

Exiled Journalist Communities in Germany

Editorial

Dear Readers,

“We need to struggle for our freedom. [...] Growing levels of authoritarianism and rising instability is leading to a fragile situation throughout the world. [...] We need to think outside our narrow communities. We need to work together as a community of global resistance to protect our freedoms against the oppressors.”

As the number of autocratic and dictatorial regimes around the world grows, Turkish journalist Can Dündar, who lives in Germany, puts it succinctly: if we are to defend media freedom, we not only need courageous journalists, but also more cooperation in broadening alliances, including exile media.

Dündar’s words sum up the core concern of the Exile Media Forum, the largest conference on exile journalism in Germany, which Körber-Stiftung will host for the sixth time in 2024. Once a year, we invite more than 100 media professionals in exile and representatives from politics and NGOs to Hamburg to discuss the possibilities for exile journalism, to share experiences and to network.

Over the last few years, we have presented many studies and surveys with the aim of developing a better understanding of the challenges faced by journalists in exile. For example, we published a study on the integration of journalists in exile into the German media industry (2019) and on support organizations in Europe (2022). This year’s study focuses on the situation and challenges faced by individual communities of exiled journalists in Germany.

This study does not claim to be exhaustive, as the data is not representative. However, it shows trends and developments, highlights differences between the exile communities and provides insights into how the situation of exiled journalists in Germany could be improved.

We would like to thank Professor Dr. Hanan Badr of the University of Salzburg, who conducted the study on our behalf and who provided valuable input.

We hope this report proves to be an informative read, and we look forward to receiving your feedback and comments.

Best regards,

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Rise of Exile Journalism

The current scale of exile journalism

Exiled journalism is not a new phenomenon: what is new is its current scale. Significant restrictions on media and press freedoms have led to a massive rise in the numbers of exiled journalists and media workers worldwide. Increased global crises and armed conflicts, rising authoritarianism and extremism as well as the decline of press freedom make independent journalism one of the most dangerous professions. Threats to people's safety and repressive measures range in severity from targeted killings, verbal and physical threats, abduction or imprisonment, discrimination, financial precarity and mob harassment, in addition to advanced digital surveillance and cybersecurity threats.

These acts further reduce the space for free and open debate in society by stifling independent reporting and fostering an environment of fear. Censorship means that journalists need to leave the country, exit the profession, or face imprisonment. Journalists are facing unprecedented demands and rising pressures. The US-American NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documents a rise of 227% over three years in the support it needs to provide to journalists forced to flee their home countries due to unsafe conditions (CPJ, 2022a).

“Journalists often have no choice but to go into exile.”

Irene Khan – Special Rapporteur, 56th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Defining exiled journalists

Agreeing on a definition of journalists in exile is not easy because of the uncertainty surrounding the phenomenon and the lack of consensus among experts. A minimal definition presented to the UN Human Rights Council in July 2024 has three elements:

- Employment in journalism or media-related work, including blogging, managing social media channels, production, or adjacent activities, etc.
- Persecution and safety concerns because of their work as journalists, political views, religion, or ethnicity which leads to restrictions on human rights and freedom of expression.

- Exile: leaving one's country of origin either temporarily or for the long-term.

Few journalists in exile actually wanted to leave their home country and often have been forced to do so due to threats and/or to be able to continue their work in journalism. This should not be used to strip away their agency or victimize them.

Further dimensions defining exiled journalists are relevant for the operationalization of the term in this report:

- Thin professional boundaries between journalism and activism: independent journalism commits to reporting the truth and to professional ethics. Restrictions on freedom of expression puts independent journalism into the opposition, where it resorts to activist tools and tactics for safety.
- Overlaps between diasporic and exiled media: The difference between exile and diaspora media does not necessarily lie in the language or the target group, but in whether content from the country of exile or the country of origin predominates.
- Reliance on digital technologies and platforms for media production and dissemination to reach audiences, contact sources and enable transnational editorial collaboration. Governmental internet policies and algorithms influence the work of journalists in exile. These aspects also affect audience reach and monetization and community engagement.
- Exiled media and exiled journalists are not identical: individual exiled journalists who self-identify as exiled, do not necessarily work in exiled media structures or in the host country's media, but still constitute a part of an exiled community. Exiled media as institutions require a different level of analysis. Exiled media can exist outside of the host country, but still be relevant employers for exiled journalists residing in that country.
- Long-term relocation and leaving the profession. The time that has passed since an exiled journalist left their country or profession affects their connections to sources, audiences, and field of expertise.

- According to an expert with many years of experience in a media assistance NGO, the number of journalists who continue to work in exile shrinks by 70 to 80 %. In other words, only 20 to 30 % of exiled journalists remain in the profession in the long term, if no structures absorb them.

Considering these aspects expands or narrows the exiled journalists' communities. We need to accept that the definition of exiled journalism differs in academic circles, practical-operational fields and journalists' subjective perceptions, as varying logics shape the definition and its consequences. NGOs adopt narrower technical definitions that directly influence their mandate and scope of work, shaped by practical and pragmatic capacities, financial resources, expectations, the desired strategic outcome as well as sustainability. Academia tolerates wider definitions and blurred boundaries.

Germany and exiled journalists

Germany's relevance for exiled journalists has grown: Global flows of exiled journalists show that Germany has evolved as a prominent destination from different parts of the world (RSF 2023). The number of emergency relocation applications received by a German-based NGO had multiplied by five times over the past three years, while the capacities remain the same. Reasons to choose Germany as a country of destination include political and administrative frameworks, geographic proximity, personal networks, professional ambitions, cultural or historical ties and established migrant communities.

Multiple global crises moments in 2015/16 (Syria, Turkey) and 2020–22 (Afghanistan, Belarus, Russia) opened windows of short-term attention respectively. While this leads to growing needs, little is still known about exiled journalists in Germany. Exiled journalists' communities can only be understood within their national contexts as they evolve in line with the legal and political frameworks and foreign policy of countries of origin, as well as societal and cultural contexts, public and media debates, migration and integration policies and infrastructures.

“When do journalists stop being in exile? Maybe never.”
Omid Rezaee, journalist from Iran

These turning points led to the awareness of the need for sustainable structures that support exiled journalists and media, such as the JX Fund, which was established in 2022, or the establishment of the Hannah Arendt Initiative to coordinate the efforts of multiple organizations like Deutsche Welle, Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT) and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) (see interview with Penelope Winterhager, p.18–19)

A different trajectory provides a professional home for individual exiled journalists through engagement with German media and collaboration with initiatives that integrate newcomers. Successful paths include *Wir machen das* and *Amal*, which center their diasporic experiences in their journalistic work.

Communities of exiled journalists in Germany: similar label, different realities

The main objective of this study is to provide an initial exploration to understand the different realities of communities of exiled journalists in Germany in terms of their evolution, prominence, professional conditions as well as the challenges they face and the opportunities they have in Germany. The study documents their challenges, needs and networking using critical, informed research.

One of the strengths of this study is its ability to look beyond the experiences of a single community

of journalists, comparing the different communities and highlighting the unique struggles of exiled journalists in one national context.

Method: Building on the elements and dimensions discussed above, the study focuses on exiled journalists or media workers currently residing in Germany, who were forced to flee their country of origin, and who either are employed or in a transition phase of a maximum of 10 years, regardless of

country of origin, media outlet or type of dissemination. It draws on data collected from an online survey that circulated from 7 July until 15 August 2024. 90 participants completed the questionnaire. The survey mixed open and closed questions and focused on the chances, challenges, and networking available in professional associations. The study is explorative, not representative.

Several further limitations of the survey include the fact that it was conducted in English, its timing during the summer and survey fatigue among exiled journalists.

Additionally, interviews were conducted with more than 50 exiled journalists, relevant experts and staff from NGOs. While the report cannot offer exact figures on the number of exiled journalists residing in Germany, it aims to provide tentative estimates from the field. The uncertainty about numbers is because the official figures only represent a fraction of the number of exiled journalists. At the same time, the field is in flux and access to information differs between the various communities.

