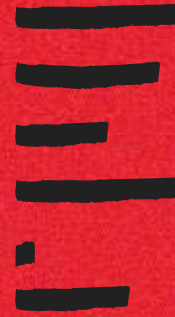


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Introduction

The undiluted metaphorical references to infrastructure throughout this report are neither particularly deft nor especially well-concealed. In a report which primarily tackles freedom of expression, transparent allusions to roads, pillars, tunnels, and tracks appear to be a lunge at the façade of something concrete and solid. In truth, there is perhaps no more apt a description of the year 2021 than the previous statement. The entire world was now reeling from the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, the US Capitol insurrection and the Israeli attacks on Palestinian civil liberties. The world order seemed to stagger, the foundation of once stable democracies tremble, and long held truths lurch forwards unevenly, knees buckling under the weight of another turbulent year.

On the level of the MENA region, several events took place which will have long enduring ramifications upon the question of individual and civil liberties. Power struggles in Tunisia following President Kais Saied's suspension of the parliament and dismissal of Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi may potentially roll back the country's democratic progress which commenced in 2011. Eighteen people were arrested in Jordan as a result of an alleged failed coup against King Abdallah. Furthermore, the uprising in Palestine which erupted in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem explicitly displayed the extent to which Israeli colonial brutality and disproportionate military aggression affected the well-being of Palestinian journalists, activists, protesting residents, and the general population within the area.

In Lebanon, clashes between sectarian partisans, the physical and moral assassination of key public figures, immense economic deterioration, and political paralysis dominated the landscape. In the midst of investigations concerned with the Beirut port explosion, the Tayyouneh clashes on October 14, 2021 exacerbated sect-based narratives, which in turn fueled Hezbollah's agenda to militarize the public discourse even further. The October 14 armed conflict took place between Hezbollah and anti-Hezbollah fighters in the Tayyouneh region in Beirut, as the former sought to delegitimize the investigation into the Beirut port explosion. Moreover, on February 3, intellectual and activist Lokman Slim, a renowned detractor of Hezbollah for years, was assassinated.

In this context, the Samir Kassir Foundation has been conducting a thorough analysis of the bigoted speech targeting political dissidents and marginalized groups or minorities in Lebanon, in addition to cautiously scrutinizing malicious attempts to spread discredit and delegitimize public figures and media personalities. This has been accompanied by projects aimed at monitoring violations against journalists, empowering the capacity, capabilities, and reach of alternative media outlets, assessing the question of religious freedoms in the region, and studying youth perception of independent media in Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, and Palestine.

Against the backdrop of a collapsing country and against all odds, the Foundation confirmed its commitment to the language of arts and culture, by organizing the 13th edition of its Beirut Spring Festival, paying tribute to young and promising Lebanese artists. The Festival crowned the efforts of the Foundation in engaging in cultural policy reform proposals, which - to go back to the infrastructure metaphore - will hit several roadblocks before, if ever, seeing the light.

Key Milestones of the Year

January 13 and 21

SKF trains civil servants at Central Inspection on digital safety, privacy, and digital rights.

January 18

SKF joins the Investigative Journalism Seminar organized by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut.

February 2



SKF publishes its first cultural policy paper, entitled [“Craft for Impact”](#) by Nicole Hamouche, with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

February 18



SKF publishes its second cultural policy paper, entitled [“Supporting Cultural Spaces in Lebanon”](#) by Areej Abou Harb, with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

February 22

The European Union and SKF launch the competition for the 16th edition of the Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press.

February 23-25

SKF joins and moderates the webinar on Media Accountability in the MENA Region, organized by the Erich Brost Institute (EBI) for International Journalism at TU Dortmund University.

March 3-4

SKF hosts a webinar for journalists focusing on access to information and understanding government data, led by Gherbal Initiative founder Assaad Thebian.

March 8



EBI launches its [“Media Accountability in the MENA Region”](#) report. SKF’s Ayman Mhanna and Karim Safieddine authored the Lebanon chapter.

March 12



SKF publishes its 2020 Annual Report entitled [“A Bleak 2020 Vision”](#).

March 15

SKF hosts a webinar on “The Importance of Journalism Awards” as part of the campaign to promote the 16th edition of the Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press. The speakers were Lina Atallah, Editor-in-Chief of Mada Masr, Guilherme Canela De Souza Godoi, chief of section Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists at UNESCO, Rawan Damen, Executive Director of Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ), and Clothilde Redfern, Executive Director of the Rory Peck Trust.

March 16

The Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) hosts the second international coordination meeting around SKF’s Media Recovery Fund and media development initiatives in Lebanon.

March 17

SKF trains civil servants and staff at the Lebanese Ministry of Finance’s Basil Fuleihan Economic and Financial Institute on digital safety, privacy, and digital rights.

March 25-April 15

SKF co-hosts an online training on journalists’ trauma delivered by the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University, with the support of Internews.

March 31

SKF joins a roundtable discussion in Hamra around Media, Publishing, and Content Creation, hosted by Executive Magazine.

April 6

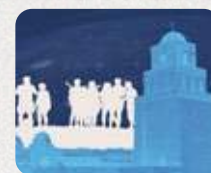


SKF publishes a report entitled [“Youth and Independent Media in Morocco: Focus Group Findings”](#) as part of the D-Jil program.

April 12

SKF hosts a webinar on “Free Press v. Disinformation” as part of the campaign to promote the 16th edition of the Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press. The discussion, facilitated by Aya Majzoub, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch, included Fares Akkad, Global Director for Media Partnerships at Facebook, Rana Sabbagh, Senior Editor for the MENA at Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and Hanene Zbiss, investigative journalist and winner of the 2014 Samir Kassir Award.

April 15



SKF publishes a report entitled [“Youth and Independent Media in Tunisia: Focus Group Findings”](#) as part of the D-Jil program.

April 21



SKF publishes a report entitled [“Independent Media in Lebanon: An Economic Outlook”](#) by Rana Khoury and Jonathan Dagher.

April 26

SKF hosts a webinar on “Disinformation Surrounding the October 2019 Uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq” as part of the Adwa2 project, with Asaad Zalzali, investigative journalist and winner of the 2018-2019 Samir Kassir Award, and Carmen Geha, Associate Professor at the American University of Beirut.

May 3



SKF President Gisèle Khoury and Sweden Ambassador to Lebanon Ann Dismorr publish an op-ed entitled [“Press Freedom in Times of Crisis”](#) in Daraj Media and L’Orient-Le Jour.

May 4



SKF’s Ayman Mhanna and Widad Jarbough interview Luis Miguel Bueno, Arabic spokesperson for the Middle East and North Africa at the European External Action Service on the EU’s commitment to media freedom at the occasion of World Press Freedom Day.

May 4

In cooperation with the Swedish Embassy in Beirut, SKF hosts a panel discussion on “Press Freedom in Times of Crisis” at the Bossa Nova Hotel, Sin el-Fil, gathering Timour Azhari, then-Lebanon correspondent at Thomson Reuters Foundation, Nour Haidar, Global Public Service Fellow at Legal Agenda, and Laury Haytayan, MENA Senior Officer at the Natural Resource Governance Institute.

May 15

SKF Executive Director Ayman Mhanna delivers the keynote speech at the opening ceremony of LebanonTalks.

May 19

the 2021 Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press and university students from across the MENA region.

