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Global Forum for Media Development
Mapping of media assistance and journalism support programmes in the Levant region

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CONTENTS

PURPOSE

This mapping of media development projects and the funding environment in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria between 2020 and 2024 was conducted at a time when funding for media development and journalism in the Levant and Middle East region was undergoing significant challenges, not least the Trump administration's decision to pause U.S. foreign aid, pending review. The mapping was initially presented at the Global Forum For Media Development (GFMD) regional workshop for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in December 2024. Participant feedback, as well as subsequent events related to development funding, have further informed the report.

The mapping provides an overview of programmes and funding to support future discussions between donors, media support organisations, media organisations, and journalists about needs and challenges related to implementing future projects in the region. We hope that the data and analysis provided will encourage and assist all stakeholders – donors, implementers and practitioners – to develop relevant and coherent strategies and approaches which are informed through localisation, coordination and research.

METHODOLOGY

How did we collect the data: The mapping was developed in collaboration with media and civil society stakeholders who are active in the Levant and MENA region. Information was gathered by the GFMD Secretariat and two GFMD consultants, as well as through consultation with members and donor organisations.

I**nformation sources:** Sources included open source platforms such as D-portal and the websites of different stakeholders who make funding data publicly available, namely bilateral and philanthropic donors such as the European Union (EU) and Open Society Foundations (OSF). The report also relied on additional significant information contributed directly by implementing partners and regional and national organisations who have also been involved in implementing media and journalism support programmes.

Limitations: This report is an effort to provide a general analysis of media support funding in the five selected countries between 2020-2024. Please note that there is no definitive way to confirm the completeness of the obtained data. We have relied on the publicly available records, as well as on contributions from relevant organisations and GFMD partners. It may thus inadvertently exclude or limit information related to organisations that do not work directly with GFMD or its partners and overrepresent programmes implemented by them. Overlap might also possible in cases where smaller calls for sub-grants may have been part of larger multiannual media support programmes and

where funding may have been regional in scope. It was also difficult to assess what proportion of larger multi-themed projects went to support media development, media and freedom of expression.

Our research was able to include some analysis of grants provided by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) between 2020-2024. Financial information on NED support is included in the overall budget section of the report.

However, this report does not analyse the NED information in depth as the type of support offered by NED is different from that of other donors. Similarly, the report includes data supplied by the International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM) which is regional and included some of the countries covered by this mapping. It has therefore been included in the overall budget.

The European Endowment for Democracy (EED) was unable to provide access to financial data for the report due to sensitivity issues. Details on the number of EED programmes by country are available in the Annex of this report. The issue of sensitivity also impacted on the provision of data for a number of programmes which were active in one of the countries. The analysis has been developed to accommodate such sensitivities and ensure that no harm is done to anyone involved in any of the projects or in this report.

The mapping focused on the following key aspects of analysis, based on an earlier mapping report and work which was conducted by the GFMD in the Western Balkans.

- **Geographical distribution of the funding** - whether the funding was allocated to individual countries or distributed across multiple countries in the region and what countries were the largest recipients of funding.
- **Programme descriptions** - the main themes and problems such programmes seek to address.
- **Type of funding** - is it core funding to be used for all organisational expenses and building capacity or is it defined by programme objectives, goals and needs to

- be implemented within a certain thematic area and with strict budgetary lines.
- **Amounts of funding** allocated to media assistance programmes. We also provided an overall budget estimate.
- **Sources of funding** - who are the donors providing support, how many programmes they fund, and the amounts they allocate for support.
- **Implementing organisations** - who are the organisations implementing the programmes and/ or distributing funds to media organisations and journalists.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- **Governmental funding is still the main source of funding in the region** which suggests that developing the possibility for alternative revenue sources remains an area which needs support;
- **The United States (U.S.) is the main supporter of media development programming in the five countries**, followed by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and then the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA);
- **Media components of larger development programming are still critical aspects of funding support to the region** and further work needs to be done to embed the importance of media development and journalism support as part of a wider support to democratic and civil society development;

- **Capacity building support is still dominant as is democracy, human rights and freedom of expression programming** while financial sustainability is less supported, although this category has seen the most growth in terms of the number of programmes over the last 5 years;
- Despite apparent recognition of the importance of localisation, **the bulk of support is still being offered from donors via European and American media development organisations**.