Description of survey respondents

Country of origin: The survey shows that exiled journalists in Germany tend to come from one of three regions: Eastern Europe, Central and West Asia and the Arab Region. Exiled journalists who participated in the survey come from Afghanistan (28%), Russia (20%) and Syria (11%), followed by Belarus (7%), Turkey (6%), Azerbaijan (4%) and Ukraine (4%). 20% of respondents come from Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, South Sudan), Asia (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, China) and Latin America (Mexico).

Gender and Family: 56% of the survey respondents were men and 43% were women (not specified: 1%). More than half (55%) have children, which highlights their care responsibilities. 62% of respondents live with their family or partner in Germany (31% do not, 7% not specified).

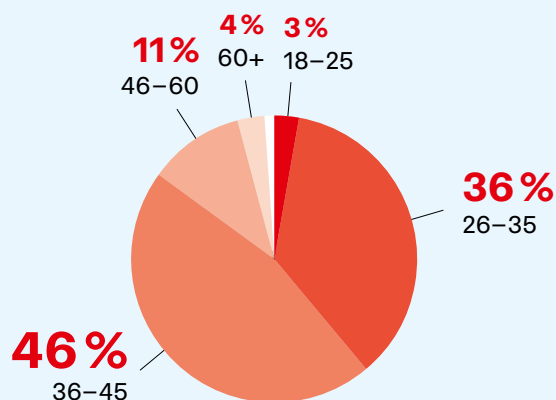
Age: The overwhelming majority (82%) of exiled journalists are aged between 26 and 45.

Employment: Most respondents are freelancers (39%). One third (31%) are currently unemployed. 25% are in full-time employment, and 16% are self-employed, 14% of the respondents are employed part-time, while 6% have a fellowship. In some cases, respondents had multiple forms of employment.

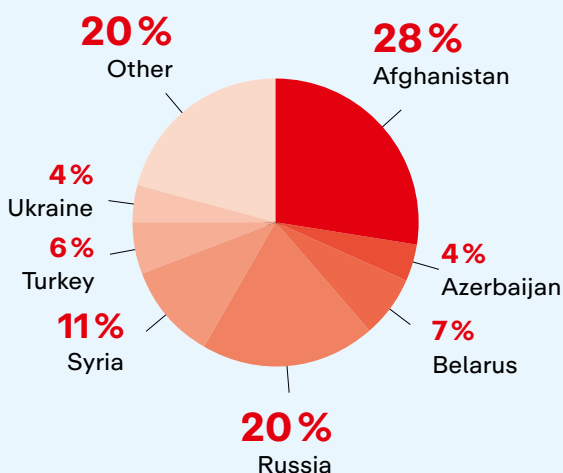
Geographic location of residency: Most respondents live in large cities, especially Berlin, Hamburg, Bonn and Leipzig, but also in the regions surrounding Frankfurt. Others are in smaller towns.

Age of participants

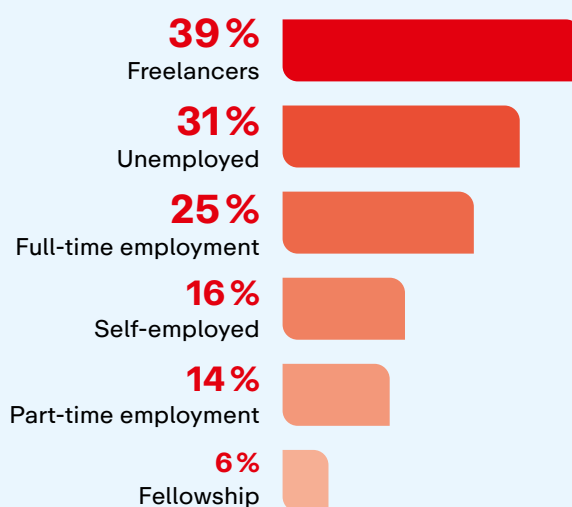
Age Range



Country of origin



Current employment status



Double nominations were possible

What exiled journalist communities share: ambivalent perceptions of opportunities and challenges

Journalists in exile face similar challenges and opportunities regardless of their country of origin. Before delving into specific characteristics, the following describes the common features that communities of exiled journalists share.

More than half (56 %) think that their life has improved. However, an overwhelming majority (86 %) state that they have faced difficulties since relocating to Germany.

Chances and opportunities

Safety, freedom, and stability

Most exiled journalists state that they have experienced positive developments on the personal level since relocating to Germany. The overwhelming majority (90 %) feel safer than in their countries of origin. 69 % agree or strongly agree that they and their families have a good level of education and healthcare. One journalist said: “I am grateful that my family and children are enjoying a normal life in a stable country”. 60 % said that they can work relatively freely on topics that are important to them.

Professional reorientation and potential for growth

Exile ruptures professional routines. 79 % agree or strongly agree that their work routines have changed dramatically since relocating to Germany. The majority see chances in exposure to a new culture and view it as enriching while providing the chance to learn new skills and/or languages. 58 % expanded their professional network, and almost half (48 %) have seen opportunities for international collaboration increase, including collaboration with German colleagues. About one third perceive training and capacity-building as a chance to improve their skills. 35 % state that they have access to new training programs in their work and that they have been able to develop their skills in media production and in cybersecurity.

Challenges and threats

Employment and financial challenges

A common concern for all communities is ensuring a stable work permit and visa that enables stress-free

employment. This focuses attention on the issue of financial precarity. 74 % state that they have difficulties finding paid work in their field of expertise.

39 % face bureaucratic difficulties in receiving a work permit, which affects their financial independence. A former TV anchor and journalist stated: “I have had to focus here more than I have in my entire professional life on securing my livelihood and not losing my freelance permit. I have juggled many jobs, and this adds more stress”. For non-German citizens, employment and income has direct consequences as it demonstrates that they can support themselves and therefore is essential in securing a residency permit, and in providing journalists stability and independence. One Belarusian journalist says: “It’s hard to plan future projects and professional development when you are not sure where you and your family will be in a year.” Only 23 % agree that they have access to new funding possibilities.

“What is the biggest challenge you face in exile?” “Existence itself.”
An exiled journalist

Professional adjustment to a new legal and cultural framework

75 % agree that adjusting to a different work culture and routine is difficult. 64 % have difficulties understanding the legal and professional framework in Germany. 46 % of the journalists have difficulties getting press accreditation, which deprives them of proof of their professional identity and access to sources.

Lack of recognition of expertise and relevance

Exiled journalists feel they are reduced to their vulnerability instead of being viewed as experts who bring skills, networks and resilience. 64 % bring access to their networks and sources in their country of origin, and this is often overlooked. 45 % of respondents do not feel that their professional experience is acknowledged. The need to persuade the authorities about their professional abilities requires communication, emotional labor and

reliance on the good will of civil servants. One Syrian journalist pointed out: “At the job center, I had to explain that I wanted to stay in journalism. Other colleagues just accept any jobs out of pressure or fear of deportation.”

Language and cultural barriers

The necessity to learn the language as a prerequisite for integration and employment is perceived as a high barrier. Journalists say they invest time and money in German language courses during precarious periods of their life and that this delays their focus on their careers. One journalist calls for more openness in media-related activities that do not require German: “Not every journalist will stand in front of a microphone or write a journalistic piece in German.”

Finding legal support and advice is much needed and is perceived as a major obstacle, as two thirds of respondents indicate. This is relevant especially because 42 % indicate that they plan to start their own media project. 32 % of exiled journalists stated that they feel uncomfortable in dealings with the German authorities.