June 1



The European Union and SKF announce the winners of the 2021 Samir Kassir Award for Freedom of the Press during a special prime-time show on LBCI: Yehya Al-Yaqoubi (Palestine) winner of the Award for the opinion piece category and the Students’ Prize, Sultan Jalabi (Syria) winner of the Award for the investigative article category, and Hammadi Lassoued (Tunisia), Hoda Zakaria, and Mennatullah Hamdy (Egypt), co-winners of the Award for the audiovisual news report category.

June 9



SKF publishes its third cultural policy paper, entitled [“Teaching Arts in Lebanese Schools: Facts, Obstacles, and Expectations”](#) by Hicham Zeineddine, with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation

June 11

SKF and the Digital Transition Network co-host a webinar on “Digital Rights Awareness” in Lebanon with the participation of parliamentarians, scholars, and digital rights and safety researchers.

June 15-17

SKF participates in GLOBSEC – Bratislava Global Security Forum in Slovakia.

June 18-19



SKF organizes the 13th edition of the Beirut Spring Festival, with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

June 30

SKF joins the webinar on “The Human Rights Council: An Avenue for Justice for the August 4 Beirut Explosion” co-hosted by Legal Action Worldwide and Human Rights Watch.

July 1

SKF facilitates a CFI-AFD panel discussion on “Lebanese Media Facing Crises” at the French Embassy in Beirut, as part of the QARIB program. The speakers were Amanda Abou Abdallah, founder of the Khateera platform, Alia Ibrahim, CEO of Daraj, Riad Kobaissi, investigative journalist at Al-Jadeed, and Roula Mikhael, Executive Director of Maharat Foundation.

August 9

SKF hosts a webinar on “Clubhouse and the Malign Use of Social Media” as part of the Adwa2 project, with journalists Aya Iskandarani and Tala Ramadan, and digital safety expert Ali Sibai.

August 25

SKF launches the Arabic translation of a comprehensive [university curriculum on journalism safety](#) by the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation.

September 3

SKF joins a UN Women panel discussion on “Violence against Women Journalists in Lebanon” at Université St-Joseph in Beirut.

September 21

SKF joins a webinar hosted by the American Bar Association on “Current Developments in Privacy and Press Freedom in the Middle East.”

September 24-25

SKF and the Erich Brost Institute co-host a two-day workshop on “Media Accountability in the MENA Region” in Amman, Jordan.

September 30

SKF joins the general assembly of the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) in Tirana, Albania. SKF Executive Director Ayman Mhanna succeeds SKF President Gisèle Khoury as a member of GFMD Steering Committee, representing the MENA region.

September 30



SKF publishes a report entitled [“A Social Media Analysis of the Hate Network Surrounding Lokman Slim’s Assassination”](#) by Nasri Messarra.

October 15

SKF joins a panel on “Information in Times of Crisis” within the Rencontres Orient-Occident at Château Mercier in Sierre, Switzerland.

October 18 - November 24

SKF, ACOS Alliance, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Marie Colvin Journalists’ Network, ARIJ, and Maharat Foundation co-host an online physical, digital, legal, and psycho-social safety training for MENA-based journalists, delivered by Silk Road Training and local experts.

October 22

SKF and Equal Rights and Independent Media (ERIM) launch the Market Innovation for Independent Media (MIIM) project focusing on opening alternative revenue channels for Lebanese independent media.

November 2



SKF publishes a report entitled [“Palestinian Media Needs Assessment in the Context of the 2021 Jerusalem Uprising and the Gaza War”](#) with the support of UNESCO.

November 15



SKF and SmartGov launch their report entitled [“E-Government Mapping: Overview of Lebanese GovTech Readiness and Respect for Citizen Privacy”](#) during a full-day conference gathering government representatives, journalists, digital safety, and e-governance experts at the Bossa Nova Hotel, Sin el-Fil.

November 19-21



SKF joins the 2021 Halifax International Security Forum in Nova Scotia, Canada.

December 1

SKF joins a webinar entitled “How important is the right to access information and digitization for the successful implementation of Lebanon’s new procurement law?” organized by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

December 7

SKF participates in the webinar on “Principles for Effective Media Assistance” co-hosted by GFMD and the Center for International Media Assistance, in the margin of the Summit for Democracy organized by the Biden Administration.

December 17



SKF publishes a report entitled [“A Social Media Analysis of the Public Debate around Tarek Bitar’s Investigation”](#) by Nasri Messarra.

December 21

SKF delivers a presentation on Media Viability in the Context of Media Accountability during the second Media Accountability in the MENA Region conference, organized by the Erich Brost Institute in Tunis, Tunisia.



SKF International Partners in

2021

- ACOS Alliance
- Agence française de développement
- Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)
- Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- CFI - the French Media Development Agency
- Committee to Protect Journalists
- Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma
- Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Equal Rights and Independent Media
- Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism
- Eurasia Foundation
- European Services Network
- European Union
- Facebook Journalism Project
- Freemuse
- French Institute
- Friedrich Naumann Foundation
- Global Forum for Media Development
- Gulf Centre for Human Rights
- Human Rights Watch
- International Media Support
- International Republican Institute
- International Women's Media Foundation
- Internews
- IREX
- James W. Foley Legacy Foundation
- Marie Colvin Journalists' Network
- Media Diversity Institute
- Meedan
- National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
- National Endowment for Democracy
- Open Society Foundations
- Pact
- Porticus
- Reporters Without Borders
- Rory Peck Trust
- Sigrid Rausing Trust
- Siren Associates
- Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Thomson Reuters Foundation
- United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF)
- UNESCO
- United States Department of State

The Underground Network of Interconnected Hate Speech

As is well documented throughout this annual report, it has been an exceptionally difficult year in Lebanon on multiple levels. The lurch from one crisis into another has been nothing short of exasperating, if not at times entirely overwhelming. However, beneath the series of crises lies an underground network of interconnected violence which is intrinsically tied in with a tide of hate speech. The assassination of intellectual and activist Lokman Slim, the murder of Zeina Kanjo by her husband, the burning of a Syrian refugee camp in the north of Lebanon, the beating of Syrian nationals on their way to cast votes, the Tayyouneh clashes, the threats directed at Judge Tarek Bitar are inherently connected by the visible thread of hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric which pierces through them. In an unprecedented economic crisis, coupled with the traumatic aftermath of the Beirut Port explosion, the flammable material of hate speech very readily sparks violence. In the heightened sensitivity environment that is Lebanon, hate speech is not simply a matter of offense or emotional turmoil (all of which are valid); rather, it is indistinguishable from the violence which frequently results from it. The aforementioned incidents have been regularly documented in our monthly hate speech reports, with the hateful discourse preceding and following them often easily traceable. In the case of the assassination of Lokman Slim, a separate Twitter network analysis report illustrated the organized, structured and targeted manner in which online trolls and hate speech propagators sought to discredit and undermine Lokman Slim. The hate speech propagators' carefully crafted implication after Slim's death, according to the report, was that either Slim was deserving of his death for his alleged ties with Israel, or that he was a de facto unknown whose death was of no consequence to Hezbollah.

When taking into account discourse fueled by tribal sentiments, one ought to factor in the integral role of the Lebanese political system and its legacy during and since the civil war period. The country's political system has allowed for and strengthened the division of residents roughly along sectarian, confessional cantons, subsequently isolating different sections of the population from one another and fueling negative perceptions and stereotypes. The latest developments have only served to amplify sectarian tensions due to the polarized sentiments induced by the Beirut Port explosion, intellectual Lokman Slim's assassination, the Tayyouneh clashes, and the heated conversation revolving around Hezbollah's arms and security-based hegemony.

