

Vibrant Civil Society

Democracy, Involvement, Cohesion

# Exile journalism in Germany

Current Challenges and Initiatives at a Glance



**‘Germany is one of the main destination countries for persecuted journalists’**

Jens-Uwe Thomas, Reporter Without Borders

**‘Some people prefer leaving a country that refuses to tolerate their ideas than giving up their ideas’**

Can Dündar, Özgürüz

**‘German editorial offices should make it easier for exiled journalists to join their teams. They desperately need more diversity!’**

Omid Rezaee, journalist from Iran

**‘Exiled journalist are very aware of the high importance of freedom of the press.’**

Julia Brötz, responsible for the integration internship at ALEX Berlin

**‘I faced many challenges when I arrived in Germany: The complete lack of relationships and networks and the fact that I lacked German language skills.’**

Dima AlBitar Kalaji, journalist from Syria

**‘There is a need in Germany for media in the languages of their countries of origin. Refugees’ views have an important role to play in German discourse.’**

Julia Gerlach, project manager ‘Amal, Berlin!’ and ‘Amal, Hamburg!’

# Editorial



**W**hen people are persecuted because of their political views, religion or ethnicity, their life may be under threat, and they often have no choice but to go into exile. However, when they do so, they leave behind their home country, their social environment, the language they grew up with, and their opportunities for professional development. These consequences are particularly significant for journalists who are targeted by threats and violence. When they finally arrive in exile, they usually have no access to their most important tools: the language of their home country and their network of contacts.

During his ‘Speech on Exile’, which was held in Hamburg last October, Can Dündar, an exiled journalist who now lives in Germany, underscored the extraordinary situation faced by many exiled journalists when he stated: ‘Where I write, is Turkey’. Exiled journalists live and work between two countries and cultures. In many cases, they address their compatriots in their home country, but still need to continue working and building a life in their host country – and to do so from scratch.

Across the world journalists are increasingly being forced to leave their home country, with a rise in numbers seeking protection in Germany. Körber-Stiftung helps ensure that the voices of exiled journalists are heard, supports them in building networks and helps them gain a foothold in the German media sector. Germany has a particular historical responsibility to protect people from persecution. During National Socialism, hundreds of thousands of people were deprived of their rights and forced into exile. Many of these individuals continued to stand up for democracy, the rule of law and human rights whilst in exile.

Although the number of exiled journalists in Germany is growing, many questions related to their situation remain unanswered. What are working conditions like for exiled journalists in Germany? What kind of support do they receive? Where are the gaps in this support? And in which areas can foundations, publishers, media companies and government agencies be of help?

This publication describes the situation faced by exiled journalists in Germany. It identifies challenges and provides impetus for new initiatives that could improve their situation. Furthermore, it affords insights into the work of exile media and the civil society actors supporting exiled journalists, while illustrating the difficulties that they face during their everyday work. In addition to our conference and discussion formats, and the support that Körber-Stiftung provides to ‘Amal, Hamburg!’, we hope that this publication will further strengthen exile journalism in Germany.

**Sven Tetzlaff**  
Head of Department,  
Democracy, Involvement, Cohesion

**Theresa Schneider**  
Programme Director  
projects on exile

# ‘People with a background in publishing’

## What are exiled journalists and how many are there?

### Terminology

Germany is undoubtedly an important country of exile, not just for journalists. Persecuted authors, scientists and artists from all over the world find refuge in Germany. Germany’s constitution not only guarantees freedom of speech, writing and pictures (Article 5), but also the right of asylum (Article 16). However, it is not even remotely clear how many exiles live in the country. Nobody collects data about them; not even the authorities. Neither the federal government nor the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees has reliable data about the number of exiled journalists living in Germany. Occupational data is simply not collected for anyone arriving in Germany seeking asylum.

Collecting data such as this would be very difficult. In Germany, ‘journalist’ is not a regulated profession. The Internet Era – a time in which anyone with an internet connection can publish throughout the world – has blurred the definition of the term. Should a YouTuber who occasionally talks about political issues but who has never worked in the formal media sector be considered a journalist? Is a student who writes for a student newspaper during their free time also a journalist? And should a person who worked as a journalist in their home country be considered an exiled journalist if they now work as a bus driver in their host country?

The nuances at play in this regard certainly have an impact on the public’s perception of terms such as these. An ‘exiled journalist’ tends to be met with a more positive reception than a ‘refugee’ or an ‘asylum seeker’. The term ‘exiled journalist’ conjures up imagery of research, resistance and the fight against political persecution. It reminds us of Kurt Tucholsky, Egon Erwin Kisch and Edward

Snowden. Rebecca Roth from Neue Deutsche Medienmacher, an association that helps integrate migrant journalists, stresses that many refugee journalists point out that they are journalists, not just refugees. But does someone who was forced to leave Turkey for posting on Facebook also count as an exiled journalist?

Whatever the case, this term undoubtedly applies to Can Dündar. In Turkey, Dündar’s home country, he was editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. However, he was arrested for political reasons and was even the target of an assassination attempt. Dozens of journalists from other countries in which freedom of the press is suppressed have also suffered similar fates. If they return to their home country, they too will have to fear for their freedom, if not their life. These individuals are clearly exiled journalists.

However, many cases are more complicated than this. The reasons why people are forced to leave their country are rarely one dimensional. Although there are some journalists among the many migrants who have arrived in Germany since 2015, not all of them were politically persecuted in their home country. They came to Germany to escape war and misery, which are certainly valid reasons to do so, but does that mean they should be referred to as exiled journalists?

‘Gesicht Zeigen’, an association based in Berlin, has established a coworking space in the city. The association refers to refugees involved in the media as ‘people with a background in publishing’ to avoid terms such as ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’, which contribute to stigmatisation. The question remains whether exiled journalist would be the more appropriate term or if a certain vagueness is unavoidable in this context.

## The scale of exile journalism in Germany

All experts agree that the number of exiled journalists living in Germany has risen rather than fallen in recent years. The reasons are quite clear. First, the overall situation concerning the freedom of the press has deteriorated throughout the world, as the international organisation Reporters Without Borders points out in its latest annual report. The murder of Saudi Arabian exiled journalist Jamal Khashoggi has recently led to a greater focus on this issue. Second, more and more people have been displaced worldwide. The United Nations estimated that there were 70.8 million refugees at the end of 2018, a much larger number than in previous years.

Reporters Without Borders stresses that **several dozen journalists** are forced to leave their home country every year.

