From Conflict to Freedom

The Professional Needs of Syrian Journalists in the Transitional Phase

2025

Research Study

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1. Introduction

Following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, after more than five decades of Assad family rule characterized by systematic repression of press freedom, Syria has entered a transitional phase filled with hopes and challenges.

This radical change, which ended an era of severe censorship and violations against journalists, opens the door to rebuilding an independent media that reflects the voice of the Syrian people. However, the situation remains fragile due to incomplete political stability and increasing economic pressures. Reports from Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in 2025 indicate that Syria's ranking on the Press Freedom Index improved to 177, up from 179 in 2024.

During the years of conflict that began with the Syrian uprising in 2011, Syrian journalists faced severe violations, including arrests, killings, and exile. According to reports from RSF, more than 700 journalists have been killed in Syria since the beginning of the conflict, making it one of the most dangerous countries for journalism.

Today, in 2025, many exiled journalists are returning home to contribute to rebuilding the media, but they face new challenges such as a lack of funding, absence of supportive laws, and the need for professional training to keep up with digital and investigative developments. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) highlighted in its July 2025 report that journalists are torn between the desire to return home and concerns about the new reality, as they need support to develop their skills and enhance their security.

This study, conducted between June 1 and September 30, 2025, aims to assess the professional needs of Syrian journalists inside Syria and in the diaspora, focusing on four main areas: training and professional development, security and safety, institutional support, and mental health.

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The study is based on recent data from 2024-2025, including reports from organizations such as the Syrian Journalists Association (SYJA), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and public discussions on social media, along with analyses from various sources emphasizing the urgent need for support for independent media during the reconstruction phase.

"It should be noted that the Syrian Center for Community Development and Empowerment prepared this study through the voluntary efforts of its founding members and at their own expense, in addition to voluntary contributions from experts within and outside Syria in the scope of the study's subject".

Through this assessment, the study seeks to provide practical insights that support the establishment of a free and independent media in the new Syria, where journalists are considered a fundamental pillar for promoting democracy, accountability, and transparency in a society striving to heal from the wounds of past years.

2. Executive Summary

Syria is witnessing a radical transformation following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, opening doors of hope for rebuilding a democratic society based on freedom of expression and independent media.

Syrian journalists are at the forefront of this transformation, facing accumulated challenges from years of conflict, including security violations and legal restrictions, despite a slight improvement in the press freedom ranking to 177 according to the RSF report of 2025.

This research study aims to assess the professional needs of journalists inside Syria and in the diaspora, focusing on four main areas: training and professional development, security and safety, institutional support, and mental health. It relies on recent data from international, regional, and local organizations documenting ongoing incidents, such as the attack on seven journalists in Sweida in May 2025, reflecting the urgent need to support this group to enhance their role in building the new Syria.

The study aims to achieve specific objectives that reflect the complex reality of Syrian journalists as follows:

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- Identify training and professional needs in the context of transitional changes, such as developing digital skills to counter misinformation and the need for journalists to have advanced tools for accurately gathering and disseminating information.
- Assess security, legal, and economic challenges, including sectarian threats and funding shortages, while considering journalists' reluctance to return.
- Propose practical solutions to enhance press freedom based on survey results, such as the lack of training (49%) and insecurity (67%), to support the establishment of independent media that promotes accountability and transparency.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure comprehensive results. It includes a survey of a sample of 100 Syrian journalists, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, as well as analyses of recent reports from organizations and survey findings, such as the lack of mental health support (85%) and limited job opportunities (68.3%). The analysis is based on real data from reports like the Reuters Institute report in March 2025 on rebuilding Syrian media amid disinformation. The methodology includes ethical considerations such as confidentiality and sensitivity to the Syrian context, relying on a theoretical framework derived from international standards like the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists.

It presented the views of Syrian journalists both inside and outside the country, extracted from three brainstorming sessions and in-depth meetings distributed across three groups. The first group called for an independent journalists' association and press cards to avoid chaos, with daily transparency conferences (61% face legal restrictions), while participants in the second group emphasized mental health support (85% without access to psychological support) and security training (34.7% digital surveillance). Participants in the third group demanded funding and an ethical charter to counter alignment with authority.

In individual in-depth meetings, it was suggested to appoint official spokespersons to respond to rumors and to call for a journalists' association to organize the profession. Several participants criticized the delay in restarting media due to costs, and some called for independent critical journalism, while others proposed a code of ethics for accountability.

