GLOBAL MEDIA DEFENCE FUND
The number of assaulted or murdered journalists has steadily increased during the last decade – between 2010 and September 2020, UNESCO condemned the killing of over 900 journalists. The trend of widespread impunity for the crimes committed against them persists: nine out of 10 murders committed against journalists remain unpunished.

The exercise of an independent, plural and free journalism is being hampered by a wide range of attacks and violations faced by journalists, including threats, harassment, economic pressures and a lack of access to specialized legal assistance – among others. The resulting self-censorship deprives society of information and has a lasting impact on press freedom.

As the specialized UN agency in charge of promoting freedom of expression and press freedom, and the global coordinator of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, UNESCO works closely together with Member States, media organizations and other key stakeholders to create a free and safe environment for journalists.
The **Global Media Defence Fund** is a Multi-Partner Trust Fund/Program established within the framework of the *Global Campaign for Media Freedom*, thanks to initial donations by United Kingdom and Canada.

Administered by UNESCO, the Fund is a responsive and effective mechanism to support not-for-profit civil society organizations working on the ground to implement innovative programming for **enhancing media protection** and **improving the access of journalists to specialized and gender-sensitive legal assistance**. The Fund operates through four key approaches or outputs:

- **Output 1: Fostering** international legal cooperation, as well as the sharing and implementation of good practices to promote the defense of journalists under attack;

- **Output 2: Reinforcing** the operationalization of national protection mechanisms and peer support networks, to ensure journalists’ rapid access to legal assistance, bolster their defense and enhance their safety, taking into account the gendered nature of the threats they face;

- **Output 3: Supporting** investigative journalism that contributes to reduced impunity for crimes against journalists, and enhancing the safety of those conducting this line of work;

- **Output 4: Enhancing** structures for fostering strategic litigation in order to protect environments where the legal frameworks are conducive to an independent, free and pluralistic media ecosystem.
The Fund’s outputs are achieved through joint cooperation with relevant implementing partners, including specialized NGOs, media associations, human rights defenders, investigative journalism networks, academic institutions and other not-for-profit entities – as well as the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The first Call for Partnerships received 110 proposals from not-for-profit organizations from all regions of the world and targeting over 50 countries. Among the 44 preselected proposals, 17 are situated in Africa and a majority come from the Global South. More than half of the preselected proposals (25) are from national/grassroots organizations, while seven of them are from regional entities and a dozen from global specialized NGOs.

Preselected projects, standing out for their original and innovative approach, range from supporting legal clinics, lawyers’ networks and other pro-bono media defence mechanisms within journalists’ associations and newsrooms, to fostering strategic litigation before regional courts and international fora to defend against laws and judicial practice which curtail media freedom. Some of these projects seek to create legal protection mechanisms specifically aimed at women journalists, free-lancers, or press cartoonists. The project proposals received under this first Call have covered a wide scope of activities to help advance the Outputs of the Global Media Defence Fund. One project tackles the growing phenomenon of “libel tourism”, which is used to bankrupt journalists or media houses under the weight of excessive legal costs.
Another project supports collaborative investigative journalism to continue and publish the work of journalists facing threats, prison or murder.

Due to the high number of eligible, innovative and quality proposals, it was decided to double the amount to be distributed in the form of small grants, in order to be in the position to support more organizations within the available resources, and in line with a responsive programming approach. Gender equality was mainstreamed in all project proposals preselected for funding.

The Fund contributes to achieve the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. It complements and synergizes with projects implemented under UNESCO’s regular program and with other extra-budgetary modalities supporting UNESCO’s work on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, including with the UNESCO initiative with security forces and the judiciary to support their role in protecting and ensuring an environment conducive to freedom of expression, as well as the Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, and the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC).

First Call for Partnerships
110 proposals
50 countries
In its first Call for Partnerships, the Fund received numerous submissions from not-for-profit organizations from all regions.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE FUND

The Global Media Defence Fund is currently open to voluntary contributions from Member States and other donors. All contributions are pooled into a single, special account, and expenditures are not linked to specific donations. UNESCO will provide a consolidated narrative and financial report on the use of the pooled resources to all donors.

The following donors have pledged have already pledged a contribution to the GMDF:

UK • CANADA • GERMANY • CZECH REPUBLIC
LATVIA • LUXEMBOURG • ESTONIA • CYPRUS • SERBIA • JAPAN

CONTACT & INFORMATION

For further information on the GMDF:
https://en.unesco.org/global-media-defence-fund

If you wish to pledge a contribution to support the GMDF, please contact:

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#ProtectJournalists
#EndImpunity
#defendmediafreedom

Learn more about UNESCO’s monitoring of cases of killing of journalists:
https://en.unesco.org/themes/safety-journalists/observatory

For more information, please visit:
https://en.unesco.org/global-media-defence-fund

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