Jens-Uwe Thomas, who is responsible for emergency aid and refugees at Reporters Without Borders, describes Germany as one of the main destination countries for these individuals. The organisation has assisted 650 exiled journalists throughout the world since its inception. The New York NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has provided support to a similar number. Between 2010 and 2015, CPJ knew of 452 journalists who had been forced into exile.

## The countries of origin

There are no precise statistics on the countries from which exiled journalists come. However, reports by the organisations that assist them yield some information. Figures demonstrate that exiled journalists living in Germany typically come from Turkey, Iran and the North African Maghreb states. Why do journalists from these countries in particular seek refuge in Germany? The German-Turkish journalist Ömer Erzeren, who is well-connected with exiles in Germany, explains that Germany is a popular country of exile for Turkish journalists because many people of Turkish origin already live here. This makes it easier to get in touch with other Turkish journalists in Germany.

Jens-Uwe Thomas from Reporters Without Borders also notes that Turkish journalists are attracted to Germany because of its large Turkish community. Thomas also underscores the importance of language in a person's choice of a country of exile when he argues that it is relatively easy for Turkish speakers to find their way around in Germany even without being able to speak German. Martina Bäurle, executive manager of the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People, which provides scholarships to journalists who are seeking protection, points out that her organisation receives relatively few applications from Latin America, not because freedom of the press is necessarily stronger there, but because of language issues; colleagues from these countries tend to seek refuge in Spanish-speaking countries or in the US.

The number of exiled journalists from the typical countries of origin has been far exceeded by those from **Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan** for several years now

Thomas confirms this: 'Since 2014/2015, almost half of the people seeking help from us have come from Syria'. While all of these countries are also ranked low on the Press Freedom Index, with journalists certainly subject to persecution there, the civil war is probably the main factor driving Syrian journalists, for example, out of their home country. As a result, non-political and even regime-loyal journalists from Syria have sought refuge in Germany as well.

In addition to the main countries of origin, journalists in need of protection tend to come to Germany from Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Cuba, China, Uganda, Vietnam, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Eritrea, Sudan as well as many other individual states. In recent years, journalists from European countries such as Hungary, Poland, Macedonia and Ukraine have also once again begun seeking exile in Germany.



Can Dündar,  
Speech on Exile  
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## Exile journalism and German media

As very few refugee journalists work in the German media, most people do not come across articles or reports by exiled journalists. Furthermore, although the number of journalists with a migrant background is growing, their most prominent representatives, such as Dunja Hayali (ZDF) and Özlem Topçu (Die Zeit), do not have a background of forced displacement. Instead, these individuals tend to stem from the second or third generation of former guest-worker families and were born here. Whereas about 25 per cent of the population as a whole has a migrant background, this only applies to about five per cent of journalists in Germany.

The German media only began focusing on forced displacement and migration in 2015 – the year when large numbers of migrants arrived in Germany. However, this situation also enabled exiled journalists to gain a media presence: n-tv began broadcasting *Marhaba*, the Krautreporter project launched *Yallah Germany* and one issue of *Zeit-Magazin* was published in both German and Arabic. Be this as it may, programmes and publications such as these have tended to focus on displacement and migration and not on the challenges faced by journalists.

Can Dündar is one of the few exiled journalists to have reached prominence. He has lived in Germany since July 2016 and is the most famous face of exiled journalism in Germany. Dündar publishes frequently for both German and Turkish-speaking audiences. He regularly writes for German publications such as *Die Zeit*, and also runs the Turkish-language radio and online project *Özgürüz*. After being sentenced to several years in prison in Turkey, he announced that he will be remaining in Germany for now. Dündar's fate has shone a spotlight on exile journalism.

In his speech at the opening event to Körber-Stiftung's Exile Media Forum last year, Dündar stressed that 'Some people prefer leaving a country that refuses to tolerate their ideas than giving up their ideas'. This probably represents the core of what it means to be an exiled journalist. It is not a person's profession that makes them an exile but how a country deals with their ideas – exiles are people who have been persecuted for publically exercising their right to freedom of expression. An exiled journalist, therefore, is someone who publishes something that leads them to be driven out of a country.

# 'Journalists are dealt better cards'

## The personal situation of people living in exile

**E**xiled journalists face the same challenges as other refugees. Many do not have a secure residency status, and they may be separated from their families or live in shared accommodation. Refugees sometimes lack official paperwork or certificates from their country of origin and the documents that they do have are not always accepted. Some continue to suffer from traumas or the consequences of war and have health problems. Others have been held in prison or threatened. The people

who provide help to refugees report that situations such as the threat of deportation, unresolved traumas, and sudden relocations within Germany expose refugees to constant stress. Many also face a loss of status: respected journalists in their home country are likely to be unknown in Germany.



Nevertheless, Jens-Uwe Thomas also points out there is at least one area in which exiled journalists may be better placed than other people seeking protection in Germany: the authorities should understand that freelance journalists cannot work in the conditions found in countries such as Afghanistan. As such, Thomas maintains that journalists are ‘dealt better cards’ than people from other professions, at least when it comes to the asylum procedure.

### The challenges faced by journalists in exile

In other areas, however, exiled journalists have a far more difficult time. The main problem faced by journalists in exile is language. Language is a journalist’s tool, but it cannot be used in a foreign country. Similarly, personal networks – comprising colleagues and sources – are almost just as important to journalists. Clearly, contacts are more difficult to maintain in exile, and it is also hard for exiled journalists to find jobs and clients. According to Thomas, as a result, some journalists are retraining and, for example, becoming cooks or working in daycare.

It is not usually difficult for newcomers in Germany to find other people from their home country. Many exile communities have meeting places in major cities and are well connected online. However, far fewer networks exist for exiled journalists.

Rebecca Roth from Neue Deutsche Medienmacher stresses that

**the need to secure a livelihood – particularly when there is a family to support – plays a major role in decisions taken by refugee journalists:**

it basically means that someone might be willing to take on a job that would not exactly be viewed as ‘quality journalism’. In a similar vein, Roth cites a story about an exiled journalist who took out a personal loan in order to complete an unpaid internship at a radio station in Stuttgart.

Some exiled journalists in Germany continue to be besieged by political opponents from their home country. The problems that they face include



Martina Bäurle (right) with scholarship holder Angel Istek Alcu  
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threatening emails and offensive comments posted on social media networks. In other cases, however, actual persecution may continue in Germany. Many people are afraid of informers, states Martina Bäurle of the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People.

