

A light gray world map is centered in the background of the page. Two thick, wavy lines, one blue and one red, curve across the map from the top corners towards the bottom corners.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF AFGHAN JOURNALISTS

FEBRUARY 2024
GERMANY

Needs Assessment of Afghan Journalists



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	02-03
2. METHODOLOGY	04-05
3. FINDINGS	06-12
3.1 Journalism and Exile	08-09
3.2 Afghan Journalists' Needs	11
3.3 Specialized Training in Journalism	12
3.4 Equipment	12
4. RECOMMENDATIONS	13-15
4.1 Professional Training Initiatives	14
4.2 Training Delivery Methods	14
4.3 Equipment Provision	14
4.4 Support for Media Establishment and Sustainability	14
4.5 Coordination and Collaboration	14
4.6 Gender-Sensitive Support	14
4.7 Promotion of Media Literacy	15
5. CONCLUSION	16-17
6. TABLES	07-12
Table 1: Journalism and Exile	7
Table 2: Afghan Journalists' Needs	8
Table 3: Specialized Training in Journalism	11
Table 4: Equipment	12

01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prior to the regime change in August 2021, the media landscape in Afghanistan was heralded as a success story. However, with the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRoA) and the subsequent ascension of the Taliban in Kabul, a significant transformation occurred. This transition led to a marked decline in media freedom, as evidenced by Afghanistan's descent from 122nd to 152nd in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranking. Furthermore, of the 543 media outlets in operation, 231 ceased functioning, resulting in the displacement of 6,400 journalists. Many of these professionals sought refuge abroad, contributing to a considerable brain drain within the journalistic community.

Consequently, these developments have engendered an acute informational void, impeding both internal and external access to the news. The erosion of accurate reporting and critical journalism has become increasingly apparent. Nevertheless, Afghan journalists in exile have exhibited a steadfast commitment to their craft, expressing a keen interest in mitigating this gap through various means. This underscores the latent potential to sustain informed discourse among Afghans, both domestically and abroad. However, failure to capitalize on this potential promptly may result in its dissipation, as media practitioners may redirect their efforts toward alternative employment avenues in their resettlement destinations.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that international media assistance organizations and governments have yet to delineate clear priorities regarding support for Afghan media and journa-

lists, both within the country and in exile. In response to this exigency, the Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization (AJSO), in collaboration with the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit (FNF), has initiated efforts to identify areas requiring improvement to empower journalists to meet the evolving demands and standards of the media landscape. This initiative aims to address and bridge the widening information gap prevalent within the Afghan community, primarily within Afghanistan but also extending to diaspora populations.

Through an online questionnaire, several key areas for intervention have been identified, including professional training in journalism and media management, language proficiency enhancement, provision of resources and support for Afghan journalists in exile, as well as bolstering media infrastructure both domestically and among exiled communities. These areas serve as foundational pillars upon which targeted interventions can be built, with the flexibility to further refine strategies as necessitated by evolving circumstances.

In light of the critical juncture facing Afghan media, AJSO emphasizes the imperative for the international community to refocus its attention and sustain support for this vital sector. Amidst competing global priorities, there is a risk of Afghanistan's media successes being overshadowed and neglected. Therefore, concerted efforts are warranted to preserve and nurture the resilience of Afghan journalism in the face of ongoing challenges.