Following the Beirut Port explosion, heated inter-sectarian and political contention allowed for furthering a discourse based on victimization, power imposition, and deflection of responsibility. Hate speech on social media has been utilized to justify and give rise to violent political acts as demonstrated by threats targeting Tarek Bitar, the judge leading the investigation of the port explosion, as well as the assassination of prominent publisher and Hezbollah critic, Lokman Slim. The October 14 Tayyouneh clashes, which erupted after a march by Hezbollah supporters and militiamen in protest against Judge Tarek Bitar, further serve to illustrate the dire consequences of unfettered hate speech.

In this current state of affairs, Hezbollah's critics have been on the receiving end of various hate campaigns. Othering opponents and delegitimizing their claims have proven to be an effective tool in the hands of the digital army of Hezbollah supporters. Branding detractors as treasonous agents serving enemy states became a default response aimed at any and all dissenting voices. This was particularly utilized before and after the assassination of Lokman Slim, as SKF's [Social Media Analysis of the Hate Network Surrounding Lokman Slim's Assassination](#) illustrates. In the case of the Beirut Port explosion investigation, judge and lead investigator, Tarek Bitar was regularly accused of "politicizing" the process by Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah. Such inflammatory and malicious rhetoric encouraged a problematic public discourse in an effort to pursue the demonization of Bitar, as documented in [SKF's Social Media Analysis of the Public Debate around Tarek Bitar's Investigation](#).



Hate speech in Lebanon is not restricted to sectarian slurs and the violent acts which result from such inflammatory rhetoric. Unsurprisingly, hate speech has continued to target those most marginalized of communities such as refugees, women, the LGBTQ+ community, and migrant workers. Lebanese Forces supporters physically assaulted supposedly pro-Assad Syrian nationals on their way to vote at the Syrian embassy. Similar xenophobic sentiments were espoused against Palestinian refugees on social media, particularly from right-wing parties including the aforementioned supporters of the Lebanese Forces and the Free Patriotic Movement, amid the shelling of Gaza in May. As detailed in SKF's [monthly Hate Speech Reports](#), media personalities, artists, and influencers such as Dalia Ahmad, Dima Sadek, Dr. Sandrine Atallah, Shaden Fakih, Nawal El Zoghbi, Hussein Kaouk, Gino Raidy, Luna Safwan and many others were subjected to a litany of sexist, homophobic or racist slurs which sought to detract from their stated opinions.

The difficult economic and social conditions which Lebanon is currently undergoing, as noted earlier, seemed to unleash a tide of hate speech which spread across every facet of life in Lebanon. Today, we find ourselves constrained by the fact that many are more concerned with what goes into their mouths as opposed to what leaves it. At times, it appears not only incongruous but also disingenuous to suggest that hate speech is the most imminent threat facing the Lebanese today. The importance of combating hate speech is more urgent than ever, but it must be done with awareness, sensitivity, and a thorough understanding of the country's desperate state of affairs.



Can Market Innovation Save One of Democracy's Main Pillars?

A strong and vibrant independent media sector is a key pillar of a functioning democracy. Giving the public access to unfiltered, transparent information ensures that citizens and residents are better educated on key issues, and thus able to make informed choices and contribute positively to the public conversation in the country. Independent media outlets have the role of keeping public institutions in check, ensuring that policies and decisions are followed through on and have the best interest of the citizens at heart.

Specifically, for conflict-prone countries with non-homogenous societies, such as Lebanon, a somewhat antagonistic relationship between media and government is critical to avoid rampant corruption, information manipulation, obscurantism, and polarization.

In recent years, Lebanon has witnessed the rise of numerous independent media outlets that are bold, innovative, and target a growing audience composed mainly of the Lebanese youth and diaspora. These media have their own sets of problems and challenges, explored in detail in [our previous report](#). The independent media has greatly suffered from the diminished purchasing power of the Lebanese as a result of the recent economic, social, and political crises which the country is undergoing. Additionally, many of these entities are composed of volunteers and do not necessarily have the requisite experience to efficiently manage a growing business. Finally, much of the general Lebanese population remains unaware of the existence of these entities and prefers staying up to date through more traditional albeit politically captured channels.

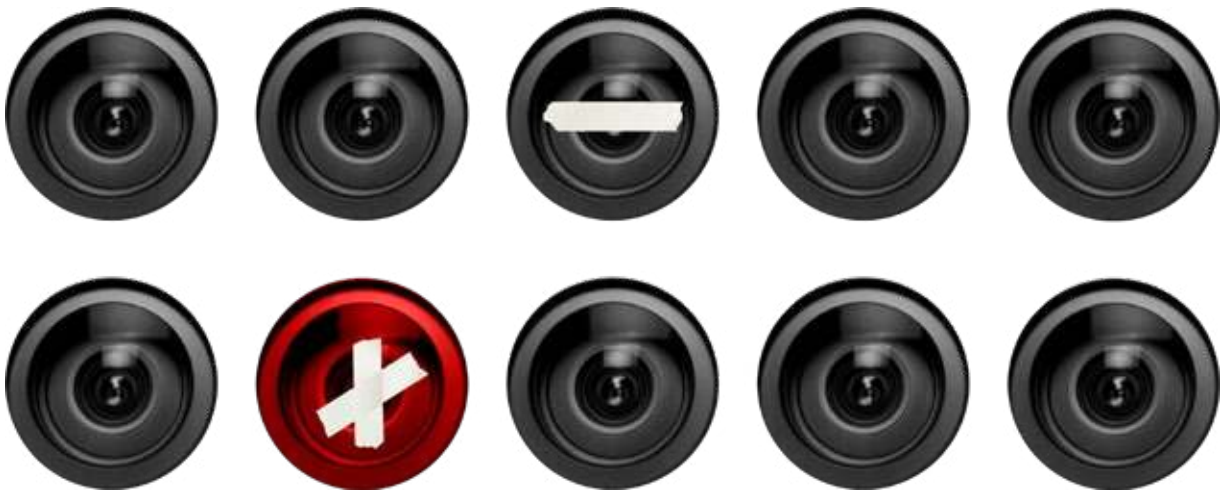
Many of these independent media outlets think of themselves and operate as startups, in every sense of the word. They are fluid, adapt quickly to changing market conditions, and prioritize user experience, leveraging social media, and providing high impact, easily consumable journalism content.


In response, SKF has designed cutting edge programs, aimed at addressing the independent media's pressing needs with a focus on growth, revenue generation, and achieving long-term sustainability.

Market Innovation for Independent Media (MIIM) is a program that kicked off in October 2021 to address these needs. It can be summarized in three major outcomes: firstly, the creation of a dedicated advertising agency for the independent media. Secondly, the launch of an online news aggregator, through a platform showcasing all independent news content from across Lebanon. Thirdly, the overseeing of a full, two-year mentorship program across core business topics, ranging from management to content creation, aiming to help the media operate at their best potential.

The foundation will continuously support this sector through further programs aimed at helping independent media entities transition from startups to businesses, and continuously innovate with regard to content formats and marketing strategies that reflect their growing user bases.

These programs will help bring the independent media sector to the forefront, ushering a new appetite for unfiltered, unbiased news reporting to the general public. Those two key pillars of a democratic and free media sector, Innovation and Independence, must not be allowed to buckle under the weight of the current crises.