Geographical distribution of the funding

The geographical focus chosen by GFMD in the Middle East was Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and the Syrian Arab Republic. A total of 91 programmes across the targeted countries were funded between 2020 and 2024. The majority of programmes (69%) were country-specific, with regional programmes (13%) and global programming (18%) making up the remainder. Several regional programmes included activities implemented in the focus countries in addition to other countries outside of the targeted five countries, e.g. Tunisia and Yemen.

Regional: $28.332.143
Global: $40.022.000
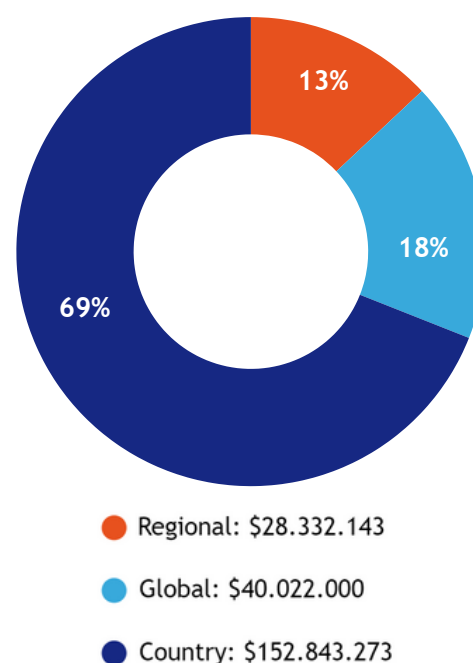Country: $152.843.273

Chart 1: Geographical distribution of funding, 2020-2024*

The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

Taking into account the limitations in collecting information as indicated above, and excluding funding from regional and multiple-country programmes, the total financial revenues on a country basis including revenue from NED programmes are shown in Table 1.

This data suggests that the largest recipient of funds during the period was Palestine. However, it should be noted that over $45 million of that funding was allocated via one FCDO programme, "Empowering Palestinian Institutions and Civil Society in the Occupied Palestinian Territories" which supported civic space. This programme began in July 2023 and is ongoing until March 2031. It also includes support to some legal organisations and political parties. It is unclear what proportion of the funding from the project is going to support media, media development or freedom of expression. According to the FCDO website, 2.93% of the project budget has been spent to date, $1.3 million.

It is important therefore to reflect on the number of ongoing programmes versus those which ended during the time frame analysed. Of the 91 programmes, 37 are currently ongoing in the five targeted countries, amounting to a total revenue of $156.588.764. Palestine receives the highest share, $51.544.479, followed by Jordan $19.800.801, the Syrian Arab Republic $10.451.014, Lebanon $7.626.271, and Iraq $3.725.299. Of these ongoing programmes, it is worth noting that $32.939.978 comes from U.S. State Department foreign aid assistance. This means that over 20% of ongoing revenue for media development in the region is currently on hold due to the current suspension of U.S. foreign assistance.

Ongoing versus completed projects

The data tells us that $41.978.814 of all programme funding, just over 30%, was allocated to projects which were completed by the end of 2024. This becomes more interesting when considering the mapped data which shows that the number of completed projects is higher than the ongoing projects in all of the countries. This suggests that funding and programming might be declining moving forward, although there are, as described above, limitations to this analysis.