02

METHODOLOGY



METHODOLOGY

In the aftermath of the events unfolding in August 2021, including the fall of Kabul, a notable number of journalists departed from Afghanistan. While some were able to secure evacuation to foreign countries, others found themselves in a state of uncertainty and remained either in Afghanistan or neighboring countries, including Pakistan and Iran. Nevertheless, these individuals remain deeply committed to their journalistic endeavors. Concurrently, a fresh wave of aspiring journalists, predominantly young, has entered the media sphere in Afghanistan. Against the backdrop of shifting work environments and the evolving landscape of media technology, the Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization (AJSO) initiated a foundational survey to learn the genuine needs of journalists. This research primarily aims to delineate the pressing requirements and priorities facing Afghan journalists, with a particular emphasis on those currently residing outside Afghanistan while still considering the perspectives of their counterparts within the country. Additionally, the study endeavors to shed light on the information reception and dissemination practices of media practitioners, as well as their perspectives on the state of Afghan media in exile, in order to identify effective avenues for delivering news information to audiences. While the precise extent of journalist displacement following the regime change remains unclear, records indicate that 6,400 journalists have lost their employment (RSF, 2021). The exact size of the target population remains undetermined. A self-administered questionnaire comprising 30 inquiries in two vernacular languages (Pashto and Dari) was distributed and remained accessible for a duration of two weeks from December 30, 2023, to

January 13, 2024. To optimize outreach, AJSO leveraged its journalist network, notwithstanding concerns expressed by journalists in Afghanistan regarding the saturation of recent surveys with minimal discernible outcomes from implementing or donor organizations. Furthermore, RSF and JX Fund contributed by disseminating survey links through their respective networks. Employing a snowball sampling technique, the survey garnered responses from 311 participants, predominantly (88%) residing abroad, with a minority (12%) situated within Afghanistan.

Data collection was facilitated through the Google Doc online platform, and participation in the questionnaire was entirely voluntary. Notably, specific identifiable information, such as names and surnames, was deliberately omitted to create an environment conducive to candid expression, recognizing that individuals are more inclined to share their thoughts when assured of privacy or anonymity. Respondents were provided with the opportunity to provide suggestions and comments regarding their circumstances and experiences. Subsequent analysis of data was conducted utilizing Microsoft Office Excel.

Although the utilization of online channels for conducting a foundational survey may not be considered optimal, given the diverse settlement patterns of journalists and resource constraints, it was deemed the most viable and efficacious approach available. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that this methodology imposes certain limitations on the study's findings.

03

FINDINGS



FINDINGS

There were 311 participants, with an average of 8 years of experience in journalism (43% with more than 10 years, 35% with less than 10 years, and 18% with less than 5 but more than 2 years of experience). Around 88% were abroad and 12% in Afghanistan during the survey time. Although a few more people marked their current location as Afghanistan, their answers to the other questions, i.e., number of years and life in exile, show they are outside. Therefore, they were considered abroad. Regarding their current location, Germany is leading. It hosts a significant number (25%), followed by Australia (24%), Pakistan (18%), Iran (14%), and the remaining are in other European countries, including France and Spain, and North America (the United States and Canada), and other neighboring countries of Afghanistan (India and Central Asian countries).