The 2022 Elections:

A Bumpy Road to Recovery?

Lebanon is meant to organize legislative (and municipal) elections in the spring of 2022. It is not outside the realm of possibilities, however, for Lebanon's ruling political class to thwart the process by devising opportune obstacles to delay the polls. While all parties are publicly committed to working toward a timely election, such guarantees have not been enough in the past to guarantee that the process will move forward smoothly. Holding legislative elections might not necessarily earn the country peace and stability in the short-term. However, if the elections are not held or if standards of freedom and fairness are not maintained throughout said elections, the country would almost certainly continue to spiral without end. A country severely devastated by political crises, economic collapse, and failure of accountability after the Beirut Port explosion, cannot hope to take the first steps along the road to recovery without free and fair elections.

The current electoral law distinguishes between "electoral information" based on free and equal airtime, and "electoral advertising/publicity" paid for and favoring the wealthiest candidates. However, the law does not specify a minimum quota for electoral information or a maximum for electoral advertising. Thus, it is technically legal for a channel to dedicate 99% of its media coverage to election advertising. Indeed, in the 2018 elections, independent candidates had limited access to the media and failed to get their message across fairly. The Samir Kassir Foundation's "Media and Elections in Lebanon" (MEL) project is therefore relevant as it supports media in ensuring a fairer and more balanced approach to the electoral process, by leveling the playing field to all candidates. It aims to focus upon fact-based reporting and questioning, thereby reflecting citizens' concerns, and refraining from incitement and partisanship from the onset of the official campaign all the way to the announcements of results and the review of post-election complaints.

SKF is not aiming to get involved in the electoral process by supporting a candidate or a coalition. Rather, SKF's experience in the field of media assistance and freedom of the press has allowed it to identify the negative impact of the Lebanese mainstream media's old practices on democratic competition. It is imperative to explore the measures which allow the practical promotion of more ethical competition between candidates in order to reduce the recurring risks of an unfair election. The "Media and Elections in Lebanon" project focuses on addressing the role of the media in this process. It is about contributing to the fairest media coverage, thereby allowing citizens to truly discover all the candidates. This is an additional guarantee of a democratic electoral process, and a chance for the renewal of the political class, without interference in the choice of candidates or partisan preferences.

MEL offers the opportunity and incentive for non-partisan and independent media outlets, including national television stations, to engage in high-quality media coverage of the elections. The project also focuses on the development of the participating media's technical and staff capacities to excel in their coverage of the elections, equipping them with state-of-the-art techniques, equipment, and training.




SKF has been playing a crucial role in supporting independent media outlets and journalists during the ongoing Lebanese financial crisis, which has hit the media sector hard. Lebanese television stations, which require a budget of several million dollars to operate, are suffering from the drying up of both the advertising market on the one hand and politically partisan funds on the other hand. Some media are directly controlled by political parties, making it hardly conceivable that these channels are open to covering the election without favoring their respective owner.

In the case of LBCI, MTV, and Al Jadeed, there is an opportunity to explore better media coverage of the elections. This is an avenue that SKF has already explored with some success through supporting Al Jadeed's investigative journalism programs, particularly concerning the Port of Beirut explosion; MTV's accountability report series during its evening news bulletin; as well as in-depth discussions with LBCI's leadership on the renewal of media content and broadcast platforms.

As part of MEL's second track, several new online and independent media are gaining audience and credibility. The elections will be a major event in which these digital native, alternative media will be able to confirm their professionalism and their lasting inclusion in the Lebanese media landscape. Strong support for these new media will broaden their audience and increase the pressure of competition on traditional media, which will be driven to further improve their content to resist the rise of these newcomers.

The road to recovery is paved with more than just good intentions. It must be layered with adequate guidance and enforced by a long term vision.



Lebanon: The Tunnel at the End of the Tunnel

The year 2021 was an arduous and heavy burden for the Lebanese people to shoulder, in light of the total economic and security collapse of the country, the rapid depreciation of the Lebanese pound, and the political complexities which halted any concrete reforms. That the country had been caught in a downward spiral was a fact which the Lebanese have become fully cognizant of, having endured the hardship imposed upon them by the corruption and malfeasance of the ruling elite. It was, rather, the lack of any proposed solution, coupled with the inadequate and disingenuous attempts at mitigating the crisis which now proved a bitter blow for any hope of recovery. The inconspicuous absence of a light at the end of the tunnel – save for that of a metaphor laden multi-ton train hurtling towards the Lebanese – became a constant theme throughout 2021. The Lebanese were subjected to repeated humiliation by the ruling elite, while protests against authorities continued, albeit at a slower pace in comparison with the last two years.

This volatile and desperate situation had a significant impact on freedoms in general and freedom of expression in particular. The assassination of political activist and renowned intellectual Lokman Slim momentarily galvanized the local and international public opinion. Unfortunately, it seemed to reaffirm the notion that criticism in Lebanon is forbidden, impunity is expected, and the reign of the authorities is supreme. Furthermore, the investigation into the Beirut Port explosion is ongoing without any genuine progress or earnest pursuit of accountability. Attempts to hamper the work of the lead investigator have thus far proven effective.

The authorities have become less tolerant to criticism of any kind. The security, judicial, and even trade union bodies resorted to repressive practices against those who expressed their dissenting opinions through various cultural or artistic means. Journalism is not a simple task in Lebanon, in light of the continuous attempts to tighten the noose on journalists, the rising level of physical risks, as well as the challenges and suffering exacerbated by the economic crisis. Repression even continued within the unions' framework. The Press Editors' Syndicate unsuccessfully attempted to silence its "colleagues" in the Alternative Press Syndicate by threatening them with a fine, instead of protecting them, defending their rights, and exposing violations against them.



Assassinating Lokman Slim and Promoting a Culture of Impunity

The year 2021 began with the assassination of researcher and activist Lokman Slim, one of the most prominent critics of Hezbollah and the regime. Slim's murder was preceded by a moral character assassination which attempted to mobilize public opinion against him through a [systematic hate speech campaign conducted by partisan electronic armies on social media](#). The murder was accompanied by a complex disinformation process which included fake accounts of fake journalists and activists to justify the crime thereby misleading the investigation and public opinion. Despite rising local and international calls to hold those who killed Slim accountable, the year ended without any significant developments on this front. The implication here is that the crackdown on dissenting voices has taken on a blood thirsty, criminal dimension in keeping with the chaos into which the country has plunged. Most alarming is the daunting ability of this culture of impunity – which dates back several decades – to pave the way for similar crimes in the future.

Lokman Slim was not the only victim of the hate speech carried out by partisan electronic armies on social media. A large number of journalists who share his opinions, including Dima Sadek and Luna Safwan, were also targeted. Such journalists were repeatedly accused of working for Israel or serving foreign agendas, among other accusations put forth to intimidate them. Even Hezbollah-friendly writer and journalist Kassem Kassir was victim of similar campaigns carried out by supporters of the party itself because he expressed some reservations towards the latter's policy and its alignment with the Iranian state.

Attacks on journalists, photographers, and field reporters increased during the coverage of protests due in no small part to the general lack of accountability. The security forces severely beat journalists, broke their equipment, and intimidated them. In addition, supporters of several parties carried out attacks against media professionals. For instance, an Amal Movement supporter put out his cigarette against the lip of photographer Dany Tanios in a violent attack. None of the perpetrators were held accountable for such acts.