Photo: Ehab Haddad

Basma Mostafa, an Egyptian journalist in Berlin, had to leave Egypt because of human rights coverage. She faces transnational repression in Germany, including verbal threats, physical violence, surveillance and intimidation from regime supporters. She started the Law and Democracy Support Foundation e. V. to support media freedoms. Basma Mostafa suggests three concrete steps:

- a clear political commitment that signals no toleration of transnational repression from other states
- an emergency hot line for exiled journalists and dissidents in danger to provide them with immediate support
- awareness programs among German authorities, law enforcement and civil society

Threats and limits on freedom despite exile

65 % of journalists are concerned about physical and digital threats posed by the government in their country of origin, and growing levels of transnational repression (see info box on the left). 55 % agree or strongly agree that they practice self-censorship to protect themselves and their families. “I am very cautious when working with my contacts and sources on the ground, as the security apparatus can find them easily”, stresses one Syrian journalist. 49 % agree or strongly agree that they fear the consequences of publishing their work and expressing their opinion. 41 % face hate speech and 33 % say that the German authorities do not provide them with adequate protection.

Countering transnational repression

Transnational repression in Germany involves the use of intimidation to silence exiled journalists. Multiple cases have been documented where journalists from Russia, Turkey and Egypt have been assaulted. To counter transnational repression, host countries need more awareness and coordination in terms of swifter reactions by the authorities. Countering transnational repression can build and strengthen solidarity across exiled communities as they share similar experiences and this can help them learn how to protect themselves.

Existential challenges

The issues related to ensuring that exiled journalists remain safe in their daily lives pose considerable challenges. Almost 60 % face problems getting visas to bring their family to Germany. 54 % have difficulties in finding suitable accommodation. Issues like access to childcare or working in child-friendly environments are further points of concern.

Psychological challenges and mental health

Despite resilience and ambition, most journalists are also adjusting to the difficult experience of loss, starting anew and missing family and friends. Some of them face the pain of never seeing their loved ones again: “I could not even say goodbye to my mother.” Despite the psychological pressures, exiled journalists also refuse to be reduced to victims. One Syrian journalist explained that they were “tired of audiences’ expectations to hear emotional performances that make me feel tokenized by white saviors”.



Photo: Johanna Lucht

Building spaces of hope: Exile Media Hub

Launched and coordinated by Media in Conflict and Transition (MiCT), the Exile Media Hub brings together a creative mix of journalists, photographers, illustrators, and podcast creators to a small town in Brandenburg. It is a new way of ensuring professional inclusion and providing asylum-seeking journalists and media workers who fled their countries a possibility to restart their careers outside of refugee centers. By blending language courses, knowledge about integration, media production and training, the Exile Media Hub provides activities that acknowledge and enhance professional skills. It relies on cooperation with local politicians and the support of the local community that voted to host the initiative.

Mapping different communities of exiled journalists in Germany

Three prominent regions of origin stand out among exiled communities of journalists: Eastern Europe (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine), West and Central Asia (Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan) and the Arab Region (mainly Syria). The communities below are described according to the respondents' country of origin, and are placed in regional clusters, not according to the size of the population living in Germany.

Eastern Europe

Russian exiled journalists: transnational work amid high restrictions

The community of Russian exiled journalists has been growing steadily in Germany since 2022. Between 2012 and 2023, media freedoms narrowed in Russia, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a turning point that led to the use of legal authoritarianism and military censorship to shut down media freedoms even further. Anti-terrorism laws, and labels like “undesirable organizations” and “foreign agent” lead journalists to be threatened with imprisonment. In 2022, journalists forced to flee Russia needed to make quick decisions, literally within two to three days. Countries that do not require Russians to have a visa, like Turkey, Georgia and Armenia, were the first options for exiled journalists, other destinations included Latvia and Lithuania. The acute crisis led to a moment of major expulsion which forced a sudden – and often chaotic – move of entire or partial newsrooms. The first few months were extremely uncertain. As their

co-workers were scattered around many different countries, newsrooms faced a chaotic and massive organizational challenge, but also one of intense networking. JX Fund, established in April 2022, played a supportive role in the relocation of media ecosystems. Unlike the slow departure of independent journalists, this acute crisis constituted a moment of expulsion that could preserve media structures and absorb some of the journalists fleeing into exile. As exile often takes place under hasty conditions, sometimes journalists relocated again. They often did so to avoid Russia's growing sphere of influence or hostilities, and to improve their safety, to bring together editorial teams and ensure their work remained professionally viable.

This entailed long procedures and further resettlement and disruption. Most Russian journalists enter on humanitarian or Schengen visas, which means they face additional bureaucracy to obtain legal residency and work permits.

Estimates suggest there are around 77 active Russian media outlets in exile worldwide and

they cover a broad range of topics (JX Fund, 2023). Russian exiled media include TV Rain (Dozhd), Echo of Moscow, Holod, Meduza, Novaya Gazeta Europe and the more local Bumaga. Riga and Tbilisi are particularly notable locations of Russian exiled media outside of Germany. Many exiled journalists work transnationally for media exiled in Germany. Cautious estimates by experts range from a few hundred to above one thousand individuals, depending on the definition of exiled journalism. In Germany, Berlin is a rapidly emerging location for Russian exiles, mainly because of the city's vibrant community, personal networks and its historic tradition as a location for Russia's exiled elite. Another notable area is North-Rhine Westphalia. Growing numbers of exiled journalists and media workers have spurred the development of co-working spaces. One of the biggest hubs is the Independent Creative Exile Berlin Generation (ICEBERG), hosting approximately 400 members at the NGO Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT). This survey shows that Russian exiles appreciate the media-management skills available at the Berlin Incubator for Media in Exile (BIMEX), run by the Berlin-based non-profit organization Journalists in Need Network (JINN), as they further the development of the vibrant Russian exiled scene and encourage a shift away from dependency. Reform Space Berlin also provides a docking point for some journalists. Its community is more focused on the pro-democracy activist spectrum.

Berlin also became home to key figures from journalism, media, arts, culture and the literary scene where events and public talks take place.

The aim is not to idealize Berlin as a location, as high living costs pose a challenge for all residents, regardless of whether they are exiled journalists. Initial attempts to establish a formal association for Russian exiled journalists ended because the financial sanctions against Russia and its citizen prevented them from opening bank accounts.

One important aspect associated with Russian exiled journalists, is that they build on decades of expertise and collaboration of working under an authoritarian regime. Moreover, they are regarded as a resilient community, even if intense debates or even “culture wars” may take place among them. Supporting Russian dissident journalists is highly important for German and Western donors because of geopolitical interests. This has had a direct impact on strengthening media structures in exile, which received significant funding. The annual budget for selected exiled media more than doubled between 2021 and 2023 (JX Fund, 2023). It should be noted that Russia is a large country (144 million inhabitants), stretching over a massive geographic

area with different ethnic minorities. Exile media reach up to 9.6 million regular users in Russia, which legitimizes their work and needs to be taken into consideration (JX Fund, 2023). Russian exiled media are still heavily dependent on donors and seek to diversify their resources (JX Fund, 2023) through innovative projects and experiments that use entrepreneurial methods like crowdfunding. Russian journalists in exile are in a phase of uncertainty and undertake creative experiments such as bookstore events or publications. Many of these projects are short-lived, despite their high potential and relevance, such as the Help Desk initiative. According to one academic expert, the level of donor funding for Russian journalists in exile in Germany allows them to focus more on journalism and fighting disinformation, rather than worrying about mundane day-to-day difficulties such as living expenses. Over the next one to two years, a phase of consolidation is likely to take place that will probably reduce the number of exiled media (see the Syrian exiled community).

Russian exiled journalists face the real and persistent danger of transnational repression that aims to silence them. Most respondents do not feel protected enough by the German authorities. Cyber-security and surveillance technology is prevalent in Russia as the country is one of the most advanced in this regard and journalists need to be on permanent alert. Multiple Pegasus software attacks on devices owned by journalists have been documented. Physical threats like the poisoning of journalist Jelena Kostjutschenko (RSF 2023) need to be taken seriously and countered preemptively.

Economic sanctions and mobility restrictions by the European Union pose specific difficulties to Russian exiled journalists, who unintentionally suffer from anti-Putin policies. Negative consequences include administrative restrictions on mobility, for example fear of being refused entry into the EU, complicated and prolonged emergency relocations from non-EU countries due to the meticulous process of verifying the threat that a journalist faces, and even difficulties in opening a bank account, despite being dissidents.