Anyone who comes from a country that lacks press freedom understands its value. Many journalists in exile find it liberating to be able to write what they want, and to do so without having to worry, and without facing interference from the authorities. Nevertheless, this is also a skill that needs to be learnt. Some exiled journalists describe facing a culture shock on arriving in a German newsroom for the first time. Many exiles are initially unable to put their doubts aside and find it hard to believe that their editors merely intend to improve their texts – instead of, for example, rewriting them to tow the government’s line. They may also find it difficult to believe that the authorities are not part and parcel of a repressive state apparatus.

Even organisations that assist exiled journalists are sometimes met with distrust. Roth describes the situation of a colleague whose asylum application had been rejected. Out of fear of deportation, the journalist promptly went into hiding and broke off contact with those supporting her. It was not until later that she realised that the danger was not as acute as she had feared. She has since been granted permanent residency and is one of the project’s most successful participants.

# ‘This is not about charity, it’s journalism’

## Support for exiled journalists in Germany

**M**any journalists view helping their colleagues in distress as a matter of honour. Even before 2015 – the year that saw a large influx of migrants to Germany – a whole series of initiatives had already existed in the German media landscape to help foreign colleagues. Many of these initiatives now receive public funding. Municipalities also specifically provide housing for refugee journalists. Berlin recently launched a fellowship scheme called ‘Weltoffenes Berlin’ alongside a support programme entitled ‘Beratung, Unterstützung und Vernetzung für transnationale Kunst-, Medien- und Kulturschaffende’ (Advice, support and networking for people involved in transnational art, media and culture). Artists and people involved in the media can apply to the programme directly. Other federal states and the federal government tend to provide more indirect assistance by financing projects that support exiled journalists instead.

Numerous forms of help are on offer and these range from being met at the airport, help with finding employment and counselling, to assistance with legal matters, the asylum process and visas, with learning German, gaining scholarships and training, and even help with hiding. This work is carried out by associations, foundations, trade unions and NGOs. Ver.di and the German Federation of Journalists, for example, provide practical support to people in their everyday lives, whereas associations such as ‘Journalists Help Journalists’ offer more individual help.

### Support from Reporters Without Borders

Reporters Without Borders is the most dedicated source of support for journalists in exile in Germany. The organisation has set itself the task of helping beleaguered journalists throughout the

world – either by supporting their work locally or once they have gone into exile. Reporters Without Borders provides assistance during the asylum procedure, in securing a livelihood, with finding a solicitor, and helps with legal fees, the costs of German language courses, and even with career advancement through internships and training courses. Above all, the organisation aims to enable people to continue working:

language barriers prevent access to the German media landscape, but there are also too few foreign-language media in Germany,

says Jens-Uwe Thomas von Reporters Without Borders. As such, the organisation focuses on supporting people in their home country and on developing a perspective for those who want to return.

### The integration internship at Medienanstalt Berlin-Brandenburg, ALEX Berlin

Although it is young journalists in particular who tend to leave their home country behind, these individuals face particular difficulties when trying to find an internship – finding such a placement is highly challenging even for German native speakers. Interns are usually expected to have accrued years of experience as freelancers in the area in which they intend to work; experience that is almost impossible to afford as a refugee.

In some cases, specialist internships for refugees are available. One such programme is the integration internship provided by Medienanstalt Berlin-Brandenburg at ALEX Berlin. The organisation is currently training three young journalists – from the Gambia, Syria and Iran. According to Julia Brötz, the person responsible for the

integration internship, most of the applicants speak German well, but not perfectly, and although some may have lived in Germany for a long time, they still speak with an accent. Candidates need to be refugees who have either been politically persecuted or who displaced by war, and they usually have experience in journalism. A current intern worked in her home country as a business editor; one candidate had even worked as editor-in-chief. As there is no age limit, older, more seasoned journalists also apply – as do many other people. Exiled journalists have already understood that the integration internship provides an excellent opportunity to gain a foothold in the German media. It is structured like a normal internship and combines theoretical modules with practical placements in a range of editorial offices, including at *taz*, *Deutschlandfunk* and *RBB*. The internship comes with a guaranteed salary, and refugee interns are paid the same as Germans would be.

Brötz emphasises the success of the project and the fact that the participants were highly motivated. Moreover, she argues that it would have been extremely difficult for them to get anywhere in the media without the internship.

Unfortunately, the project's future is unclear. It is currently in its second year, but is due to close as it has not been able to gain financing for a third year. 'All media companies should be doing this,' states Brötz, 'It is more work than a traditional internship, but it is really worth the extra effort.'

### Further education at Hamburg Media School

Hamburg Media School offers a further education course for refugees. However, it is a lot shorter and less comprehensive than the internship at ALEX. The school offers refugees involved in the media an opportunity to take a six-month course followed by an internship at a media or film production company. The course is free and there are a total of twelve places available. However, the rules governing the course are quite strict and attendance is compulsory four times a week between 10am and 5pm. Students also need to attend on weekends if filming is taking place. 'We place great importance on attendance and punctuality. We expect the participants to work hard,' says Professor

Richard Reitingner, head of the programme. Reitingner emphasises that mediating culture and helping refugees to build a network of contacts is more important than providing them with a place to stay. 'On the one hand, our goal is to provide people involved in the media with the skills that they need to work in this society. On the other, we also aim to help people from the same country establish a network.'

### Neue Deutsche Medienmacher's mentoring programme

Neue Deutsche Medienmacher is an association based in Berlin that runs a mentoring programme. The programme is aimed at ensuring that newcomers have someone at their side with experience of the local media. The association has more than 1,250 members, all of whom are journalists. It was established in 2008 to increase the proportion of journalists with a migrant background in the German media. The association opened up its mentoring programme to refugees in 2016. It began with 100 individuals – 50 Germans (some of whom also had a migrant background) and 50 refugees (mainly from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan). The initiators view the reasons that brought the refugees to Germany as of secondary importance. Rebecca Roth of Neue Deutsche Medienmacher states: 'The participants on our programme gain collegial advice and support from highly experienced – in some cases, renowned – voluntary



Neue Deutsche Medienmacher © Thomas Lobenwein

mentors. They also have the opportunity to join a large professional network. The exchange of experiences that this encourages helps the participants to get up and running. However, mentoring cannot replace proper training’.