Criticizing the Authorities Is Risky Business

For authorities in Lebanon, repression of journalists and activists has become the norm. Authorities continue to silence dissenting voices which expose the abuses taking place within a country in the midst of collapse. This systematic repressive path was established by the authorities through security services, public prosecutors, and courts lacking jurisdiction, which seek to prosecute dissenting voices. Laws have been used in a discretionary manner, in accordance with the interests of politicians against journalists and activists. The security and judicial bodies mobilize quickly to summon or prosecute a journalist or activist who criticizes the authorities and their practices but act indecisively when a journalist, activist, or any other citizen files a complaint against that authority and its affiliates. These repressive measures were complemented by unfair sentences against journalists and activists, issued by incompetent parties. The military court, for example, sentenced journalist Radwan Mortada to one year and one month in prison in absentia for "insulting the military institution." The same court summoned comedian Shaden Fakih for questioning over a satirical video. Moreover, the General Security banned a student play which satirizes the Lebanese crisis. All these abuses and other complaints against activists and people who use political satire came as a punishment for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

The head of the Press Editors' Syndicate, Joseph Kossaifi, and his list, have been reelected with the support of the parties in power. In 2021, the syndicate was nothing but the reflection of the regime, particularly in terms of repressing and silencing journalists. It remained silent in the face of serious violations and attacks against journalists in the past years. The Press Editors' Syndicate even tried to muzzle "colleagues" in the Alternative Press Syndicate, which played an important role in defending journalists and exposing repressive practices against them.

The Economic Crisis and the Fear of Politicized Media

The economic, social, and living challenges that Lebanon and the Lebanese people are confronted with, have affected media institutions and their employees. The Daily Star newspaper folded due to the financial crisis, and the salaries of media workers were greatly affected after the Lebanese pound lost its value. In addition to being exposed to danger during field work, journalists face further challenges in carrying out professional standards of work on meagre and insufficient salaries. The pressure on media professionals also increased due to the scarcity of fuel and the permanent power cuts. They were no longer able to carry out their journalistic tasks, be present at the media institutions they work for, or even secure transportation for fieldwork. As a result of the poor economic situation and the increasing suffering of journalists, abuses in the field of media freedoms had an impact on media content. Indeed, the regime exploited the crisis to influence journalists, specifically those working in institutions funded by political figures or affiliated with the parties in power. Politicized media played an important role in undermining truth in the Beirut Port explosion and in the systematic campaigns targeting the lead investigator, Judge Tarek Bitar. Such smear campaigns set about questioning Bitar's integrity and that of the investigation. This prompted the civil society to mobilize and raise its voice against politicized media and focus on the importance of supporting independent media, in order to convey accurate information to the public opinion, away from political agendas.

In truth, with the prevailing power cuts, the Lebanese have come to expect darkness. Despite all these dangerous violations, the only glimmer of hope is to preserve and defend freedom of speech, while denouncing all practices that undermine it. The only glimmer of hope is to support journalists and independent media institutions that have proven to be one of the only effective checks and balances against this corrupt regime. The latter bears alone the responsibility of the unprecedented collapse the country is currently enduring.

117

violations

Violation	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21	Jul 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Total
Censorship on arts & culture					1					1	1		3
Censorship of media work		1		1					1				3
Hacking/blocking online content			1							1		1	3
Legal action	1	4		1	1	2	4				2	2	17
Assault by non-state actors	1	2	3	2	2	3	9	4	1	6			33
Assault by security forces	1					1	6	3					11
Assassination		1											1
Prison sentence											1		1
Detention	4				1	1		1		2	1		10
Detention by non-state actors						2							2
Summons and interrogations	1		3	4	2	1	2	1		1	1	1	17
Travel ban								1					1
Attack on media offices										1			1
Threats and harassment	3	1		2				3	2	1	1	1	14
Total violations	11	9	7	10	7	10	21	13	4	13	7	5	117

The image shows a scene of urban devastation in Syria. In the background, several multi-story buildings are reduced to skeletal remains, with exposed rebar and charred structures. The sky is a deep, dark red, suggesting a sunset or the aftermath of a fire. In the foreground on the right, a framed portrait of Bashar al-Assad is visible, showing him in a military-style uniform. The overall mood is one of tragedy and conflict.

Syria: The Runaway Train

Syria has become a narco-state, a land of poverty, a country of [landmines](#), the “land with no bookshops,” and a failed state. The Syrian territory, which covers approximately 185,000 square meters, is under the control of 514 foreign military bases, operated by the US-led international coalition, Russia, Turkey, Iran, not to mention the Syrian regime troops, the militias supporting them, and all sorts of opposition forces. Each military group imposes its own rules and restrictions on all aspects of public life. Syria is perceived today as a smattering of weak, crumbling “statelets” which are not only controlled by external forces, but are also subject to the whims of local abusers.

The south of the country has returned to the regime’s stranglehold under the guise of “reconciliation.” The government military forces entering the Deraa governorate have expanded the sphere of control of the regime and its allies, further marking these events as a “victory” for them. However, the regime is in desperate need of a civil, service-oriented front which would give those who supported – or pretended to support – Al-Assad a chance to live within the walls of their large prison. De facto local powers on the ground are not faring better than the regime and its allies. They adopt the Baathist approach regarding the centralization of power, but also in terms of totalitarianism and arbitrariness in public life. They arrest, kill, and burn media offices. They force journalists to fulfill the duty of obedience and loyalty. They do not fail to emulate Al-Assad in this regard.

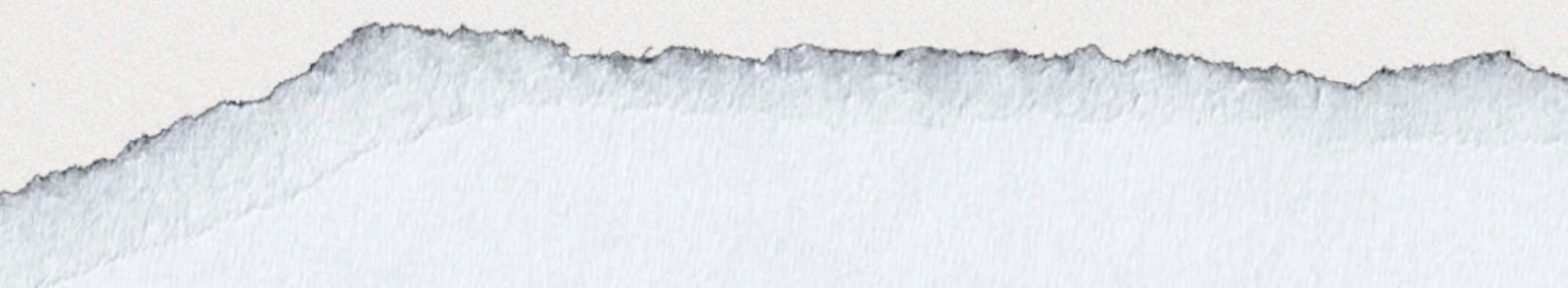
In its 2021 report, Freedom House [describes](#) the situation in Syria by stating that “political rights and civil liberties are severely compromised by one of the world’s most repressive regimes and by other belligerent forces in an ongoing civil war.” The report places the country last in the annual index of freedom around the globe. It is also one of the most corrupt countries in the world and ranks amongst the poorest. More than 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line.