Country	Total (USD)	In %
Palestine	$68.220.065	45
Syria	$32.712.732	21
Jordan	$25.067.476	17
Lebanon	$16.952.930	11
Iraq	$9.723.070	6
Total	$152.752.849	100

Table 1: Funding allocation by country (excluding regional funding), 2020-2024*

Country (or territory)	Programme status		Total
	Ended	Ongoing	
Iraq	10	3	13
Jordan	8	6	14
Lebanon	12	9	21
State of Palestine	14	5	19
Syrian Arab Republic	4	4	8
MENA region	0	4	4
Multiple countries	5	6	11
Total	53	37	90

Table 2: Number of programmes by country and status(excluding regional funding), 2020-2024

The mapping identified total funding allocated across the analysed programmes of $221.197.416 million. This amount includes funding from regional programmes which may cover other countries in addition to the countries covered in this analysis.

The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

The main themes of the programmes

The main thematic areas of programming for the mapping were determined by existing themes used on the D-portal and the websites of bilateral donors, foundations and implementing organisations including the EU and OSF. The mapping did not include any analysis of sub-themes such as gender or climate change. Analysis of funding for independent and public interest media organisations was unfortunately a challenge to specifically allocate although it remains highlighted through thematic areas such as financial sustainability and digital innovation in media, content production and investigative journalism.

An analysis of the programme names and descriptions through mapping main or dominant themes revealed that the programmes focus on a range of thematic areas:

- Capacity-building training: The most common theme with 29 programmes, focuses on enhancing local expertise and operational skills.
- Democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression: A priority, with 20 programmes accounting for 38% of ongoing programmes and significant funding allocations.
- Other notable themes include:
  - Disinformation, Media Literacy and Fact-Checking;
  - Financial Sustainability and Digital Innovation for Media;
  - Content Production;
  - Investigative Journalism;
  - Research and Advocacy;
  - Safety of Journalists

The largest thematic category of programmes in terms of a number of programmes focused on capacity-building of both individual journalists and media or civil society organisations. However, this category is broad and includes activities such as verification and fact-checking support, editorial training, and awareness-raising skills development for staff working in human rights defence, advocacy, and freedom of expression. Capacity building support is likely to cross over to other thematic areas although it might have been classed as capacity building, for example disinformation work that might include training.

Programme themes	Number of programmes		
	Programme status		Total
	Ended	Ongoing	
Capacity-building training	21	8	29
Democracy, human rights and freedom of expression	11	9	20
Content production	4	2	6
Disinformation, media literacy and fact-checking	6	2	8
Financial sustainability and digital innovation for media	1	6	7
Investigative journalism	3	3	6
Research and advocacy	4	2	6
Safety of journalists	3	5	8
Total	53	37	90

Table 3: Number of programmes by main themes and status, 2020-2024*

However, when looking at financial revenues, the democracy, human rights and freedom of expression theme is the largest group. This included sub-grants to support independent media and journalists including support of internet freedom, local media organisations, ethical journalism, fostering freedom of expression, media and elections and even content production. Some donors use the theme 'Democracy, Human Rights, and Freedom of Expression' to support independent media within the programme. For example, in Jordan, a democracy programme which included a budget to support independent media provided core funding to a well-established media platform.

The third largest group consisted of programmes focusing on disinformation, media literacy and fact-checking initiatives. These are highly common programmes in the region although the main countries of focus for these projects were Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria.

*The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

Mapping other programmes showed support for the safety of journalists, research and advocacy, and financial sustainability and digital innovation in media. The higher revenue amount allocated towards the safety of journalists compared to the lower number of programmes is due to one large and sensitive programme which was implemented during the time frame studied.

It is also interesting to note that investigative journalism programmes received the lowest amount of funding, although it is likely that some investigative journalism content has been funded through other themes, for example, content production and capacity building.