People have to apply to join the programme – and many do so. In fact, there are usually twice as many applicants as places. The programme prefers to work with journalists who are planning to stay in Germany instead of returning to their home country – and particularly with those who have a future in the German media landscape. ‘It’s important that people do not join the programme until they are really ready. They need to have understood the routines of everyday life here in Germany because otherwise they won’t be able to focus on re-entry into journalism,’ says Roth. ‘However, this is difficult because many still have to deal with post-traumatic stress.’ The mentoring team also organises regular seminars, visits to editorial offices and publication projects, and an alumni programme is to be established to enable former participants to maintain contact.

### The tandem project *wirmachendas.jetzt*

The Berlin-based project *wirmachendas.jetzt* is built on a similar idea: pairing an established journalist with a new arrival. The project enables a German journalist to work together with and guide a refugee journalist during their first few steps in their new environment. The two journalists work together to conduct research and write about forced displacement and arrival in a foreign country. The articles that they produce are then made available free of charge to local newspapers. Annika Reich, one of the project’s initiators, argues that it is important that the tandems are not limited to a single project and that the collaboration should continue in the long term: ‘At some point, working together leads both participants to open up their respective networks to one other.’

Although the project is no longer running, Reich still raves about the tandem partnerships. She points out that both sides benefited from



Inga Alice Lauenroth and Hiba Obaid formed a tandem at *wirmachendas.jetzt*  
© Alexander Janetzko

them as they provided refugees with a foothold in the German media, and German journalists with access to the world of refugees, a world that normally remains closed to majority society. Reich emphasises that

the tandems involved people working together **as equals**.

They were not about helping somebody, but about working together. She emphasises this in the following manner: ‘This is not about charity, it’s journalism.’

The project has now ended as it was unable to secure continued funding. However, Reich stresses that the project was a great success, and that the journalism it initiated continues as an online magazine.

### The Media Residents’ coworking space

A further project in Berlin pursues a very different yet more open approach. Since 2017, Media Residents, which is part of ‘Gesicht zeigen e.V.’, has offered journalists in exile a place in the German capital where they can work free of charge. The project is also aimed at refugee journalists who would not usually be referred to as ‘journalists’ in the narrow sense: bloggers, YouTubers, and Twitterers – ‘grassroots journalists’, as Bastian Koch, a freelance project manager at Media Residents, calls them.

The most important principle behind the project is its low threshold: nobody has to apply or sign up to join Media Residents. It is possible to make a reservation but the premises are otherwise open three mornings a week. Media Residents offers a classic form of coworking: it makes 20 workspaces available across 50 square metres of office space. Writers, directors, filmmakers and people working in radio all stop by at the office and the desks are used around 100 times a month.

In addition to their modern, stylish rooms, Media Residents also provides hardware, which is particularly useful to audiovisual journalists. Professional cameras, powerful computers and laptops, tripods, lamps, microphones and recording devices are all available. The entire project is paid for by public funds, with the three-year project phase financed by the Federal Ministry of Justice.

‘The hardware is primarily a means to an end,’ explains Koch. ‘It brings together refugees, initiatives and people who want to help, and this provides us with a strong network. People with or without a migrant background who work in the media meet each other here, and they stay in touch.’

Koch points out that the journalists who use Media Residents’ tools have usually managed to get quite far by themselves. Most, he argues, are so well integrated that they can communicate in German. They primarily come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, but also from Iran and Azerbaijan.

However, Koch also understands that some of the refugees’ problems – ranging from fears of deportation, unresolved traumas, and impending relocations away from the capital to areas such as Brandenburg – exceed their skills. Koch stresses that the project is not run by social workers, which is why Media Residents builds networks with other organisations that are able to provide the necessary assistance.

### **Support from the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom**

In contrast to the journalists who receive assistance from Media Residents, the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) tends to help people who are at the beginning of their path: ‘You’d like to know where our houses are

located?’ asks Jane Whyatt from the ECPMF in horror, ‘Well, I can’t say because they’re supposed to be safe houses!’ Since 2016, the ECPMF has taken in twelve persecuted journalists, mostly from Eastern Europe and Turkey. It currently has three flats in Germany and receives funding from the city of Leipzig, the Free State of Saxony and the European Commission. However, it keeps the location of its safe houses secret: the people who live there are under threat; some have even been rescued from mortal danger.

ECPMF does not provide the people it helps with a permanent place to stay. Instead, the programme offers people involved in the media a secure place of residence for between three and six months to protect them from persecution and threats. In addition to furnished housing, the organisation also organises health insurance and psychological care (if required), covers travel expenses and provides a monthly scholarship worth 1,000 euros.

The ECPMF helps people from Council of Europe member states. In most cases they come from Turkey, Albania or Azerbaijan, but – perhaps surprisingly – some are from countries such as Ukraine, Slovenia and Bulgaria. The ECPMF focuses on getting journalists out of harm’s way and helping them to stand on their own two feet. The programme also provides training so that they can prepare for their return, such as on improving personal security and using encrypted communication.

### **Scholarships from the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People**

The Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People pursues a similar approach and has been providing assistance to the politically persecuted for 27 years. People in need of protection from Algeria, Tunisia, Iran, Mexico, Nicaragua and the Maldives have already been accommodated by the foundation. Over the last few years, many journalists from Syria, Pakistan and Africa have joined their ranks. The idea behind the scholarship is to provide people with a year off so that they can rest in a protected and safe environment. The programme aims to ‘empower and provide them with courage and strength,’ says Martina

Bäurle, managing director of the foundation. ‘Scholarship holders should make new contacts and then return.’ The programme is not only aimed at journalists, it is also available to authors and other political activists.

Some of the foundation’s guests have escaped severe levels of persecution. One had problems in his home country (Ukraine) with the military. Until he found safe shelter in Hamburg, he had been forced to hide elsewhere: He always had to sleep with a gun under his pillow, says Bäurle.

People who have been exposed to such extreme levels of persecution are usually unable to return home. But they also tend to face a bleak future in Germany. It is extremely difficult to find employment for exiled journalists who are unable to return home, says Bäurle. ‘None of them has been able to find a job in the media that could support them properly.’ Some have retrained and are now working in other professions. Bäurle blames the media: ‘The media slept through the opportunity of opening up editorial offices to foreign journalists.’ However, she is not without sympathy: ‘They too are fighting for their survival.’