Today, Syria is nothing but the remnants of a country torn apart by Al-Assad’s unquenchable desire to stay in power. This was the instigator and trigger leading to militarisation, massacres, international intervention, collapse of health and educational sectors, tearing of social fabric, and the impossibility to find a solution. The so-called “children of the state,” or to be more accurate, its “shabiha” (state-sponsored militias of the Syrian government), have become hungry, stray, unstoppable wolves, ever since the central authority’s ability to stay in control has weakened. It can no longer halt the runaway train that is the interminable “violence” unleashed by Al-Assad eleven years ago with the outbreak of the Syrian revolution.

66

violations

Violation	Jan 21	21 Feb	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21	Jul 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Total
Blocking online content					1	1				1			3
Censorship on media work				3		1		1	1	1			7
Censorship on arts and culture						1							1
Journalists killed							1						1
Attack on media offices									1			1	2
Assault by non-state actors	1		1	1	1		2		4		3		13
Assault by security forces							1						1
Detention by non-state actors	2	1	2	5	1	1	4	2	2	4		9	33
Detention by state actors	1		1			1			1				4
Kidnapping	1												1
Total violations	5	1	4	9	3	5	8	3	9	6	3	10	66



Jordan: Freedom of Speech is Still No Priority

In 2020, SKF's annual report entitled this section "Jordan Dunks on Freedom of Expression." In 2021, it behooves SKF to report that Jordan continues to dunk on freedom of expression. The inherent levity within the title should not detract from the very real and unyielding onslaught of arrests, summons, bans, and restrictions. The following is a textual highlights reel of Jordan's attack on freedom of expression, represented here in a marriage of form and content. It is, in essence, Jordan's greatest hits of 2021: a veritable depiction of the unobstructed determination of the Jordanian authorities to control the public narrative.

The Jordanian security arrested Egyptian journalist Hassan Al-Banna at Queen Alia International Airport upon his arrival, and deported him back to Egypt. Journalist Jihad Al-Muhaisen, who was about to participate in a protest, was arrested at the Dakhiliya roundabout in the capital and released on the same day. The Amman court arrested journalist Fadi Al-Amr over a publication on social media, before releasing him on bail. The court sentenced the Deereetna News editor-in-chief, Sawsan Mubaideen, to three months in prison after she published an article about the results of the Jordanian parliamentary elections. The Amman-based Syrian journalist, Ibrahim Awad, was also arrested. However, contradictory information was shared as to which security party had detained him and the place in which he is currently held. Furthermore, Jordanian writer and political analyst, Oraib Al-Rantawi was victim of a ruthless cyberbullying campaign because of a Facebook post, which prompted him to hand in his resignation from the Royal Reform Committee.

Amman's public prosecutor summoned Al-Ghad journalist Hamza Daana and photographer Amir Khalifa, following a defamation complaint filed against them over an article; they were released the same day. Zulaikha Abu Richa, a Jordanian writer and intellectual, appeared before the Amman court to respond to charges of religiously offensive material in three different lawsuits.



Furthermore, Amman's public prosecutor has banned the publication of any information about an alleged plot said to involve the King's half-brother, Prince Hamzah. The Amman court banned the media from publishing content related to the complaint filed by Jordanian Prime Minister Bisher Al-Khasawneh against a political activist who criticized his family.


The Jordan Media Commission banned an American movie, *Eternals*, from cinemas, over scenes involving LGBT characters, which the distributor refused to delete. It also canceled the *Umm Al-Darahem* series, under the pretext that it contained unacceptable political content. The State Security Court further prevented the media from covering the trial of public figures involved in the alleged coup. Moreover, the police prevented journalists from covering protests that followed the events at the Gardens Hospital, where a power outage led to the death of several patients. As for the Jordanian authorities, they restricted the live video streaming features on Facebook and Twitter during the coverage of the anger protests which followed the unfortunate event. The authorities also blocked access to the Clubhouse application two days later, without giving any reasons for this policy.

In a region not short on infringement upon freedom of expression, Jordan distinguishes itself in its stride: the breadth and range of its attacks on civil liberties.

18

violations

Violation	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21	Jul 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	21 Dec	Total
Censorship on media work				1		1	1				1		4
Censorship on arts and culture				1							1		2
Blocking online content			3										3
Prison sentence against journalists					1								1
Detention			1	1	1						1		4
Summons and interrogations							2						2
Legal action										1			1
Threats and harassment						1							1
Total violations	0	0	4	3	2	2	3	0	0	1	3	0	18



Palestine: Israel's Apartheid Regime Shows True Colors

Israel's apartheid regime unleashed the full force of its colonial practices upon the Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah. Israeli violence against Palestinians escalated rapidly, particularly in April 2021. The Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem was the starting point. Not long afterwards, the Israeli military offensive against the Gaza Strip killed and wounded hundreds of Palestinians. Popular uprisings took place inside the West Bank in support of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli forces carried out violent and disproportionate attacks to suppress and debilitate protests. Israel's flagrant violations against media professionals and headquarters went unabated. The Israeli air forces destroyed more than thirty media institutions via missiles, while soldiers brutally cracked down on Palestinian journalists and photographers in the 1948 Territories and the West Bank.

Simultaneously, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas government in Gaza continued to persecute journalists. The West Bank witnessed the worst repression of freedom of expression in years, specifically after the killing of activist and political dissident Nizar Banat at the hands of the Palestinian security forces. The latter also tracked down activists and journalists covering the protests which followed Banat's murder and strengthened laws against freedom of expression.

In 2021, Palestinian online activity was closely monitored, given the prominent role played by social media in drawing attention to Sheikh Jarrah and exposing the blatant crimes and atrocities committed by Israel against the Palestinians.

Targeting and Intimidating Journalists to Hide the Truth Regarding Sheikh Jarrah

Clashes erupted in Sheikh Jarrah after Israeli judiciary unsurprisingly ruled in favor of Israeli settlement associations regarding the forced expulsion of Palestinians from their homes. The neighborhood witnessed repeated confrontations between the Israeli riot police and the Palestinians protesting in solidarity with the residents. Dozens of journalists and media professionals were victims of Israeli repression in Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa, Sheikh Jarrah, and a number of mixed cities where the protests took place.

The Israeli police carried out heavy attacks against journalists, hampered their work and attempted to prevent them from documenting the developments in order to impose the oppressor's side of the story. The large-scale attacks against journalists show that Israel has adopted a systematic policy to suppress media professionals. The repression of protests and peaceful activities taking place across Palestine was aimed at giving the Israeli narrative a form of legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

The Israeli police and border guards abused journalists and photographers, beat them severely, attacked them with rubber-coated bullets, teargas bombs and sound bombs, and arrested a number of them for hours to prevent them from covering the events. Journalists' freedom of movement was restricted, and their press cards seized. Only those with Israeli cards were allowed to cover the events, while journalists with Palestinian cards – that is the majority – were not permitted to go near the neighborhood.

Israel Targets Journalists in Gaza and the Hamas Government Muzzles Them

The latest war Israel launched on the Gaza Strip in May 2021 led to an increase in media and cultural violations in the region. The Israeli warplanes destroyed the headquarters of dozens of Palestinian, Arab, and international media institutions, including the Qatari channel Al-Jazeera, the American agency Associated Press, the local newspaper Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, and Al-Asra radio station. Many Palestinian artistic and cultural institutions were also targeted, such as the Mashareq advertising agency and the Al-Nahda and Samir Mansour publishing houses, in an attempt to muzzle the media. Several journalists were injured and two of them killed. Youssef Abu Hussein, Sawt Al-Aqsa radio station host, and Rima Saad, a freelance journalist, both lost their lives as a result of the unceasing Israeli air raids. The war resulted in huge material damages within the media institutions' buildings, equipment and archives.