As uncertainty, war and authoritarianism worsen over time, the initial defiance and spirit of resistance is mixing with rising levels of burnout and fatigue. Many Russian journalists will only be able to return home once the regime changes. Looking at other communities, like Syrian exiled journalists, which have been in exile for ten years, can offer insights.

Belarusian exiled journalists: demonstrating solidarity despite an uncertain future

The current wave of exiled Belarusian journalists started in August 2020 after the heavily disputed re-election of Alexander Lukashenko and amid a crack-down on press freedom. Coming to power,

the regime radically tightened freedoms, and targeted the independent media and opposition using legal authoritarianism as well as moving closer to the orbit of Russian influence. Belarusian exiled journalists mainly relocated to Poland and Lithuania, with Warsaw, Bialystok and Vilnius being popular cities. Initially, some journalists relocated to Ukraine, only to have to relocate again after the Russian invasion in February 2022.

“Despite all difficulties I remain optimistic.” Maria Savushkina

Repressive measures of the regime include legal tools to criminalize and penalize independent media organizations. Critical journalists and bloggers are censored by being placed on the Republican List of Extremist Content – all under the guise of fighting ‘extremism’. Belarus is one of the most repressive states, ranking 167 out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Individual journalists face harsh conditions of imprisonment. Belarusian exiled journalists are further targeted as their families face intimidation, their homes are raided in Belarus and they are also denied consular services like passport renewals, which increases their vulnerability and limits their mobility. Like Russian exiled media, Belarusian media face strict bans, and daily cyber-attacks.

Belarusian journalists in exile are well organized. Two journalists’ associations Press Club Belarus and Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) support journalists professionally and legally, document press freedom violations, offer training and represent the interests of exiled journalists. Both associations are in Poland but operate transnationally. BAJ has 400 members worldwide. NGO Experts working with the Belarusian community estimate that 20 to 30 Belarusian journalists have been working from exile in Germany since 2020. The closely-knitted community expresses solidarity by coordinating editorial agreements, for example, not to cover Luakeshenko. They also strive to ensure the financial viability of their media.

The most prominent media in exile are Belamova, Euroradio, Nasha Niva, Salidarnasts and Zerkalo. Although these media entities are not registered in Germany, they are relevant employers for journalists living in the country. Deutsche Welle is also an important employer. Most exiled journalists have freelance contracts. High-quality professional work from abroad, investigative practices and long-form journalism as well as advanced digital security methods have evolved. These media target audiences in Belarusian and Russian. Materials are sometimes translated into Polish or English to reach a larger readership beyond the Belarusian-reading population and thus generate more revenue.

The Belarusian and Russian communities are not identical: they not only have different geopolitical weights and demographics (9.2 million inhabitants in Belarus) but also the length of exile, which began two years earlier for the Belarusians. The post-election political crisis in Belarus has been overshadowed by more recent international emergencies, and this has had a negative impact on funding for Belarusian exile media. The decreasing amounts of short-term and long-term funding is a structural challenge that poses difficulties for the viability of Belarusian journalists in exile. “It was easier for Belarusians to gain funding in 2021 and 2022”, as one stakeholder says. With new emerging crises, like the Russian war against Ukraine in 2022, funding is moving elsewhere to new priorities. Some journalists share the sentiment that an appreciation of Belarus’ geopolitical importance is overlooked.

A feeling of uncertainty affects the community due to the challenging future that it faces, as well as insecure funding and a lack of employment. Slow bureaucracy makes it difficult for them to gain legal status and residence permits in Germany. Some media initiatives resort to small and less sustainable crowdfunding initiatives.

Ukrainian journalists: journalists in exile or abroad?

The Ukrainian journalists have a distinct position when it comes to categorizing them as exiled. Being displaced because of a war is not the same as being exiled, as they are able to work in journalism and can return home as they are not persecuted by their government. However, they still face psychological worries and trauma. At the same time, Ukrainian journalists from Crimea and Donbas are not able to return at this point. Therefore, we need to look at the Ukrainian exiled community with nuance. The United States, Poland and Germany were the major destinations for Ukrainian exiles after the war started in 2022. Many journalists chose to remain in Ukraine, or even returned after the initial shock and a brief phase of exile, even if the media landscape, profession, and their daily lives are dominated by war, hardship and restrictions. At the peak of the public attention in 2022, some Ukrainian journalists took positions in German media entities, to make Ukrainian voices heard.

Independent exiled media range from the investigative Zabarona to the smaller niche Bird in Flight. Ukrainian media also face repression and digital security threats from Russia. The invasion of 2022 awakened a need to counter the information war. It also strengthened the desire to detach from the Russian-speaking community, which hinders potential investigative collaborations between Ukrainian and Russian journalists in exile, who may well be possibly working on the same story for the same goal.

While some experts see this as a missed opportunity to build collaboration, a Ukrainian journalist expressed her dismay: “Some German colleagues do not understand how emotionally difficult it is for me to write about or work with dissident Russian activists, because I have friends who have been killed in the war”.

One specific feature shared by Ukrainian journalists in Germany is that they have unrestricted border mobility and access to the labor market through work permits (Section 24 of the Residence Act¹). Under current plans, these are to be automatically renewed for Ukrainians until March 2025. This is unique among exiled journalists, and one Ukrainian journalist described it as “liberating”.

Residence permits provide Ukrainian journalists with an easier path towards a legal status, financial independence, and less bureaucracy.

German support for Ukrainian journalists takes different forms beyond journalists in exile. Several activities foster German-Ukrainian relations through exchange visits, cross-border programs, and fellowships. Examples include the n-ost special focus or the Kyiv Media Hub (MiCT), which supports 1,400 Ukrainian media workers and 15 media outlets in Ukraine. This shows that Ukrainian journalists have different opportunities to work abroad or from inside Ukraine.

1 § 24 Aufenthaltsgewährung zum vorübergehenden Schutz

West and Central Asia

Afghan exiled journalists: dispersed, let down, but resilient

In August 2021, the Taliban took over Kabul after the US-American and NATO troops’ disorganized retreat and the collapse of the government. This also led the existing media ecosystem to shut down instantly to avoid the life-threatening dangers posed to journalists.

Closure of independent media, sanctions on women journalists and heavy censorship on topics like security issues, societal problems, or women’s rights placed press freedom in a critical condition. It is estimated that at least 6,000 journalists and media workers lost their jobs after the Taliban came to power in 2021 (AJSO 2024). For decades, the country heavily relied on US and Western assistance for its media, and 75% of its national budget came from development aid. Following the Taliban takeover, international isolation instantly affected independent media (International Crisis Group, 2024).

This forced journalists to hastily organize evacuations to safety amidst the chaos, with journalists facing acute threats to life. Gender is a prominent aspect of exile, as female journalists face life-threatening conditions. Neighboring countries like Pakistan, Iran and Uzbekistan were their initial destinations – many fled to the US and Canada. The dire need hit unmatched capacities in the NGO sector. One example: once an emergency program’s email address had become public, it received 26,000 requests for emergency support within three months, making timely processing and verification almost impossible.

Relocation preoccupies the Afghan community as it entails long transition phases, massive financial hardships and unsafe conditions. It also affects family members and friends who remain stuck in unsafe locations.

The German Federal Admission Program for Afghanistan (Bundesaufnahmeprogramm BAP), a special program designed for Afghanistan was announced in October 2022. The BAP was supposed to ensure a swift and secure relocation of journalists and aid workers targeted by the Taliban as collaborators. It promised to take in 1,000 persecuted Afghan citizens and their family members every month. Procedures became increasingly slow, inconsistent and intransparent, limiting the passageway to Islamabad with cycles of complicated and invasive security questions (RSF 2024). Even people who gained security clearance were not always able to come to Germany. One Afghan journalist pointed out that “People do not even receive answers when they send emails. Some people who believed the German government, sold their property and relocated with their families to Pakistan. And they are still waiting in limbo”. The program was not adequately supported and has de facto ceased to exist due to a lack of political will (Feroz, 2024). The failed implementation of the BAP casts its shadows on the Afghan community: restricted relocation pushes people into precarious and costly migration routes that pose additional hazards to women, who are under threat due to the rule of the Taliban. Most Afghan journalists feel fatigue, frustration and that new geopolitical crises have led them to be forgotten. Another route for relocation for many Afghan journalists was seeking asylum. Germany took on 33,000 Afghan refugees. Professional journalists tend to seek asylum as a last resort, as they wish to preserve their agency and mobility. Highly skilled professionals often feel disparaged by the restrictions placed on asylum seekers and their allocation to initial reception facilities. “Many journalists are waiting in refugee camps without any chances or professional input”, as one NGO expert stated.

