
- Help local news media find ways to build trust and support in their communities.
- Source or create an executive facilitator/solutions lab to bring together news media leaders in a focussed programme to solve

particular (perhaps common) problems, or to work on a challenge, including audience engagement and revenue strategies available to all local media leaders in need, but with a focus on Africa and Asia.

- Design an adaptable aid package from immersive training to mentoring that will help news media to better know and understand their audience.
- ➡ Build understanding within donor organizations and philanthropic networks that sustainable news media need long-term funding commitments.
- Create a fund to support local media in the regions of need with external funding.
- As IPI is ideally placed to act as a connector, we will continue to identify and build a global network of news media innovators, supporters, journalists, publishers, and editors that can create networking, sharing and learning opportunities across continents.
- Continue to develop and host vital networking and learning events such as the IPI World Congress and Media Innovation Festival and the IPI virtual newsroom visits programme.
- ⇒ Facilitate an IPI transnational mentor network for journalists, editors and media founders.
- Evangelize for high-integrity independent news media by leveraging networks and reporting frameworks and to act as champions for one another and for the sector at large.
- Continue our focus on local news with special programs networking the sector and sharing best practice, and aim for a global award programme that recognizes the importance of the sector and promotes great journalism.

Networking and Membership

Through their membership in the IPI global network, journalists, editors and newsroom leaders build the collaboration and solidarity that empowers the network to shape discourse and policies affecting the media and push back against restrictions to the free flow of news and information. IPI membership offers solidarity in the face of oppression.

Our membership strategy is designed to:

- ⇒ Help our members deeply understand the challenges we face and creatively solve for their situation
- → Help our members and the news media community do the best journalism possible for this time.
- → Help ensure that as we transition to new ways of journalism, and new media business models, that we do so with an agreed set of principles of journalism, and with a focus on audience, relevance and trust.
- Map and unlock the expertise and resources in the network to serve members and foster stronger connections to strengthen independent journalism.
- Strengthen the global and regional networks by expanding the membership to reflect the current media makeup, and by creating more sustainable national committees.

Broaden and strengthen the network

The work of the IPI global network lies at the centre of this challenge. It has a strong network of members, National Committees and relationships that it leverages to achieve its goals. The IPI global network brings a much-needed collaboration and solidarity among journalists and independent news media. The values that the IPI global network, its members and journalism bring to the challenges of this moment are deeply shared: a profound commitment to media freedom. a belief in the importance of accuracy, quality, public interest, independence; a focus on content and

audiences. And the value in the practice of solidarity that empowers the network.

This understanding of the values, membership engagement and the power networking enables us to properly identify the IPI's offering or value proposition which reflects both what we do and why we do it, including providing global leadership on media freedom advocacy and promoting independent journalism both globally and on focus countries.

Through the network, we bring the power of sharing, of pooling (and identifying) expertise and resources both to sustain our current work around media freedom, and also share and exchange the strong interest in journalistic values and skills.

We will:

- Network national committees with annual meetings to share best practices, coordinate actions and learn from each other, and explore benefits of standardising support and activities.
- Seek out and build new alliances and collaborations with media houses, universities, NGOs, journalism organisations to power our work, help spread our messages, and to share IPI values
- ⇒ Build new National Committees in countries and where appropriate, in new regions. Also where appropriate, these could be supported with partnering sponsorship from existing national committees.
- Expand and diversify the membership, including focus on leading journalists/editors, women and founders of not for profit and new digital media,
- Create a global network of news start-ups particularly from countries that lack institutional infrastructure support for media transition.
- ⇒ Create accessible and adaptable resources to help support groups of members to create national committees.
- Empower National Committees to host their own fundraising events/programs that will promote IPI's shared values, raise awareness of IPI's work and promote media freedom and sustainability.

Cross-cutting approach

Across IPI's work, we prioritise support for journalists previously underrepresented in the media most notably female journalists, journalists from minority backgrounds, and those from vulnerable groups. In our monitoring work, we closely document attacks and harassment of journalists based on gender and ethnicity as well as journalists who work especially dangerous "beats", such as covering climate or politics.

it is needed

Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities & Threats

STRENGTHS WEAKNESSES Over 70 years experience of working on Limited resources and key staffing media freedom positions Broad membership committed to media Lack of planning/monitoring and freedom evaluation systems Lack of organisational investment Global network of experts supporting our work Reliance on project funding Perception of IPI as representing Strong multi-stakeholder networks and legacy media coalitions Reputation as an independent voice in the Lack of awareness among broader press freedom community journalism and media innovation Trusted as an "intermediary organisation" for community of the full range of channelling public and philanthropic money work and expertise in IPI into high-quality journalism Staff's commitment to the IPI's mission Wide ranging, valuable experience across full range of media management, publishing, innovation and journalism that members are ready to share **OPPORTUNITIES THREATS** Deepen partnerships and coalitions to Direct pressure on IPI by advance media freedom, support authorities as a result of our independent journalism and media advocacy work and campaigns Disengagement by members innovation Overextended staff and burnout Create regional IPI presence and member networks Legal risks Transpose successful models for supporting Geographical activities limited by independent journalism in Europe to other donor priorities parts of the world Capacity to retain senior and Diversify sources of funding to implement IPI specialist staff strategy independently of individual donor Operating in a crowded field of priorities media freedom organisations Grow membership to strengthen solidarity and cooperation Deep experience within membership can be leveraged and shared across network where

RESOURCES

IPI has always focused the bulk of its resources on achieving its core programmatic objectives. There is a need to dedicate additional resources for fundraising, financial management, strategic and campaigns communications. It is imperative for IPI's success to be able to share its work with a wide audience, develop creative ways to engage with its partners and members across the globe, and secure the attention of its advocacy targets and donor community.

Objectives:

- → To improve mentoring and evaluation capability to track and measure the impact of our work, improve donor reporting efficiency and guide strategic planning.
- To invest in essential support services including finance and fundraising, allowing for the opportunity to invest in expert staff and to create a framework to diversify IPI's income streams, particularly through trusts and foundations, and generate sustainable sources of long-term core funding.
- → To strengthen strategic and campaigns and external communications.
- → To develop a comprehensive training and development programme
 for all staff.