Injuries among journalists and photographers increased as they covered the return marches in the eastern part of the Gaza Strip. Protests resumed during the months of July and August after the COVID-19 spread had put them on hold. The Israeli forces attacked protesters with teargas, live ammunition, and rubber-coated bullets.

As for the Hamas government, it continued to suppress anyone in the Gaza Strip who would criticize it, "insult and underestimate the resistance," or protest against the living conditions on social media. Its security services used accusations such as "misuse of technology" as well as "spreading and promoting rumors on social media." They also arrested and unlawfully detained several journalists while the latter were performing their duties.

Freedom Deterioration in the West Bank

The state of emergency declared by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the Palestinian Authority's territories continued during the year 2021. The beginning of the year was relatively calm and further reinforced by a decree issued by the Palestinian President on February 20, prohibiting prosecution, detention, arrest, and all forms of unlawful retribution for reasons related to freedom of opinion and political affiliation. However, in June, Palestinian political activist, Nizar Banat, who was known for his outspoken criticism of the Palestinian Authority, was killed. He had been severely beaten with iron bars and wooden truncheons on the head prior to losing his life. This crime and the subsequent suppression of protests condemning the killing of Banat reflect the staunch security grip of the Palestinian Authority on the country.

Prosecuting those who protest and express their opinion on social media was another way to clamp down on freedoms. The Palestinian Authority cancelled Article 22 of the Code of Conduct, which guarantees freedom of expression for civil servants. It also dismissed the head of the Palestinian National Library and former Minister of Culture, Ihab Bseiso, for criticizing the killing of political activist Nizar Banat on Facebook. Suppression of freedoms was thus, again, carried out systematically, and not through a few isolated incidents.

In keeping with the above, Palestinian courts and security services applied laws that undermine freedom of expression. The cybercrime law, for instance, along with malicious political charges such as "weapon possession" and "unlawful fundraising," were employed in order to repeatedly arrest and summon journalists. Freedom of access to information remained nonexistent, in light of the Palestinian Authority's refusal to sign the law on the Right of Access to Information, despite the existence of a draft law.

Popular uprisings against the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, and in solidarity with the Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, took place in various areas across the West Bank. The Israeli forces deliberately targeted journalists and photographers with live ammunition, rubber-coated bullets, stun grenades, and teargas. They also beat them severely, broke their equipment and arrested them to prevent them from covering the events.

Blocking Access to Palestinian Content on Social Media

The repression of Palestinian activists and journalists was not only limited to physical attacks. It continued in the digital space as well, after the Israeli authorities persisted in monitoring Palestinian content with the cooperation of social media companies. Such companies buckled under Israeli pressure, allowing the monitoring of content published by Palestinian journalists in particular. All digital eyes were on Jerusalem, which prompted Facebook and Twitter to close and restrict the accounts and pages of dozens of Palestinian journalists and press institutions, under the pretext of violating their publishing standards. However, the social media giants did nothing about the escalating Israeli hate speech, which brazenly called for the killing and arrest of Palestinians. Also, WhatsApp blocked the accounts of dozens of Palestinian journalists during the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in May.

The year 2021 was a cruel one for media freedoms in Palestine. The Israeli military aggression on the Gaza Strip, Israel's unflinching repression of Palestinian journalists and photographers in both the West Bank and the 1948 Territories, as well as the prosecution and abuses carried out by the security forces of the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas government against journalists paint a dark picture.

392

violations in Palestine

West Bank

Violation	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	April 21	May 21	June 21	July 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Total
Blocking online content								1	3				4
Legal action						1	1						2
Assault by non-state actors												2	2
Assault by security forces	3	2	2	6	25	26	13	2	4	1	3	8	95
Detention			1	3	1	4	2	8	2	2	3	2	28
Summons and interrogations	1				1	1		1			5		9
Attack on media offices						1	2						3
Threats and harassment		1		1		7							9
Total violations	4	3	3	10	27	40	18	12	9	3	11	12	152

Gaza

Violation	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	April 21	May 21	June 21	July 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Total
Official censorship on arts & culture							2						2
Blocking online content					13	36	1		1				51
Legal action		1											1
Assault by security forces	1			2	26		1	8	1				39
Detention		1	1				2			1			5
Summons and interrogations		1	2	1									4
Threats and harassment					2								2
Total violations	1	3	3	3	41	36	6	8	2	1	0	0	104

1948 Territories

Violation	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	April 21	May 21	June 21	July 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Total
Official censorship on arts & culture	1	1	1							1	1		5
Unofficial censorship on events & culture									1				1
Blocking online content										1	4		5
Assault by non-state actors			2			4							6
Assault by security forces	3	1		3	40	32	2		1	7	2		91
Prison sentence against journalists											1		1
Detention	1	1		1	11	1			1	3	4		23
Summons and interrogations		1	1		1								3
Threats and harassment			1										1
Total violations	5	4	5	4	52	37	2	0	3	12	12	0	136



Supporting Journalists' Safety and Well-being

Given the regional context for journalists and the overall status of press freedom in the MENA, the importance of journalists' safety has been one of the major concerns at the Samir Kassir Foundation. These clear and present dangers have presented themselves in various guises, both online and offline.

As a means of addressing journalists' safety and security, a comprehensive, online safety training, delivered by specialized British firm Silk Road Training, was set up to provide a powerful learning experience which may help raise global safety standards and develop the skills of journalists living and working in hostile environments. Designed to assist journalists in overcoming their challenges during the work day, the online course offered a combination of structured and self-paced learning. This training course was organized in partnership with the [ACOS Alliance](#), [Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism \(ARIJ\)](#), [Frontline Freelance Register \(FFR\)](#), [Gulf Center for Human Rights \(GCHR\)](#), [Maharat Foundation](#), and [Marie Colvin Journalists' Network \(MCJN\)](#).

Furthermore, SKF's unique Safe Hosting Program has aimed to help journalists who face life threatening risks in their home countries. Today, the program has helped nearly 20 journalists from Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, and Iraq, providing hosted journalists with contacts with media outlets to keep them working, alongside training opportunities and psychological assistance.

As another sign of SKF's unwavering support for journalists, the Foundation used the Media Recovery Fund (MRF), which was created just a few days after the August 4, 2020 blast, not only in order to help journalists in distress, but also to contribute to a stronger and more accountable media industry that can lead to the vital changes of which Lebanon is in need. In other words, this requires a media environment which is better equipped to hold those in power accountable for their actions, ask the right questions, and develop its capabilities to investigate and reflect citizens' needs.

With the closing of MRF on January 31, 2022, SKF has received and disbursed an amount of **USD 764,627** for the purposes of helping journalists and media face the multi-pronged crises and develop a stronger culture of accountability.