“We feel like we have been betrayed, our lives wasting away either on the borders or in refugee camps.”
An exiled Afghan journalist

Most Afghan journalists do not believe they receive adequate support or protection in Germany. At the same time, they also face bureaucratic difficulties in receiving a valid work permit or press accreditation. The chaotic situation and refusal of governments to cooperate with the Taliban makes it more difficult and perilous for verification or work with sources on the ground.

Despite the difficult relocation processes, Afghan media in exile remain vibrant, especially in the United States and Canada, ranging from general interest to specialized topics and often multi-lingual journalism in Pashto, Dari and/or English. At least 17 media are partially based in Germany, mainly due to individual journalists working on a freelance basis and not because of the presence of an editorial office (JX Fund, 2023). Major exiled media include Amu TV in Canada, Eye Media in the United States, and Watan TV and the smaller Madanyat Media in Germany. Social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram are essential for reaching target audiences. Journalists also cover entertainment and not only politics, as entertainment is also censored in Afghanistan. Some individual successes for integration in mainstream media include Arezao Naiby at WDR.

The Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization (AJSO) is a network that operates as a registered non-profit in Germany. It supports media freedom and documents violations against journalists. It has 700 members worldwide, and 200 members in Germany. The real number of exiled Afghan journalists is certainly higher, with at least 1,000 to 1,200 journalists in exile. However, it is difficult to determine exact numbers as many journalists relocate to further countries and others have been outside of the profession for a long time, according to one expert. In Germany, Afghan journalists are dispersed among different places: Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, Leipzig and smaller towns. Yet they often keep in touch via Telegram and WhatsApp.

Political divisions, internal conflicts, ethnic rivalry, and linguistic divisions mark the exiled community from the war-torn country. 74% of Afghan journalists exiled in Germany rate solidarity among journalists as either low or very low. Only 16% think that exiled journalists successfully organize themselves as part of self-led initiatives (JX Fund, 2023).

Exiled journalists from Afghanistan are acutely concerned about the prolonged relocation, uncertain transition phase, precarious employment, massive financial hardships, in addition to threats and psychological pressures.

The current political climate and the public debate about migration in Germany is perceived by many as distressing.

Coming from a Muslim-majority country amid rising anti-immigration narratives causes unease due to a lack of nuanced media coverage, and inflammatory political discourse towards Afghan and Syrian refugees. Many exiled Afghan journalists shared the view that: “Whenever I hear about a terrorist act in the media, I just pray the perpetrator does not come from a Muslim-majority country.”

Turkish exiled journalists: declining freedoms at home and growing waves of brave journalists in exile

Ranking 158 out of 180 countries on the Press Freedom Index, media freedoms in Turkey have worsened over the past decade and particularly since the 2012/13 Gezi Park protests. In 2014, the US-American non-profit Freedom House described Turkey for the first time as “not free”.

Since 2015/16, and especially since the 2016 coup attempt, oppositional journalists have increasingly faced severe intimidation and acute repression. This has created an atmosphere of fear and the regime instrumentalizes the label “terrorist”. Turkey declared a state of emergency between 2016 and 2018, and introduced a series of legal measures, such as anti-terrorism and disinformation laws in 2021. Further measures included oligarchic acquisition of media ownership by pro-Erdogan tycoons, confiscation of journalists’ property and assets as well as banning media and websites. Digital surveillance and censorship also increased significantly. Turkish Minute states that more than 700,000 websites and 16 VPNs were banned. Critical content on platforms like X, YouTube and Instagram have also been banned. Turkish nationalism and religious morality serve as silencing strategies. Journalists leave into exile, change profession, go into early retirement, or practice self-censorship. During one of Körber-Stiftung’s podcasts (Gesellschaft besser machen), Turkish exiled journalist Yavuz Baydar argues that Turkey is in danger of turning into a “black hole” where independent reporting is no longer possible.

The German-Turkish journalist Ömer Erzerem points out that Germany is a popular destination for Turkish exiles because many Turkish people already live in the country (Körber-Stiftung, 2019).

Berlin is home to several famous Turkish exiled journalists like Can Dündar, Cevheri Güven and Erk Acarer. Exiled media initiatives include Özgürüz, BirGün and Boldmedya. However, many exiled journalists need to work outside of journalism to survive, although several maintain a social media presence in Turkish to pursue their journalistic passion, even if unfunded.

The recent wave of exiled journalists has sought political asylum. The numbers of Turkish citizens

seeking asylum in Germany in 2023 hit a record level and they are now only second in numbers to asylum seekers from Syria. Other destinations include Belgium, France, Sweden and the United States. The lack of regulated, fast and safe passage opens a need for irregular and, therefore, highly precarious forms of migration that add to the psychological toll and financial pressures.

Turkish exiled journalists in Germany face a complex situation due to Turkish-German relations and the multi-layered Turkish community. With an established and multi-generational Turkish diaspora of 4 million people, it is important to remember that the Turkish diaspora is not monolithic, and not every Turkish journalist in Germany is in exile. Most of the Turkish diaspora supports President Erdogan as he uses nationalist pride to fuel support (SWP 2024).

Even exiled journalists have different views on politics, culture and religion.

Several networks exist, but some are loyalist and cannot be considered as spaces for oppositional exiled journalists, like the German-Turkish Journalist Union. After 2016 a new network was formed in Germany called the International Journalists Association. It has more than 1,000 members worldwide, and 250 registered members in Germany. 80% of its members self-identify as members of the Gülen Movement, 15% as Kurdish and 5% as secular.

Geopolitics and security issues relating to Turkish-German relations make the scale and selection of support for exiled journalism a political decision. Turkey's geopolitical influence, NATO membership, involvement in multiple crises, growing relations to Russia, as well as the large diaspora in Germany, increases its strategic importance for Germany and Europe.

In addition to the usual challenges of employment, financial hardship and lengthy processes of gaining legal status, asylum-seeking Turkish journalists, in particular, face transnational repression, and this is especially the case with prominent critical voices.

The Arab region

It is not surprising that many journalists flee Arab countries considering that the Reporters without Borders 2024 Index ranks 16 out of 22 Arab countries as among the bottom 40 countries in the world. Journalism in these countries is in a critical or very difficult situation. However, rising numbers of exiled journalists from the Arab region does not only reflect repression, but also regional instability,

Transnational repression and cybersecurity threats are a serious concern for Turkish journalists. Harassing relatives of exiled journalists, instrumentalizing pro-regime newspapers like Sabah to dox exiled journalists in Germany (CPJ 2022b), warnings of hit lists containing the names of famous journalists and violent assaults by pro-Erdogan mobs threaten the safety of oppositional journalists in Germany. This is made more difficult by bilateral security coordination, Turkey's criminalization of journalists and its instrumentalization of the "terrorist" label to discredit them and possibly extradite dissidents for political favors.

Other exiled communities

In addition, some exiled journalists come from Iran and Azerbaijan. Exiled activists and journalists have fled to Germany from Iran at key moments and can now build on a strong Iranian diasporic community. Recent causes of exile include the 2009 Green Revolution and the 2022 Woman Life Freedom movement, which led the government to massively stifle freedoms. Gender activism is an important lens through which to understand the generation exiled since 2022. Multiple generations and a lack of structural funding for exiled independent media inside Germany limits the construction of cohesive communities. Instead, individual journalists struggle through scattered programs. Despite the steady numbers of Iranian journalists fleeing Iran in recent years, no Iranian exiled media organizations exist in Germany, but individual journalists working for Deutsche Welle Farsi or Kayhan media in London do reside in Germany. Notable exiled media in Europe are Radio Liberty in Prague and Radio Zamaneh in Paris. The Iranian community is divided across political, generational and lifestyle choices, which is reflected in its level of cohesion.