Programme theme	Programme status		Total
	Ended	Ongoing	
Democracy, human rights and freedom of expression	$18.486.593	$65.740.731	$84.227.324
Capacity-building and training	$13.583.711	$36.930.675	$50.514.386
Safety of journalists	$2.089.157	$41.637.000	$43.726.157
Financial sustainability and digital innovation for Media	$133.350	$14.537.955	$14.671.305
Content production	$4.281.745	$9.800.000	$14.081.745
Disinformation, media literacy and fact-checking	$5.911.666	$370.455	$6.282.121
Research and advocacy	$758.923	$3.313.000	$4.071.923
Investigative journalism	$2.796.576	$825.879	$3.622.455
Total	$47.903.221	$173.155.695	$221.197.416

Table 4: Funding allocation by main themes and status, 2020-2024*

Looking at funding for ended versus ongoing programmes reveals a relatively unchanging picture in terms of future support with the overwhelming majority of funding still attributed to Capacity Building and Democracy, Human Rights and Freedom of Expression. Safety of journalists, however, becomes a much greater funded category over the reporting period compared to previous years.

Similarly, support for financial sustainability is more prominent in ongoing projects which speak to

the OECD-DAC Development Co-operation Principles for Relevant and Effective Support for Media and the Information Environment which call for increased financial support to public interest media. Disinformation, media literacy and fact-checking, as well as investigative journalism, are all to receive less funding moving forward with significantly less money being allocated to these ongoing projects.

The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

Type of funding

It is difficult to ascertain what specific funding types are allocated in the five countries as the majority of funding types are described as grants. **Grants** dominate at 92%, with sub-grants (6%), assistance (1%) and other smaller funding types making up the remaining amount. **Programmatic or project-based funding** accounts for 94% of all programmes,

highlighting the structured nature of interventions and the largely conditional nature of support. Smaller shares are allocated to technical/mentorship support (2%) and content production (3%). This data does not include NED programmes as the type of support is different to other donors.

Amounts of funding

The amount of funding ranges widely from $2000 for the smallest grant to $19.522.543 from Internews for their Sawt programme in Jordan, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (This programme was set to end in 2027 but may be disrupted by the U.S. administration's foreign aid freeze.) The second largest programme, just over $9 million, is an International Media Support (IMS) programme funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) which focuses on developing Syrian media and supporting the production of diverse media content which fulfils professional and ethical norms.

Support largely went to exiled media working with journalists inside Syria due to the security context for media and journalists at the time, although this programme closes at the end of 2025 following the change in governance in Syria. While both programmes provide support to local media and civil society organisations, there is yet to be any evidence of large amounts of programme funding allocated directly to media and not via implementing agencies and international actors.
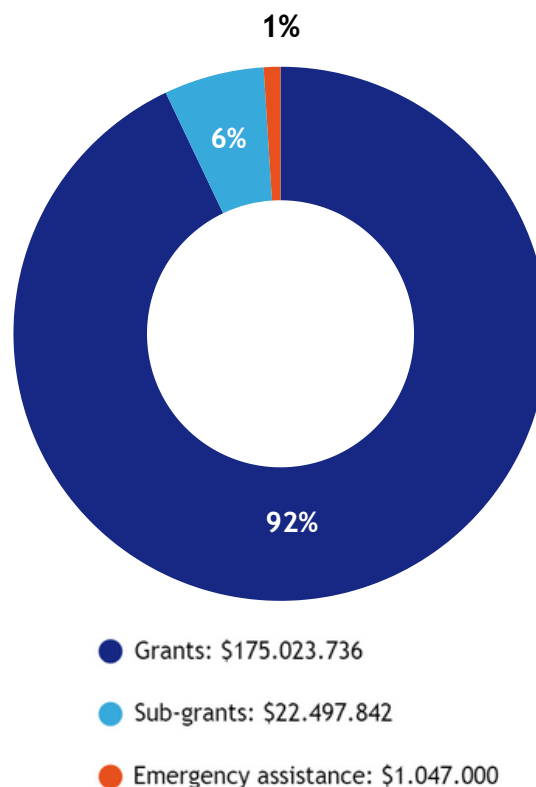

Grants: $175.023.736

Sub-grants: $22.497.842

Emergency assistance: $1.047.000

Chart 2: Type of funding, 2020-2024*

Overall budget

The mapping of funding focused on both completed and ongoing projects. The total programme budget reflects diverse funding mechanisms.