### The German PEN Centre’s ‘Writers-In-Exile’ scholarship

Whereas Bäurle helps people to find employment if they are unable to return to their home country, refugees can also apply directly for scholarships from initiatives such as ‘Writers-In-Exile’ at the German PEN Centre. The programme has also been around for quite a while – it just celebrated its 20th anniversary. It is funded by the federal

government and awards one-year scholarships that can be extended up to two times. In addition to a monthly stipend, the participants receive a furnished flat, health insurance and personal assistance. Volunteers from the PEN Centre are also on hand to help them cope with everyday life.

The goal of the project is not only to enable writers to continue writing, but also to ensure that they can recover from the stress and pressure caused by persecution.

The PEN Centre is actually a writers’ association but Sandra Weires-Guia, the project’s manager, maintains that the dividing line between authors and journalists is difficult to draw: ‘Writers also regularly publish in newspapers and magazines, and journalists regularly write books. So we do not make such a sharp distinction between them.’ Weires-Guia states that the project continues to have a large number of applicants because recently the situation has become more acute around the world. In the past, more people returned to their home countries, but they now tend to stay longer in Germany. The number of places has just been increased to nine and is expected to rise to ten in the coming year – but people still have to be turned away all the time.

The PEN Centre not only aims to provide individual help to writers, but also to create publicity for them. Weires-Guia points out: ‘Our goal is to ensure that our scholarship holders are also recognised as authors.’ As such, the PEN centre uses its contacts and regularly sends out invitations to readings and discussions with authors in exile so that they can meet publishers. It also produces ‘Zuflucht in Deutschland. Texte verfolgter Autoren’, a publication containing German translations of texts written by the exiles.

### Körper-Stiftung’s Exile Media Forum

The Exile Media Forum aims to promote exchange between journalists in exile and their colleagues working in the German media. The forum is a specialist conference that took place for the first time in 2018 in Hamburg. It encourages German and foreign journalists to use podium discussions and lectures to discuss approaches to cooperation and to provide impetus to help establish a more diverse media landscape. ‘We have a historic responsibility in Germany to assist journalists who are persecuted because of their commitment to democracy or freedom of expression,’ explains Theresa Schneider,



Integration interns at ALEX Berlin  
© ALEX Berlin

programme director at the department for democracy, involvement, cohesion at Körber-Stiftung.



Participants at the Exile Media Forum © Jörg Faerys

However, the Exile Media Forum is not only intended to bridge the gap between the past. It is also aimed at providing the work of exiled journalists with visibility, giving them a voice and encouraging debate. ‘The exchange between German media and exiled journalists has been sporadic until now,’ explains Schneider. ‘Exiled journalists enrich the German media landscape because they approach topics and stories from a different angle and reach out to different target groups. Ultimately, greater diversity in the German media landscape strengthens social cohesion.’

## In which forms of media can exiled journalists publish in Germany?

Journalists who arrive in Germany are faced with an important decision: they can either continue publishing in their native language or try to gain a foothold in the German media. Essentially, this decision depends on their outlook. Exiles need to ask themselves whether they intend to remain temporarily in exile or start a new life in a new country.

Both options are associated with different challenges. People who intend to continue publishing in their native language usually have no access to the media in their home country. Opposition and exile media also need writers but these publications tend to involve volunteer work, and therefore cannot provide a livelihood.

### Exile journalism and German media

Anyone who opts for closer links to German society must overcome the language barrier. However, migrant journalists who manage to learn German

fluently are still at a disadvantage compared with their German colleagues. Very few non-native speakers manage to succeed in the market. At the same time, the media is currently facing a crisis and most publications are looking to reduce employee numbers rather than to create new positions.

In some cases, newspapers such as *taz* and *Die Zeit* do provide exiled journalists with a voice. Since October 2016, *Der Tagesspiegel* has also regularly produced a supplement (‘Jetzt schreiben wir’) that exclusively publishes work by exiled journalists. It is supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and has been published three times, most recently in May 2019. In general, however, the free market offers exiled journalists very few opportunities to gain a foothold in journalism, irrespective of whether they publish in their native language or in German.



## The target groups of exile media

Projects that operate independently of the market – whether this is because they are non-profit initiatives or run by public broadcasters and financed by licence fees – provide exiled journalists with an alternative means of accessing the media.

These projects can be divided into three groups: media in which refugees publish for an audience in their home country; media published in their native language for refugees living in Germany; and media that target a German audience. Exiled journalists who describe the situation of refugees in Germany, mostly with the aim of promoting understanding about newcomers, are involved in all of these projects. This is also the case of *Flüchtling-Magazin*, edited by Syrian exiled journalist Hussam Alzahr.

## Media aimed at the home country

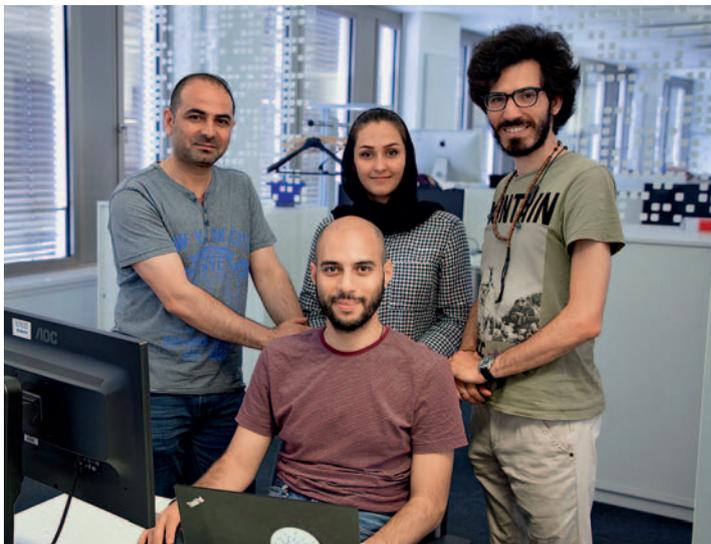
The first group is exemplified by Can Dündar's *Özgürüz*, an internet platform with a radio stream aimed at Turkish listeners; and *taz.gazete*, a Turkish-language website that belongs to the *taz* newspaper and is sponsored by its Panther Foundation. Unlike *Özgürüz*, articles published on *taz.gazete* also appear in German, and both German and Turkish editors work in its editorial offices. In addition, *Arti-TV*, which has been broadcasting from Cologne since 2017, is run by the Turkish opposition and aimed at a Turkish audience.