Human resources: USD 105,122 (13.7%)



Translation and admin costs: USD 24,353 (3.2%)



Web development services: USD 11,500 (1.5%)



Pillar 1 (medical support): USD 4,196 (0.5%)



Pillar 2 (equipment): USD 150,478 (19.7%)

Equipment for individual journalists: USD 31,689

Equipment for independent media: USD 118,788



Pillar 3 (damage repair): USD 43,327 (5.7%)



Pillar 4 (psycho-social support): USD 3,075 (0.4%)



Pillar 5 (investigative journalism): USD 302,240 (39.5%)

Investigative journalism grants: USD 288,585

Capacity building for investigative journalism: USD 13,655



Pillar 6 (livelihood support): USD 95,336 (12.5%)

Health insurance: USD 30,489

Tuition fees: USD 54,561

Housing loans: USD 10,286



Facebook advertising credits: USD 25,000 (3.3%)

Support has been provided to a total of **98 journalists**, media professionals and direct family members, in addition to equipment and/or financial support for **17 independent, online media and two television stations**, as well as a capacity building session for **16 investigative journalists**.

The Media Recovery Fund's Success Factors

1. Local Leadership

- A Lebanese organization at the center of program design, outreach to partners, and contact with stakeholders.
- A locally-designed project, built on years of engagement with journalists and the media sector.
- Evidence that support can be garnered without having to respond to traditional calls for proposals and follow the rigid processes imposed by North-based and international organizations.
- Importance of credibility, transparency, and years of credible programmatic and financial records.

2. Context-Based Emergency Response

- Program based on a detailed and thorough mapping of damages following the August 4, 2020 Beirut Port blast.
- Direct response to emergency medical, psycho-social and damage-related needs.
- Leveraging the international support and solidarity to induce medium- to long-term impact in the Lebanese media sector.
- Program taking place amid the most severe economic crisis hitting Lebanon, including journalists and the media sector.

3. Wide, Coordinated International Interest

- International financial partners and 10 support/capacity-building partners responded to SKF's call in less than three weeks.
- Trust in SKF's response triggered international partners to place SKF at the center of their initiative and minimize publicity requirements.
- Trigger for the first-ever, organic coordination process among all donors involved in MRF, facilitated by the Global Forum for Media Development.
- The coordination process built upon the MRF example to tackle, progressively, other essential media development and press freedom interventions in Lebanon, which involve multiple local and international players.

4. Solid Foundations for Independent Media

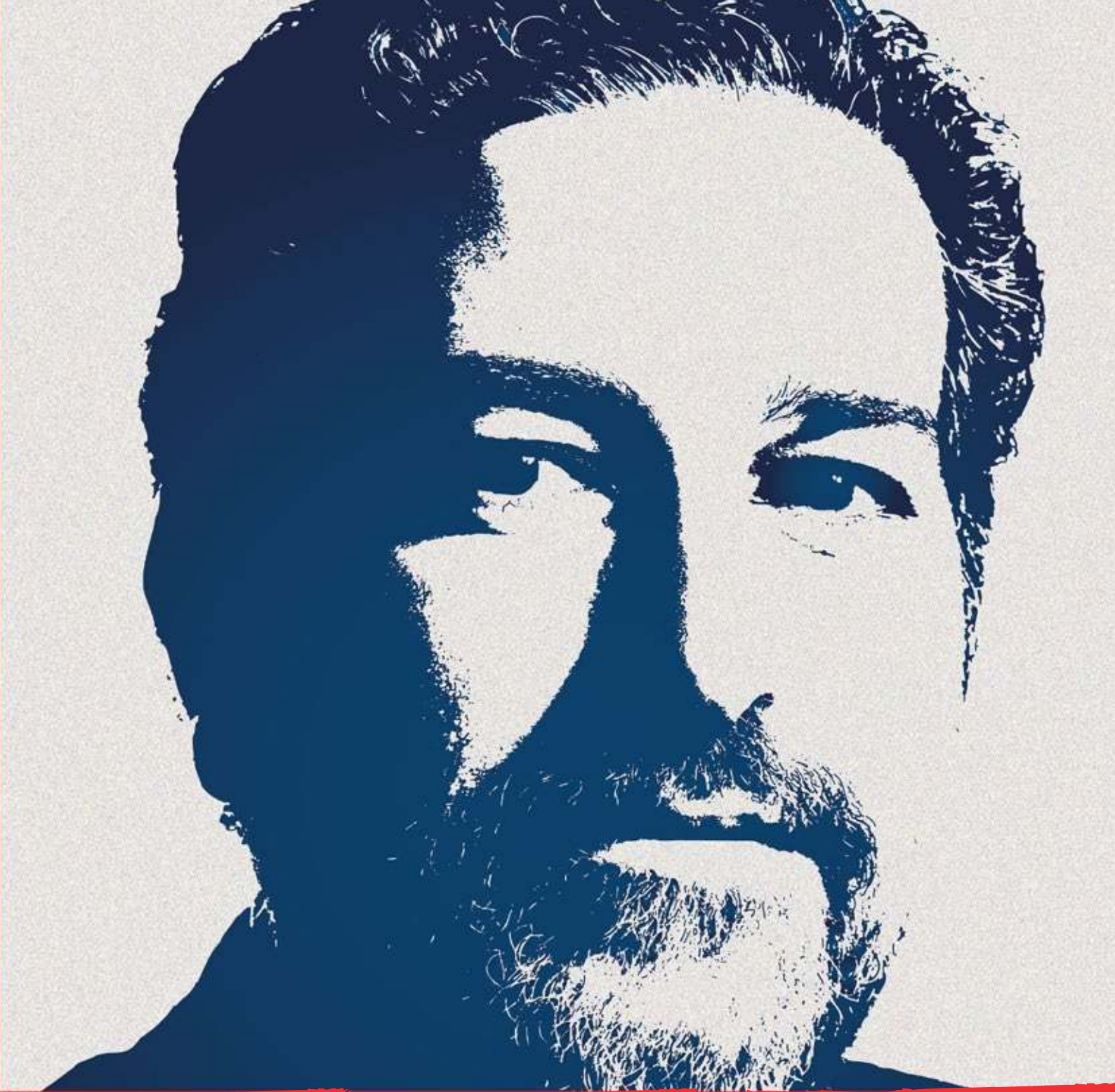
- Nascent, independent media received emergency support to rebuild destroyed offices and replace damaged equipment.
- Independent media also supported within a vision to promote accountability-oriented journalism and increase the pressure on politically co-opted traditional media
- Support to independent media through the largest ever equipment support initiative: at a time of currency devaluation, 17 independent media received most of their filming, sound, and editing equipment needs.
- Allowing independent media to focus upcoming grants on content production and journalists' remuneration.

5. Cultural Shift in Traditional Media

- Traditional media outlets placed under the "positive dilemma" of being (financially) rewarded for high-quality, investigative and/or accountability-oriented content.
- Increase in the consistency of accountability-oriented content on LBCI, Al Jadeed and MTV.

6. Strongest Support Signal to Individual Journalists

- Individual journalists working for traditional, non-internationally funded media, get their salaries in Lebanese pound. Severely hit by the financial crisis and currency devaluation.
- Severe loss in purchasing power leads to:
 - ◆ Loss of motivation for and interest in higher quality production
 - ◆ Risk of co-optation by business and political interest holders
 - ◆ Higher appeal for emigration and working for wealthier (albeit less free) outlets
- Direct financial support reduces the commitment of employers to their legal and contractual duties
- Instead, focus on alleviating the pressure by providing:
 - ◆ Tuition fees for journalists' children
 - ◆ Private health insurance for journalists and their family members
 - ◆ Housing bank loan repayment for journalists' apartments
 - ◆ Reconstruction of journalists' houses and replacement of cars damaged by the blast



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