Governmental Contributions: $149.2 million, supporting both individual and multi-stakeholder programming initiatives.

Philanthropic Support: $50.8 million, driving innovation and capacity building.

Multilateral Support: $20.5 million, enhancing regional and global media activities.

The 90 programmes analysed average a duration of 34 months.

Ongoing Programmes: $173.15 million (78% of the total budget).
Ended Programmes: $47.9 million (22%).

The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

Sources of funding

Donors	Total amount of Funding(not including NED or IFPIM)(USD)	Total amount of funding (%)	Number of programmes funded and/or co-funded
USA - US Department of State, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	$75.765.685	36	11
UK - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCDO)	$45.102.933	21	2
Sweden - Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)	$28.019.237	13	8
European Union	$17.503.570	9	7
France - French Development Agency (AFD), French Media Development Agency (CFI)	$12.402.537	7	7
Netherlands - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	$5.749.923	3	7
Canada Global Affairs	$5.531.395	3	1
Open Society Foundations	$4.248.862	2.5	5
Germany - AA, BMZ, GIZ	$2.887.215	1	12
Norway - Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD)	$2.679.228	1	8
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)	$2.670.910	1	2
Denmark - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	$1.172.151	0.5	2
Free Press Unlimited (FPU)	$744.157	0.4	2
United Nations (UNDEF, UNESCO)	$356.000	0.2	3
Porticus Foundation	$167.000	0.07	1
Finland - Ministry of Foreign Affairs	$133.350	0.06	1
International Media Support (IMS)	$125.000	0.05	2
Switzerland - Swiss Agency for Development (SDC)	$85.935	0.03	2
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)	$40.000	0.01	1
RSF (Reporters Without Borders)	$22.000	0.009	1
International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF)	$15.902	0.008	1
Meedam	$10.000	0.004	1
Italy - Italian Agency for Cooperation (AICS)	$2.864	0.001	1
Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA)	$2.000	0.001	1

Table 5: Donor contributions overview*

Based on the mapped information, bilateral organisations fund the largest number of programmes in the region. Mapping shows that they provided funding of $149.2 million, making up the majority of the funding. The highest amount of spending came from the U.S. at $75.765.685. This is particularly significant for the future of media development, given the ongoing review of all foreign aid programs to ensure alignment with U.S. foreign policy under the America First agenda.

The U.S. is followed by the FCDO at $45.102.933 although this amount is only for 2 projects, revealing the vulnerability of that funding should these two projects cease to exist.

SIDA is third, spending $28.019.237, which is also worrying given SIDA's decision to withdraw development aid to Iraq, which makes up over 10% of their spending budget.

Open Society Foundations (OSF) were the largest philanthropic funder at $4.248.862, funding five projects through funding local organisations. This also raises concerns as OSF announced towards the end of 2024 that they are closing their longstanding media programme which provided the bulk of philanthropic support to media development in the region.

The third largest type of donor was multilateral organisations, e.g. the United Nations and World Bank at $20.5 million.

The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

All NED support in the space that can be classed as media development goes towards supporting democracy efforts. Media is one component of this work, providing support for initiatives that promote democratic objectives. NED's total contribution is $5.330.650.

Implementing organisations

The data suggests that many governmental or large intergovernmental bodies provide the funding to implement projects through European and international partners who may subcontract to national organisations or directly through national partners. Some governmental agencies such as the SIDA funded European NGOs to implement projects in one or more of the five countries. SIDA funded International Media Support (IMS), Free Press Unlimited (FPU) and others to implement media projects. These NGOs either contracted or collaborated with local organisations to implement or partly implement the projects.