*Meydan TV*, which is also broadcast from Germany, is produced by exiles and seeks to address compatriots in Azerbaijan. Its founder, Emin Milli, was held in prison twice before he managed to flee to Germany. Despite the persecution that has accompanied the station all the way to Germany – a stone was thrown through the window of the channel's offices in Berlin – *Meydan TV* reaches hundreds of thousands of people, making it one of the most successful media projects produced by exiles in Germany.

## Media for refugees in Germany

*Handbook Germany* is published by Neue Deutsche Medienmacher and is aimed at refugees living in Germany. Instead of reporting about current events, it contains articles about enduring aspects of German society published in Arabic, English, French and German. The Arabic-language newspaper *Abwab* is also run in accordance with the principle of 'refugees writing for refugees'. The exiled journalists who write for the newspaper are mainly from Syria and Iraq. 'Abwab' means 'Door to the world' and the paper informs its audience about important contemporary issues in Germany.

The projects 'Amal, Berlin!' and 'Amal, Hamburg!' are made possible by funds from foundations and the Protestant Church. They focus on local journalism and report in Arabic and Farsi. A total of 14 journalists work in two editorial offices and are either employed part-time or work regularly as freelancers. The jobs are very popular as they provide staff with a secure income, at least temporarily, and enable them to work in their preferred languages. The project aims to provide exiled journalists with a future and to enrich the German media landscape. It was originally founded by the Protestant School of Journalism and its Hamburg editorial office is located in the premises of *Hamburger Abendblatt*.



The team of 'Amal Hamburg!' © Abdol Rahman Omareh

Julia Gerlach, the project's manager, stresses that it is not always easy for exiled journalists to focus on issues linked to local city life. Whereas they reported about repression and war in their home country – and may have risked their life to do so – in Berlin and Hamburg they tend to write about children's playgrounds, sessions of the city parliament or even tattoo conventions.

Gerlach has a lot of experience with Arab journalists. She was a reporter based in Cairo until 2015, where she lived for many years. 'There is a strong feeling of community among refugee journalists, but there is also a lot of competition between them,' explains Gerlach. 'Sometimes they speak badly about each other for political reasons. But sometimes it is just because they lack resources.'

However, this does not prevent exiled journalists, such as those from Arab countries, from working in Germany.

### There is a need in Germany for media in the languages of their countries of origin.

Refugees' views have an important role to play in German discourse. In order to overcome the language problem, Gerlach proposes establishing a translation fund that is financed by government agencies or NGOs as newspapers usually lack the budget for translations. Although it is common for authors to have their works translated, there is no culture of translation in journalism. A further difficulty, according to Gerlach, is the fact that it is not just words that have to be translated: 'Journalism is conducted very differently in Arab countries compared with Germany. In some cases, reading habits differ significantly'. Whereas German articles usually begin as interestingly as possible, at times, Arab writers introduce their themes far more delicately.

### Audiovisual media

Audiovisual journalists do not have the same problems with translation. It is easier for them to apply their skills in Germany than for their colleagues in print media. However, foreign-language TV formats are still rare in Germany. Public broad-

casters do have a long tradition of producing foreign-language programming, but their projects are not usually particularly long-lived.

The WDR television programme *Cosmo TV* was aimed at young people with a migrant background but stopped broadcasting precisely at the peak influx of migrants in 2015. Although new programmes were launched afterwards, such as SWR's multilingual *News for Refugees*, they no longer exist. Efforts to add Arabic subtitles to German-language programmes in media libraries have also been discontinued. The public programmes that do still exist for migrants include *Info Migrants* by Deutsche Welle, *WDRforyou* and *Refugee Radio* by *Cosmo* (both WDR), which broadcasts daily news in English and Arabic. *WDRforyou* provides its audience with the opportunity to choose between German, Arabic, English and Farsi when registering. Similarly, *Cosmo* provides *Refugee Radio* in Turkish, Arabic, Italian and many other languages. As such, it not only appeals to refugees, but also to other migrants, such as people from Eastern Europe.

Finally, a number of small, private radio initiatives, such as the *Refugee Radio Network*, which are broadcast primarily on the internet, also address listeners outside of the country.





© Juliette Moarbes

## ‘The most important challenge is the language’

**Dima AlBitar Kalaji** is originally from Syria but has lived and worked as a freelance journalist in Berlin since 2013. She produced the podcast series ‘Syrmania’ for Deutschlandfunk Kultur and now heads the online magazine *wir machen das* ([www.wirmachendas.jetzt](http://www.wirmachendas.jetzt)).

**We were almost unable to conduct this interview due to time constraints. You seem to be very busy.**

**Kalaji:** I am, but it’s not just to do with my work. I’m a single mother and have a three-year-old daughter, which is why I am also very busy after work.

**What is your working day like?**

**Kalaji:** I am usually in the office until 16:30. Together with a German journalist, I am the editor-in-chief of *wir machen das*, an online magazine predominantly made by refugees for refugees. I also curate and edit other projects. The fact that I do so many different things provides me with a lot of experience, but it also means that I don’t have much time for anything else.

**Do you also write regularly?**

**Kalaji:** Rarely, unfortunately. But I really want to write more in the future. I really miss writing!

**Were you a journalist in Syria – your home country? And what differences are there between Syria and Germany in this regard?**

**Kalaji:** Yes, I worked as a journalist in Syria. Everything is different – the entire structure, the whole way of working. But the main difference is that journalism actually exists here. It really is possible to write what you want in Germany. Working in the media in Syria is always dangerous – unless you are on the side of government propaganda.

**What were the biggest problems that you faced as a new arrival in Germany?**

**Kalaji:** The complete lack of relationships and networks and the fact that I lacked German language skills. But I also didn’t know anything about the media in Germany or, say, the political affiliations of a particular publication.

**Were there moments when you thought that you might not make it?**

**Kalaji:** Yes, and I still have them! Everyone probably does.

**Would you describe yourself as a typical exiled journalist?**

**Kalaji:** I wouldn’t know what it means to be a typical exiled journalist. My approach to a topic is different from that of other journalists, but so is everyone else’s. Unfortunately, in my case, I’m always asked to report about war or exile.

**Do you think that Germany is a good place for exiled journalists to live? Are German journalists open towards refugees as colleagues?**

**Kalaji:** Well, the proportion of non-German journalists in German media is quite small, and this is particularly the case with women. Of course, this is not just the case with refugees, it applies to all migrants. I think I was lucky to meet people who were more open to the issue of diversity. But I’ve also experienced situations in which I was taken less seriously because of my background. I was made to feel like I was being given a job more out of a favour than because of my abilities. Positive discrimination is still discrimination.