The community of exiled journalists from Azerbaijan is still small in Germany, but is increasing amid repression and silencing in Azerbaijan around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Asairbashan media outlets in Germany include Meydan TV and Mikroskop Media.

persistent authoritarianism, as well as socio-economic grievances after two waves of failed uprisings in 2010/2011 (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Syria) and 2018/2019 (Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Sudan). Wars and semi-failed states limit independent journalism. The presence of Arab exiled journalists in Germany does not reflect the magnitude of crises or repression in

their home countries. There are still very few exiled journalists from Yemen and Sudan despite the ongoing wars. They tend to arrive as asylum seekers. Humanitarian visas are not given to journalists who come from countries that German foreign policy perceives as of lower geopolitical relevance, like Sudan and Yemen.

A shared language enables journalistic cooperation between Arab exiled journalists across nationalities. It also opens the labor market to economically strong media structures in the Arab Gulf that heavily engage in soft diplomacy and cross border media projects. This includes Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. However, cultural differences between the Arab communities tend to create clusters from certain regions, for example, the Eastern Mediterranean or Francophone North Africa. The different national backgrounds and the slow trickle of Arab exiled journalists has not promoted the development of a closely-knitted community or the experience of a formative moment, except for some Syrian exiled journalists who started long-term initiatives together. Political and religious differences as well as subtle inner-Arab rivalries also exist.

Journalists become emotionally involved while covering homeland politics from afar, as well as due to the complexities of engaging with host country politics amid the rise of the far-right and anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments. Since the 2023 war in Gaza, and ongoing escalations in Lebanon and Syria, several Arab journalists have expressed unease about expressing pro-Palestinian solidarity out of fear of professional repercussions. This leads to self-censorship and intense debates in newsrooms. The journalists described the war in Gaza, and German foreign policy, as a turning point that revealed the limits of what can be said and that problematizes the reliance on Western funding where a certain narrative prevails. Many Arab journalists agree that freedom of expression is not guaranteed in Germany, but there is gratitude for relative freedom compared with the repression at home. One journalist stressed: “My biggest fear here is unemployment, in Syria, Iraq or Yemen it could be death or imprisonment.”

Syrian exiled journalists: a decade-old vibrant scene that has passed the test of time²

Contemporary Syrian exile journalism can be traced back to the 2011 uprising, where new media initiatives flourished as small magazines, art collectives and Facebook pages involved in fact-checking and exposing propaganda. As the conflict became militarized, individuals and initiatives relocated, primarily to neighboring Lebanon, Turkey, and to a lesser extent, Egypt. Between 2012 and 2015, Syrian media

² This text was produced in the summer of 2024, before the fall of Assad's regime.

relocated to Gaziantep in Turkey. The town near the Syrian border became a dynamic spot for exiled media projects, which also received substantial funding from mainly Western donors, in particular International Media Support and the US development agency USAID.

Gaziantep provided the basis for creative media incubators for many initiatives that continue to survive. The consolidation phase from 2017 to 2018 is marked by reduced donor funding and transnational dispersal of media outlets. Affected by a “Syria fatigue” and donors’ new priorities, the number of active media dwindled from over one hundred to around twenty Syrian exiled media today, narrowing the political spectrum. Some media initiatives maintained a presence in Turkey, while others moved to Germany or operated transnationally without a physical base. The current phase witnesses a relocation to Germany, mainly Berlin. Major independent media initiatives where members of the editorial team or the headquarters are in Germany include the progressive Enab Baladi, Syria Untold and Al Jumhuriya. Many short-lived projects did not survive the euphoric welcome phase but enabled individual journalists to join their German colleagues, for example, through mentoring programs offered by Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen (NdM). NdM is a non-governmental organisation of media professionals with and without an immigration background who, among other things, campaign for more diversity in newsrooms.

Journalists tend to have an ambivalent perception of freedom of expression in exile. One journalist emphasized: “We believe in talking to our Syrian audience inside Syria because they are deprived of free and independent information. I no longer believe in the romanticized image of a free Europe; it is not as rosy as we thought. Both Gaza and the politicized coverage of certain countries show us that the media landscape here is not as free as we thought it was before coming. Having said that, there are liberating moments in our professional work, such as being able to contact sources without having to worry.”

Exiled journalists are aware of safety issues in exile and the responsibility towards sources back home.

Syrian journalists in exile have become increasingly professional in their reporting from outside their home country. This includes the evolution of content to address the needs of the dispersed Syrian diaspora.

Several independent Syrian professional associations have developed with different foci and operate transnationally (IMS, 2019). The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), which predates the uprising, helped in documenting

human rights violations by war criminals. The Syrian Journalists' Association (Rabta), and The Ethical Charter for Syrian Media (ECSM), which has 20 media organizations as members, and the Syrian Female Journalists' Network (SFJN), which curates a specific feminist progressive agenda, helped develop the professional identity of independent Syrian exiled journalism. Although they are extensive, professional associations cannot claim to represent dispersed exiled Syrian journalists, and they are run on a voluntary basis, have no accountability mechanisms and are dependent on funding. One journalist stressed that the lack of agreement on professional values, fragmentation across confessional and political lines and the lack of democratic procedures that divided the community into "cliquey circles of friends" pose further challenges to the unity of the exiled community.

Some initiators of the networks left after they were established as the networks began to develop in a direction that they could not identify with.

After the relocation and orientation phase, Syrian journalists in exile face a number of challenges, including the need to redefine their professional identity and the struggle to maintain relevance and impact in their work amid reduced funding and shifting geopolitics. As Al-Assad's regime continues to survive, the Syrian media system continues to be highly repressive, and Reporters without Borders ranks it as 179 out of 180 countries. Journalists are being killed or detained in Syria, and transnational repression is feasible in neighboring countries, but not in Germany. Journalists have to come to terms with lifelong exile and settling in Europe. The longer a community stays the more it turns to diasporic topics. As is the case with Afghan communities, stereotypical views about refugees, the rise of Islamophobic discourses and hate crimes targeting visibly Muslim journalists are daily negative occurrences.

Summary

Exiled journalism is on the rise globally in unprecedented ways as more journalists are forced to leave their home country for safety. Global flows show that Germany has become an important destination for many journalists in exile. The aim of this study was, amongst other things, to provide estimates of the number of journalists living in exile in Germany and to examine the various exile journalist communities in with regard to their development, their professional conditions, opportunities, challenges and needs. It is assumed that several hundred to more than a thousand Russian journalists in exile in Germany. Experts also estimate that, as of 2020, between 20 and 30 Belarusian media professionals are working in Germany. Estimates of the number of journalists in exile from Arab, African, West and Central Asian countries are not available. The Afghanistan Journalists Support Organisation (AJSO) has 200 members in Germany. However, the total number of Afghan journalists in exile living in Germany is likely higher.

The study also used an online survey that mixed open and closed questions, which generated 90 responses in July and August 2024. The study is not representative. In addition, more than 50 interviews were conducted with exiled journalists and experts.

Results show that the surveyed exiled journalists in Germany mainly come from three regions: Eastern Europe (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine), West and Central Asia (Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan) and the Arab region (mainly Syria). Other countries are represented with fewer numbers. 56% of the survey respondents were men and

43% women. More than half (55%) have children. 82% of the exiled journalists are between 26 and 45 years of age.

Most exiled journalists appreciate the safety, relative freedoms and stability, as well as the potential for professional reorientation and growth. Exiled journalists also face several difficulties: finding stable employment, financial challenges, professional adjustment and adapting to a new legal framework, lack of recognition of their expertise, language and cultural barriers, threats to their security and transnational repression. In addition, there are significant mental health concerns.