For example, SIDA funded FPU to implement the Ethical Journalism for Syrian Media phase 2[1] in Syria between 2016 and 2022. SIDA also funded FPU to implement another project, "Cohesion through Independent and Inclusive Media (CIIM)", in Syria between 2021 and 2024.[2] Another ongoing Syria project is funded by SIDA and implemented by the FPU: Cohesion through Independent and Inclusive Media (CIIM), Old Strategy (2021-2025).[3]

SIDA funded IMS to implement the project "Independent Media Development Programme in Iraq 2023-2026 - IMS media support to Iraq"[4] which provided core funding for independent Iraqi media. Another ongoing Palestine project funded by SIDA is "IMS programme Strategy 2022-2024 for the Occupied Palestinian Territory"[5]. The project is expected to end in June 2025 as SIDA have announced that they are phasing out bilateral development aid with Iraq. Some donors provided direct funding to national organisations to implement projects or activities.
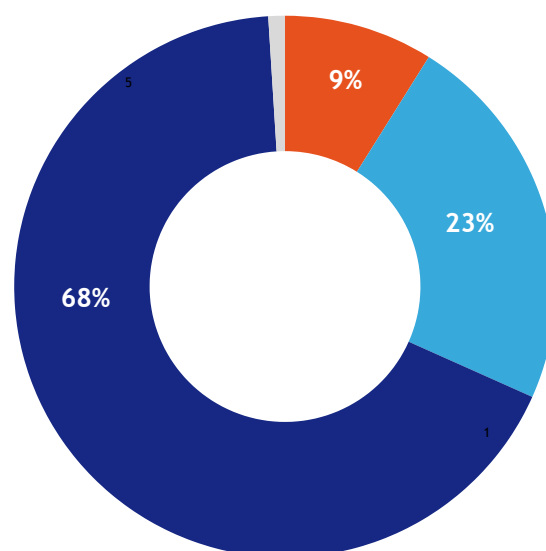
It is interesting to note that NED funding to the media bucks the overall trend in terms of country support, with Iraqi and Syrian organisations receiving the most amount of funding over the five years.

- Multilateral: $20.495.480
- Philanthropic: $50.386.769
- Governmental: $149.268.167
- Other: $1.047.000

Chart 3: Distribution of Media Development Funding by Donor Type*

For example, UNESCO provided the Samir Kassir Foundation with direct funds to implement a Research and Advocacy project. The project lasted for five months. Other donors provided funds to international implementing organisations who then sub-fund to local organisations. For example, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded Internews to implement "Amplifying Diverse Voices in Lebanon", 2022-2023. Internews allocated this funding to local Lebanese NGO 'Maharat Foundation' to implement the project.[6]

The amounts include both funding spent between 2020 and 2024, as well as funding committed during this period that is planned for distribution beyond 2024

1. https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html#view=act&aid=SE-0-SE-6-52030294-5203029401

2. https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html?country_code=SY&reporting_ref=SE-0&sector_code=15163%2C15153%2C22030&year_min=2020&year_max=2024#view=act&aid=SE-0-SE-6-14702-14702A0102

3. https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html?country_code=SY&reporting_ref=SE-0&sector_code=15163%2C15153%2C22030&year_min=2020&year_max=2024#view=act&aid=SE-0-SE-6-14702-14702A0101

4. https://www.mediasupport.org/where/#iraq

5. https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html?country_code=PS&reporting_ref=SE-0&sector_code=15163%2C15153%2C22030&year_min=2020&year_max=2024#view=act&aid=SE-0-SE-6-15353-15353A0101

6. https://d-portal.org/ctrack.html?country_code=LB&reporting_ref=XM-DAC-7&sector_code=15163%2C15153%2C22030&year_min=2020&year_max=2024#view=act&aid=XM-DAC-7-PPR-4000004511