**What could the German authorities or NGOs do better in order to help refugee journalists?**

**Kalaji:** I didn’t have any opportunities at all to work in my area of expertise when I first arrived. I found that really frustrating. The most important challenge is the language. Normal language courses aren’t good enough for journalists. I think there should be special programmes and more support provided in this area, but support needs to be provided on a higher level. More internships and scholarships would also be helpful.

**You worked in a tandem together with a German journalist. What was the experience like?**

**Kalaji:** It is definitely one of the most effective and practical ways of doing so because – as a journalist – you are involved in all the details of a particular article or video. If we are going to get to know the German media better, then we need to work on more than just one or two projects. People need long-term experience of working together.

## ‘I’ve never stopped trying’

**Omid Rezaee** grew up in a small town in northwestern Iran. During his studies he wrote for a student newspaper and this brought him into conflict with the regime. The newspaper was banned and Rezaee was held in prison. He managed to flee from Iran and has lived in Germany since 2015. Rezaee is now the managing editor of ‘Amal, Hamburg!’ and also works as a freelance journalist.



© Friedrun Reinhold

**You are a successful journalist. You work for *taz*, *Welt* and *Spiegel Online*, and you have been a guest at ARD’s Presseclub. How have you managed to get so far?**

**Rezaee:** I don’t know whether I could say that I have. It’s true that I have achieved some of the goals that I set myself when I arrived in Germany.

**What were they exactly?**

**Rezaee:** I gained experience in journalism in Iran. But I wanted to learn German quickly so that I could continue working here. My plan was to work in the German media. And that’s what has happened.

**Was everything really so easy?**

**Rezaee:** Of course not! It was incredibly difficult. I actually studied mechanical engineering and I became really desperate and almost returned to this field.

**So how did you manage to achieve so much?**

**Rezaee:** I’ve always kept on going. I’ve never stopped trying. I went everywhere, to all the events. I made an effort to make sure that I knew about how certain things work, and the places that you need to go to.

**So which places do you need to go?**

**Rezaee:** Well, journalism is completely different from mechanical engineering. If you are looking for a job in engineering, you look for a job posting on the internet and you apply for it. You can’t get a job like that in journalism. This is one of the things that I had to learn.

**Who helped you get started?**

**Rezaee:** I took part in several projects that were specifically for journalists with a refugee background. I initially attended Neue Deutsche Medienmacher’s mentoring programme and Hamburg Media School. I also managed to get a scholarship from Zeit Foundation to study digital media at Hamburg Media School. I’ve been to Media Residents’ co-

working space in Berlin several times, where I’ve met people and been able to try out new things without having to invest a lot of money.

**If you look back at all of these projects, what was the most important thing that you learned?**

**Rezaee:** Actually, everything. I had to learn everything – everything to do with German media. I was 26 when I came to Germany, and I had no idea at all about journalism. I knew nothing about the type of newspapers that existed here, what they stood for, which were public, which were private. I had to learn it all so meticulously; everything that Germans take for granted.

**Does being an exiled journalist come with any advantages?**

**Rezaee:** Of course. I know Iran better than many so called experts who have just read about Iran or gained a bit of experience while visiting the country for a short time. I speak the language and I still have a lot of contacts there. This is certainly beneficial to me when it comes to German editorial offices.

**Why did you decide to write in German when you could have continued to work in your native language?**

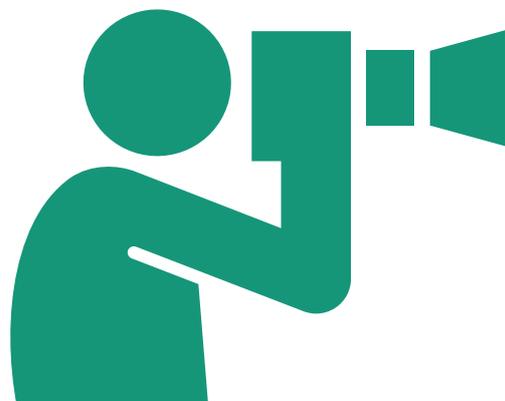
**Rezaee:** I still do so occasionally. But I mainly work for German media, and that sets me apart from many of my refugee colleagues. Most are still closely focused on their home country and are not particularly interested in what’s happening in Germany. They still feel responsible for the country they grew up in.

**Do you also feel that same responsibility?**

**Rezaee:** Yes, but in a different way. When I see how the German media report about Iran, I realise that I know so much more about the country, and I feel like I have the responsibility to try and change the picture they are painting of the country.

# Ten ways of improving the situation of journalists in exile

- › The reasons that force people to leave their homes are very different, and the same can be said of the fate of journalists in exile. Some individuals remain focused on their home country, whereas others prepare for permanent residency in Germany. As such, it is important to promote career advancement in two ways: some exiles need help integrating into the German media market, whereas others need assistance in preparing for their return home.
- › Language is the biggest obstacle to integration into German society and media. General language courses for refugees should be supplemented by specialist courses aimed at people from the media.
- › Exile media usually have difficulties securing financing. However, direct funding by the state jeopardises neutrality. As such, projects should be funded indirectly or by non-governmental organisations.
- › Linguistic and cultural barriers mean that it is almost impossible for refugee journalists to find internships. These barriers could be removed by providing specialist internships that take the particular needs of refugees into account.
- › In addition to internships, basic courses on journalism in Germany could also be helpful. They would need to cover issues such as: How is the press structured? How do German editorial offices work? What sources exist for pictures?
- › Refugees living in Germany need more media in their native languages. Establishing new services could also create jobs for exiled journalists.
- › Publishers and editors provide very little long-term support to exiled journalists. However, it is important that they become more involved in the long term, particularly in training. This would also be beneficial to publishers and editors as it would increase diversity, provide access to new networks and enable reports to be written from a different angle.
- › Hardly any refugee journalists find permanent jobs – most are freelancers. Freelancers need advice about issues such as how to draw up invoices and about tax. Advice services could also help them to prepare CVs, to translate articles and to write job applications.
- › Translations are very common in literature but not in journalism. Translations would enable refugee journalists to publish their own articles in the German media. As editors are reluctant to spend money on translation, this could be funded by non-commercial entities, such as a translation fund.
- › Networking between exiled journalists has been sporadic until now. Existing conferences and formats for discussion aimed at journalists could be used to facilitate exchange between exile media.