Despite sharing similar challenges there are differences between communities of exiled journalists.

First, the communities are in different phases of evolution and establishment in Germany. Accordingly, their needs and priorities differ. Communities that have been exiled recently include those from Russia, Afghanistan, Belarus and Ukraine. Communities still in the arrival phase face more uncertainty, tend to focus more on security, relocation and bringing their families to safety. This is particularly the case with the Afghan and Russian communities. After having spent some time in Germany, issues relating to community-building and coming to terms with long-term exile arise, as we have seen with the Syrian community.

Other exiled journalists join far more established and multigenerational, albeit heterogenous, diasporic communities, like the Turkish and Iranian communities. Exiled journalists who have remained in their profession tend to live in urban centers.

Exiled communities of journalists experience different paces and methods of relocation, legalization and work, as well as different visa types. Journalists in exile can be supported by offering them fast paths to legal status and access to the labor market. Exiled journalists want professional recognition and access to employment. Simpler entry into the labor market would open the door to them to practicing journalism and achieving financial independence sooner. For example, simplifying the system of granting asylum and faster recognition of their qualifications, granting freelance visas and press accreditation frees their capacities to work professionally. Political decisions for certain target groups play a decisive role, for example, issuing humanitarian visas to Russian journalists, granting Ukrainian journalists residency under Section 24 of the Residence Act and even the (albeit failed) BAP program for Afghan exiled journalists helped in the short term. Political asylum is the most restrictive pathway for journalists.

Careers can be ruined by long transition and waiting periods. It is important to understand that journalists from the same country of origin can have different residency statuses, which increases the disparity between them. The current political climate and public anti-immigration discourses are causing unease, especially among communities from Arab and Muslim-majority countries, like Syria and Afghanistan.

A further difference that affects the development and success of the communities is their level of funding. This is often determined by German and European geopolitical policies, foreign relations and donors' priorities. 2022 was a turning point as the Russian invasion of Ukraine led to high levels of funding. Dedicated programs enabled the relocation of entire or partial media structures and editorial teams from certain countries, such as Russia and Belarus. These programs employed the newcomers to counter disinformation after the acute crisis. While this track is promising, the Syrian experience shows that a consolidation phase can lead to shrinkage in exiled media, as the attention cycle and funding decrease. Co-working hubs and professional input benefit community building and psychological support and this helped forge long-term communities of Syrian journalists and spur networking between Russian journalists.

A second possible track for exiled journalists involves working for German/international media or starting their own media and advocacy projects. This is probably most promising for the younger exiled journalists who also invest in learning German.

Creating tailored tracks for journalists, with specialized programs and journalistic projects can help provide meaningful opportunities and recognition to their expertise.

Professional changes in the editorial and journalistic routines differ from one community to another depending on the level of structural organization. Specific challenges crop up when working with transnational teams, these include the need to learn new managerial and financial skills and safety in exile. In addition, cultural differences between the new partners and the exiled journalists may be seen as limiting autonomy.

The various communities of exiled journalists differ in their levels of cohesion and coordination.

Communities that are smaller in size have strong professional organizations that have developed over a number of years and tend to show more coordination. For example, the Belarusian journalists constitute a well-structured community in exile. Other communities are more heterogenous and divided along political and ethnic lines. Journalists coming from war-torn countries, like Syria or Afghanistan, or from polarized countries like Turkey, face challenges forging consensus over political futures and professional values. However, it should be noted that smaller subgroups of exiled journalists work closely even if the broader community has divisions. For example, progressive independent Syrian exiled journalists have developed close professional ties through almost a decade of working together.

Safety and transnational repression pose serious threats for some exiled communities, depending on their country of origin. Russian, Belarusian, and Turkish journalists – and others – face massive transnational repression and cybersecurity threats. Turkish exiled journalists arrive to find a divided diaspora with a long history in Germany and may face hostility and assaults from Erdogan supporters.

As the host country, Germany needs to tackle these issues.

The debate about exiled journalism needs to include more conversations about exiled journalists and their communities, as well as conversations about Germany as a host country. This study is just one part of that debate.

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Interview with Can Dündar

Can Dündar is an award-winning Turkish journalist, filmmaker and author. He is editor-in-chief of #Özgürüz in Germany, regular columnist for ZEIT ONLINE and former editor-in-chief of Turkey's oldest newspaper Cumhuriyet. He left Turkey in 2016 after facing political persecution, imprisonment, a 27-year sentence, the freezing of his financial assets, and an assassination attempt.



Photo: Milena Schlösser

In the interview, Can Dündar explains what it means to work in a country with a prominent Turkish diaspora, why it is important to work across exiled communities and why an umbrella association for exiled journalists would be a dream come true.

Why did you choose Germany as a destination of exile?

I considered other locations in Europe but chose Germany for professional reasons when I received an offer from ZEIT to write a weekly column. On the one hand, I live in freedom to write articles and work on documentaries. On the other, I am away from my home, my loved ones, my library. Starting a new life at 55, in a new place and a new language is not easy.

But living in a country with a large Turkish community makes me feel at home, because the hatred is there, together with the support. And I would have missed both (*laughs*).

What are you currently working on?

I am working on several projects. The first one is #Özgürüz with Correctiv, where together with a team of brave journalists we focus on Turkish speakers using YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. It's like a cat-and-mouse game: whenever they ban our website or account, we move to the next platform. But I also focus on German speakers. I write about Turkey and my life in Germany. Recently, my new documentary about politics in Turkey was released on ARD Story. It took me three years to complete. I spent half of that time convincing colleagues to produce it. In addition, I publish books, write for magazines, and give speeches.

Why is journalism from exile important?

We need to struggle for our freedom. We cannot let autocrats take away our freedoms, and we cannot let others fight for us. Growing authoritarianism and rising instability is leading to a fragile situation throughout the world. Independent journalism faces global struggles: journalists are threatened in Azerbaijan, jailed in Hong Kong and an activist was killed in Malta. We need to think outside our narrow communities. We need to work together as a community of global resistance to protect our freedoms against the oppressors. It is our responsibility to make change happen so that our children have a better future.

What is it like to work as a journalist in exile?

Living in exile is like waiting in a train station. But it is not waiting in a desperate situation; we are making change happen. Changing the routes, organizing, convincing people to get on the train, etc. My current task is speaking to two audiences: the Turkish audience and the international audience. I work with brave people inside and outside Turkey.

But working from the safety of exile also bears responsibility. Every morning, I check on my colleagues and friends back home, because I worry about them. It feels as if they are "hostages" of the regime. Sometimes I need to be careful to make sure that I do not put anyone at risk. I choose where

“Independent journalism faces global struggles (...). We need to think outside our narrow communities. We need to work together as a community of global resistance to protect our freedoms against the oppressors.”

to publish what I say, so criticism goes on my website. Self-censorship even affects you in exile. Sometimes, I just want to be a writer; it's easier than being a journalist, because you just write what you want without the management responsibility (*laughs*).

What can journalists in exile do to make their voices heard?

Working within conditions of exile is not easy and requires patience. But we need to keep telling our story. We have so many powerful stories, but we might not have the means that we are used to. This is where working with our colleagues can help us. If we can convince our colleagues in England, France, Germany, or other countries that our story is worth telling, they can help us in this new situation. I hate complaining, I accept the conditions and challenge them and work to make change happen.

I have been reading a lot about German exile in the 1930s and 1940s. I am learning from history that it is not easy to work from exile. There are divisions, negotiations processes, uncertainty. If we can give hope to our people while being in Germany, then it is worth the fight.

Journalists in exile need to connect and cooperate with other colleagues. We cannot stay in the trap of our own small community. We are part of a bigger family who fight against autocrats. I am willing to work with anyone who agrees on a set of

principles I believe in: democracy, press freedom, rule of law, equality between men and women, etc.