CONCLUSIONS

This mapping was conducted in preparation for the GFMD Levant Regional Meeting on Media Support (18 December 2024). The mapping addresses critical areas in media and civil society development, with a strong emphasis on countries facing political instability and societal challenges. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the OECD Development Cooperation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment. These Principles aspire to encourage development cooperation providers and other actors to improve the relevance and effectiveness of their support and policies in preserving, protecting, and promoting public interest media and information integrity in the following ways:

1. **Ensure that assistance does no harm to public interest media.**
2. **Increase financial and other forms of support.**
3. **Take a whole-of-system perspective.**
4. **Strengthen local leadership and ownership.**
5. **Improve coordination of support.**
6. **Invest in knowledge, research, and learning.**

For example, Principle 1 "**Ensuring that assistance does no harm to public interest media**" may initially appear to be supported by programs focused on democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression. However, many programs in this category also support other development goals without guaranteeing adherence to journalistic standards of quality, professionalism, and independence. To address this, it is crucial to involve more local organisations in program development and implementation, ensuring that local interests and values are integrated at all levels.

The second principle emphasises the need to "**increase financial and other forms of support to public interest media and the information environment to strengthen democratic resilience."**

Our mapping indicates a rise in funding aimed at media financial sustainability. However, this is offset by evidence of many donors and organisations withdrawing support for media and journalism in the MENA region. While overall funding levels appear to be increasing, this may be due to larger projects that support civil society as a whole, including media. It is difficult to determine how much of this funding is specifically allocated to media support. Additionally, media funding embedded within broader civil society programs is less likely to provide core or organisational support.

Countries undergoing political crises or transitions require increased funding for media projects to sustain public interest content and contribute to democratic processes. The withdrawal or suspension of donor support in the region runs counter to this principle.

In line with principle 4: "**Strengthen local leadership and ownership**" the data, although likely limited, found that only four local or regional organisations received funding directly to implement programmes. Clearly, many donors continue to fund international organisations to implement large programmes in the targeted countries. The inclusion of local NGOs is needed not only to ensure that media support is relevant and addresses local needs but also to strengthen local leadership and ownership and develop best practices and good governance at a local level. This will also create trust and encourage participation in the programmes.

In relation to Principle 5: "**Improve coordination of support to the media and information environment**", we identified that only 2 out of 90 mapped programmes are funded by more than one donor organisation. They were both based in Lebanon and implemented by a Lebanese local NGO, Samir Kassir Foundation. Cooperation among donors would make funding more effective and efficient and would help avoid duplication of programmes.

Principle 6 calls for actors to "**Invest in knowledge, research, and learning**". The report recommends that donors increase their support for research and learning to find new ways of strengthening public interest media, including addressing digital advances and challenges, as well as combatting growing threats to viability and sustainability. This also can be assisted by analysing lessons learned from previous projects and programmes. These findings can be shared with other actors involved in planning and supporting future interventions.

During the MENA Donors Priorities and Challenges meeting, a closed session held during the ARIJ24 conference, it was expressed that:

"When funding is cut, organisations getting killed and future long-term core support is the only thing that can save the field".

We call on the donor and media development communities to continue to support media and journalism in the MENA region at this critical time. Without support for public interest media and related endeavours, the possibilities for democracy, meaningful citizen engagement and participation in social and political processes become even more contested.

AUTHORS

- **Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet** is a senior researcher with over 20 years of experience within higher education. He has regularly worked as policy adviser to the European Union and its Member States on security and police cooperation issues. He also has developed a solid experience in monitoring and evaluation of aid programmes and projects related to conflict prevention and the strengthening of civil society in conflict-prone, fragile and complex environments.

- **Ghias Al Jundi** is an experienced researcher with over twenty years of experience working on freedom of expression and media issues in the MENA region. Ghias is the co-founder of the independent fact-checking Fareq Platform.

- **Aida Al-Kaisy** is a senior human rights researcher focusing on freedom of expression and media development topics. Aida is the co-founder of Jummar, a Iraqi independent media platform. She also teaches at SOAS University of London where she completed her PhD.