# Körper-Stiftung's focus on exile journalism

## Focus topic 'New Life in Exile'

Körper-Stiftung's focus topic 'New Life in Exile' assists people who live in exile in Germany in reflecting on their experiences of war and migration, the loss of their home country and their arrival in a foreign culture. The foundation aims to afford visibility to the journalistic, artistic, scientific and political endeavours of people living in exile, provide exiles with a voice in society, and, thus, strengthen social cohesion.

By conducting international specialist events such as the Exile Media Forum, discussion series such as the 'Voices of Freedom' and supporting the news platform 'Amal, Hamburg!', Körper-Stiftung and its partners focus on the challenges linked to and the possibilities associated with strengthening exile journalism in Germany. The foundation also organises the 'Days of Exile' in Hamburg, an audience-centred programme of exchange based around more than 50 events that encourages participants to get to know each other and that promotes dialogue between people in exile and their fellow citizens of Hamburg. The month of events begins with the 'Speech on Exile', which is held by a prominent figure.

## Exile Media Forum

Once a year, around 100 experts and people involved in the media are invited to Hamburg to discuss the future of exile journalism, to discover new trends and to share their experiences. In 2019, the conference forms part of the Global Investigative Journalism Conference, which brings 1,500 journalists from around 130 countries to Hamburg.

## Amal, Hamburg!

People can only feel at home and get involved if they understand what is happening in their city. This is why the news website 'Amal, Hamburg!' has published news about cultural, political and social life in Hamburg in Arabic and Persian since April 2019. It provides exiled journalists from Afghanistan, Syria and Iran the opportunity to write and gain a voice.

'Amal, Hamburg!' is a project from the Protestant School of Journalism and Körper-Stiftung, and is supported by *Hamburger Abendblatt* and the Protestant Church in Germany.

[www.koerber-stiftung.de/exil](http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/exil)

# Overview of media outlets and organisations\*

## Media

**Abwab** [www.abwab.eu/deutsch/](http://www.abwab.eu/deutsch/)  
**ALEX Berlin** [www.alex-berlin.de/blog/tag/integrations-volontariat](http://www.alex-berlin.de/blog/tag/integrations-volontariat)  
**Amal, Berlin!** [www.amalberlin.de/de/](http://www.amalberlin.de/de/)  
**Amal, Hamburg!** [www.amalhamburg.de/de/](http://www.amalhamburg.de/de/)  
**Arti-TV** [www.artitv.tv](http://www.artitv.tv)  
**Deutsche Welle (Info Migrants)**  
[www.infomigrants.net/en/author/dw/](http://www.infomigrants.net/en/author/dw/)  
**Flüchtling-Magazin** [www.fluechtling-magazin.de/](http://www.fluechtling-magazin.de/)  
**Handbook Germany** [www.handbookgermany.de/de.html](http://www.handbookgermany.de/de.html)  
**Meydan TV** [www.meydan.tv/en/](http://www.meydan.tv/en/)  
**Özgürüz** [www.ozguruz.de/](http://www.ozguruz.de/)  
**Refugee Radio Network** [www.refugeeradionetwork.net/](http://www.refugeeradionetwork.net/)  
**Tagesspiegel (Jetzt schreiben wir):** [www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/exiljournalisten/](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/exiljournalisten/)  
**taz gazete** [www.gazete.taz.de/](http://www.gazete.taz.de/)  
**WDRforyou** [www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/wdrforyou/index.html](http://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/wdrforyou/index.html)  
**WDR Cosmo (Refugee Radio)** [www1.wdr.de/radio/cosmo/programm/refugee-radio/](http://www1.wdr.de/radio/cosmo/programm/refugee-radio/)

## Organisations

**Europäisches Zentrum für Presse- und Medienfreiheit: Journalists-in-Residence-Programm** [www.ecpmf.eu/help-for-journalists/journalists-in-residence](http://www.ecpmf.eu/help-for-journalists/journalists-in-residence)  
**Hamburg Media School** [www.hamburgmediaschool.com/weiterbildung/digitale-medien-fuer-fluechtlinge](http://www.hamburgmediaschool.com/weiterbildung/digitale-medien-fuer-fluechtlinge)  
**Hamburger Stiftung für politisch Verfolgte** [www.hamburger-stiftung.de/](http://www.hamburger-stiftung.de/)  
**Media Residents (Gesichtzeigen e.V.)** [www.media-residents.de/](http://www.media-residents.de/)  
**Neue Deutsche Medienmacher** [www.neuemedienmacher.de/projekte/mentoring/](http://www.neuemedienmacher.de/projekte/mentoring/)  
**PEN-Zentrum: Writers-in-Exile** [www.pen-deutschland.de/de/themen/writers-in-exile/](http://www.pen-deutschland.de/de/themen/writers-in-exile/)  
**Reporter ohne Grenzen** [www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/wirmachendas.jetzt\(Tandemprojekt\)](http://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/wirmachendas.jetzt(Tandemprojekt))  
[www.wirmachendas.jetzt/](http://www.wirmachendas.jetzt/)

\* This list provides a first overview of organisations active in the field of exile journalism in Germany. It is by no means comprehensive.

September 2019

# Körper-Stiftung

Social development needs dialogue and understanding. Through its operational projects, in its networks and in conjunction with cooperation partners, Körper-Stiftung takes on current social challenges in areas of activities comprising Innovation, International Dialogue and Vibrant Civil Society. At present its work focuses on three topics: Technology needs Society, The Value of Europe and New Life in Exile.

Inaugurated in 1959 by the entrepreneur Kurt A. Körper, the foundation is now actively involved in its own national and international projects and events. In particular, the foundation feels a special bond to the city of Hamburg. Furthermore, the foundation holds a site in the capital of Germany, Berlin.

## Körper-Stiftung

Kehrwieder 12  
20457 Hamburg  
Germany  
Phone +49 · 40 · 80 81 92 - 168  
Fax +49 · 40 · 80 81 92 - 300  
E-Mail [dez@koerber-stiftung.de](mailto:dez@koerber-stiftung.de)  
[www.koerber-stiftung.de](http://www.koerber-stiftung.de)

## Contact

Sven Tetzlaff | Phone +49 · 40 · 80 81 92 - 144  
E-Mail [tetzlaff@koerber-stiftung.de](mailto:tetzlaff@koerber-stiftung.de)  
Theresa Schneider | Phone +49 · 40 · 80 81 92 - 166  
E-Mail [theresa.schneider@koerber-stiftung.de](mailto:theresa.schneider@koerber-stiftung.de)

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