Exile turns you into someone else. Sometimes it is difficult to explain our struggle for freedom to my German colleagues. For example, when we discuss professional ethics and the lines between activism and journalism, I say it is like covering a story about my house on fire. I cannot take a picture of the house while it is burning. I must try to bring water. We need to resist. We need to take a side. This still respects the ethical code of the profession. This is also an ongoing dialogue between me and my German colleagues.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

My biggest dream is to see an umbrella organization that speaks for exiled journalists and advocates for their rights. There are many of us, and we have similar stories. We can share experiences, best practice, and solutions. We can help each other. Exiled journalists have similar problems, so why not build a startup – even right here – that operates in different languages? We can work to offer practical support for daily issues and help each other find ways of continuing our struggle for freedom.

This interview was conducted by Hanan Badr in August 2024.

Interview with Penelope Winterhager

Penelope Winterhager is managing director of JX Fund, a non-profit, limited liability company founded in April 2022. JX Fund focuses on supporting media and journalists who have fled war and crisis regions.



Photo: Neumann Rodtmann

How can we understand exiled journalism today?

Regardless of exile, journalism worldwide is under pressure. We are seeing a rise of authoritarian regimes globally that threaten freedom of opinion and focus on propaganda and censorship. At the same time, digitalization has transformed the media sector fundamentally and this has led to an erosion of income models and channels. Polarization and disinformation are growing and destabilizing democracies. But it is precisely in the places where independent media are repressed that they are needed the most.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but also the crises in Afghanistan 2021 and Belarus 2020, we not only saw individual journalists relocating to safety, but whole media landscapes. During the crucial period of moving into exile, media ecosystems need unbureaucratic and fast support to rebuild and continue their work. If they cannot develop sustainable structures, there is a high chance that we will lose exiled journalists and, therefore, lose expertise and insights into entire regions.

German news media outlets cannot employ every journalist who flees persecution; they cannot take on ten journalists from the same country. Exiled media outlets need support if we are to avoid information deserts. They play an essential role in securing a global democratic debate, and countering disinformation and propaganda.

On a positive note, the digitalization of media has empowered independent reporting from exile in ways unthinkable just ten years ago. Our studies show that exiled or hybrid media from Belarus and Russia, for example, still reach a substantial daily audience.

Can you tell us more about the JX fund and its work to support exiled media?

JX Fund acts as an international clearing house for journalism in exile: we collate the various offers of support and connect them to the respective needs of exiled media. We pool available resources and funds in order to distribute them efficiently and sustainably, targeting them towards the areas most in need. Together with partner organizations and expert advisors, we develop projects with the goal of filling gaps in the existing funding structure. JX Fund was initiated by the Schöpflin Foundation, the Rudolf Augstein Foundation and Reporters without Borders. It builds on the momentum from 2022 and was established to join forces to tackle complex challenges. But its work wouldn't have been possible without the additional support of a broad alliance of media, civil society organizations and an extensive donor pool – including the public sector. In less than three years, we have supported 79 exiled media outlets, awarded 129 grants and implemented 28 projects.

We are also part of the Hannah Arendt Initiative, a network of civil society organizations that is funded by the German Foreign Office and the German Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media. The initiative protects and supports journalists and media wherever they are under threat.

How can we support exiled media?

Exiled journalism needs a balanced approach and several support mechanisms: financial support, technological support, psychological support as well as management skills to keep a media ecosystem alive. Exile is a hard experience, in addition to emergency, relocation and rebuilding programs, we need a long-term vision. We view journalists as a

“Exiled media play an essential role in securing a global democratic debate, countering disinformation and propaganda.”

professional community, and we support structures that enable the community to keep doing its vital work. We cannot find places for them all in the German media, so we need to bundle their expertise into media structures and creative environments where they can collaborate and thrive.

What is unique about exiled journalism?

There are challenges that need to be solved: getting a work visa, health insurance, housing etc. At the same time the editor in chief often becomes the managing director who needs to register a new media company, rebuild the team and develop editorial structures and routines as well as securing sources in the country of origin and building safe communication channels with them.

They not only need reporters, but also publishers, lawyers, tech experts, and, of course, money. We found that around 30 % of the budget is needed for relocation alone. And even after the initial phase of relocation, the psychological worries, mental stress and questions of belonging continue. It is hard to develop a mid-term and long-term perspective as exiled media constantly faces new challenges, such as channels that have just been built successfully becoming blocked. And even if exiled media manages to build a substantial audience in their country of origin, this often can't be monetized due to sanctions or legislation that would put readers in danger.

Why should people in Germany care about supporting independent exiled journalism?

We live in a globalized world, and it is essential to protect independent information in and from all parts of the world. By supporting diverse media

in exile, we not only improve the debate in the countries of origin but our own as well.

Independent exiled media are instrumental in exposing the wide-reaching and evolving tactics of authoritarian regimes. From covert espionage and disinformation campaigns, financial fraud, ecological disasters to election manipulation. And the work between exiled media and international media proves to be extremely fruitful.

We need strong media partners to expose global stories, and deconstruct and debunk disinformation worldwide. One example of local relevance would be the upcoming state elections in Germany.

What needs to change to improve the situation of exiled media and journalists?

We need to do three things. First, we need more funding, especially more private funding, more philanthropy. Second, we need to develop media entrepreneurial skills that enhance media management so that exiled media can build sustainable structures. Third, we need easier visa and mobility frameworks for exiled journalists. This is particularly the case if we regard journalists as “qualified professionals for democracy” (“Fachkräfte für die Demokratie”) as Claudia Roth, the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, described them.

This interview was conducted by Hanan Badr in August 2024.

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Körper-Stiftung's focus on exile journalism

The “Democracy and Cohesion” department at Körper-Stiftung assists people who live in exile in Germany to reflect on their experiences of war and migration, the loss of their home country and their arrival in a foreign culture. Körper-Stiftung aims to afford visibility to the journalistic, artistic, scientific and political endeavors of people living in exile, provide exiled people with a voice in society, and, thus, strengthen social cohesion.

By conducting international specialist events such as the Exile Media Forum and discussion series like Voices of Freedom, Körper-Stiftung and its partners focus on the challenges linked to and the possibilities associated with strengthening exile journalism in Germany. Körper-Stiftung also organizes the Days of Exile in Hamburg and, increasingly, in other cities in Germany. Days of Exile is an audience-centered program with more than

50 events, which promotes dialogue between people in exile and other parts of society. The program is rounded off with the Speech on Exile, which is held by a prominent figure.

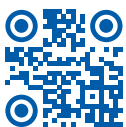
Exile Media Forum

Once a year, around 150 experts, exiled journalists and other representatives of the media are invited to Hamburg to discuss challenges associated with exile journalism. They discuss future issues, examine new trends and share experiences. The conference is a central place for networking between the media, civil society and politics. The 2024 conference focuses on the methodological approaches and solutions for exiled media, political decisions to support exiled journalists and cooperation between exiled and non-exiled media.



Exile journalism in Europe

In recent years, organizations and initiatives have been founded in numerous European countries to help journalists in exile. The 2022 report “Exile journalism in Europe” describes several key organizations and programs.

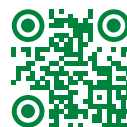


koerber-stiftung.de/en/projects/exile-media-forum/exile-journalism-in-europe/



Exile journalism in Germany

Germany is one of the main destinations for refugee journalists. Once in exile, however, they face many challenges. The 2019 publication “Exile Journalism in Germany” examines the situation, outlines existing hurdles and lists selected support initiatives.



koerber-stiftung.de/en/projects/exile-media-forum/exile-journalism-in-germany/

Körper-Stiftung

Social development needs dialogue and understanding. Through our operational projects, in our networks and in conjunction with partners, we take on current social challenges in the areas of activities comprising “Knowledge for Tomorrow”, “International Dialogue”, “Vibrant Civil Society”, and “Cultural Impulses for Hamburg”.

Inaugurated in 1959 by the entrepreneur Kurt A. Körper, we conduct our own national and international projects and events. In particular, we feel a special bond to the city of Hamburg. We also maintain an office in Berlin.

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