The study revealed urgent needs reflecting the difficult reality of journalists as follows:

- **Training and development:** A pressing need for digital (30.7%) and security (25.7%) skills, with 49% having no prior training.
- **Security and safety:** Physical (22.7%) and digital (34.7%) threats, with a feeling of insecurity (67%).
- **Institutional support:** 52.3% are independent without support, with funding shortages (29.7%).
- **Mental health:** Psychological stress (50%), with limited access (85%).

The study presented multiple challenges faced by Syrian journalists as follows:

- **Legal restrictions:** 61% suffer from inherited restrictions.
- **Security challenges:** Ongoing assaults and impunity, with a lack of security training (69.7%).
- **Resource shortages**: Low funding (12.5%) for humanitarian response according to the UN, with limited job opportunities (68.3%).
- **Access to information:** Censorship and disinformation.

Recommendations were distributed to various stakeholders, with the most prominent being:

- **For the government:** Legal reforms and funding mechanisms to address the lack of support (52.3%).
- **For international organizations:** Training programs and psychological support to bridge the training gap (49%) and access (85%).
- **For local associations:** Support networks to enhance safety and opportunities (68.3% limited).
- **For journalists:** Self-development to face security challenges (67% insecurity).

In conclusion, the study found that supporting Syrian journalists requires joint efforts to enhance their role in building a democratic Syria. The CPJ report in July 2025 confirmed journalists' reluctance to return due to risks, making the implementation of these recommendations a critical step towards a better future for press freedom.

3. Recommendations

These recommendations aim to address the professional needs of Syrian journalists in the transitional phase of 2025, based on the study's results and the survey of Syrian journalists' opinions.

The recommendations are directed at key stakeholders: the transitional Syrian government, international organizations, local organizations and press associations, and the journalists and media institutions themselves. The survey results, such as the lack of training (49% without training), insecurity (67%), lack of institutional support (52.3% independent without support), and lack of psychological support (85%), were taken into account to formulate practical and targeted solutions.

These recommendations are considered actionable through joint efforts, with monitoring of implementation to ensure that needs are met based on survey results, as follows:

3.1. Recommendations for the Transitional Syrian Government

3.1.1. **Urgent Legal Reforms:** Repeal inherited repressive laws and enact new legislation guaranteeing press freedom, focusing on removing legal restrictions faced by 61% of journalists according to the expected survey. Starting with the establishment of open press offices to facilitate access to information, as suggested by RSF in January 2025.

3.1.2. **Enhancing Security and Safety:** Allocate resources for security training for journalists, especially in conflict areas, to address the feeling of insecurity at 67%, ensuring accountability for perpetrators in cases of assaults as documented by the CPJ in 2025.

3.1.3. **Economic and Institutional Support:** Establish government funding mechanisms for independent journalists (52.3% without support) and provide stable job opportunities to address the shortage at 68.3%, in collaboration with international entities to restart official media outlets.

3.2. Recommendations for International Organizations

3.2.1. **International Training Programs**: Organize free workshops on digital journalism and digital security to bridge the training gap (49% without training), focusing on countering disinformation as in UNESCO's programs for the safety of journalists.

3.2.2. **Security and Psychological Support:** Provide grants for protective equipment and psychological support programs to address the lack of access to psychological support (85%) and digital threats (34.7%).

3.2.3. **Funding Partnerships:** Allocate grants to Syrian media institutions to enhance institutional support, addressing funding shortages (29.7%).

3.3. Recommendations for Local Organizations and Press Associations

3.3.1. **Local Support Networks:** Establish networks for experience exchange and local training to bridge the training gap in digital skills (30.7%), focusing on independent journalists.

3.3.2. **Community Mental Health Programs:** Organize free psychological support sessions in collaboration with specialized organizations to address psychological stress (50%), especially in unstable areas.

3.3.3. **Enhancing Local Partnerships:** Collaborate with institutions to provide job opportunities and funding to address the lack of opportunities (68.3%), while pressuring authorities to remove legal restrictions (61%).

3.4. Recommendations for Journalists and Media Institutions Themselves

3.4.1. **Self-Skill Development:** Participate in online courses to enhance digital and security skills, bridging the training gap (49%), using platforms like Coursera or DW Akademie programs.

3.4.2. **Building Safety Networks:** Form self-psychological support groups to address the lack of support (85%), exchanging experiences on safety to reduce the feeling of insecurity (67%).

3.4.3. **Seeking Independent Funding:** Submit individual grant applications to international organizations to address the lack of institutional support (52.3%), focusing on independent investigative projects.