PERCENTAGE OF AFGHAN JOURNALISTS LIVE IN EXILE

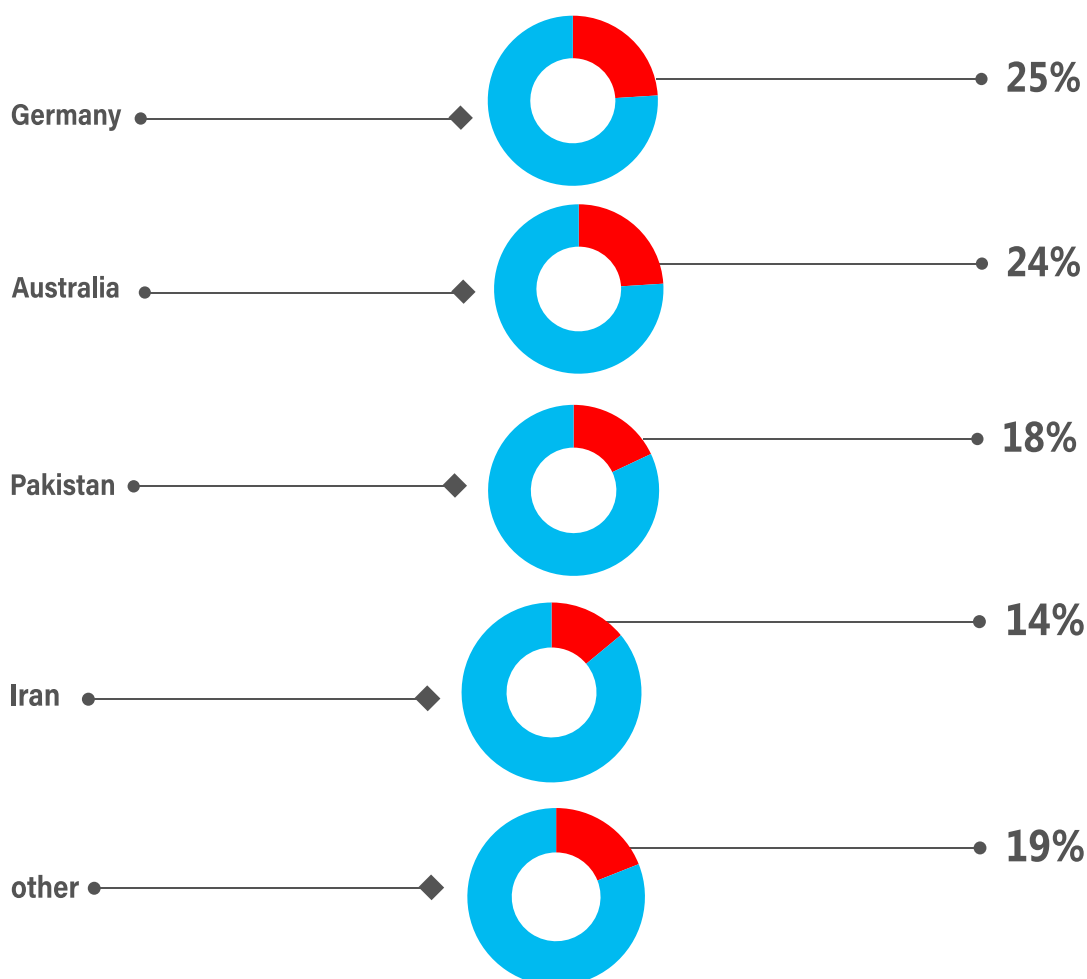


Table 1: Percentage of Afghan journalists live in Exile

About one-fifth (19.9%) of the respondents were female. Regarding age, almost half of them (47,8%) were between 20 and 30, about 40% were between 30 and 40, and the remaining were above 40 years. Around 56 % of surveyees said that they left Afghanistan two years ago, and about 26% responded that they lived in exile for one year.

Journalism and Exile

The respondents consider life and working environment challenging in exile. However, they generally (97,5%) remain committed and ready to work in journalism. Nevertheless, 2,5% said they no longer want to work as a reporter and plan to change profession. Currently, about 40% of the journalists still work in exile, and they dominantly (64%) focus on Afghanistan and the people there; their second priority (31%) is Afghans living abroad, and international audiences are in the third category (21%). Some created and run social media accounts; around 17% work with international media focusing on Afghanistan (i.e., VOA, Azadi, BBC, DW) and recently established or relocated Afghan media in exile (i.e., Afghanistan International, Amu TV, 8 AM, etc.).

Among the jobless, 74% of the surveyees said they couldn't find work, and about 21% mentioned that they are not ready or lack the qualifications for today's media market. Responding to multiple-choice questions related to the challenges against their professional work, 72% of the journalists marked not suitable working conditions and environment as their top challenges. Language is their second top (44%) challenge. In addition to that, 20% mentioned integration and bureaucracy, and 9% said lack of expertise as their third and fourth top challenges, respectively. Unemployment seems to be a general challenge that journalists, both inside and outside the country, mentioned. However, the unsuitable working conditions were mainly associated with countries like Iran and Pakistan (or third countries). They also reported repeated and unnecessary disturbances created by local security authorities. Language and integration were associated with European countries, the US, Canada, and Australia.

CHALLENGES FOR AFGHAN JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

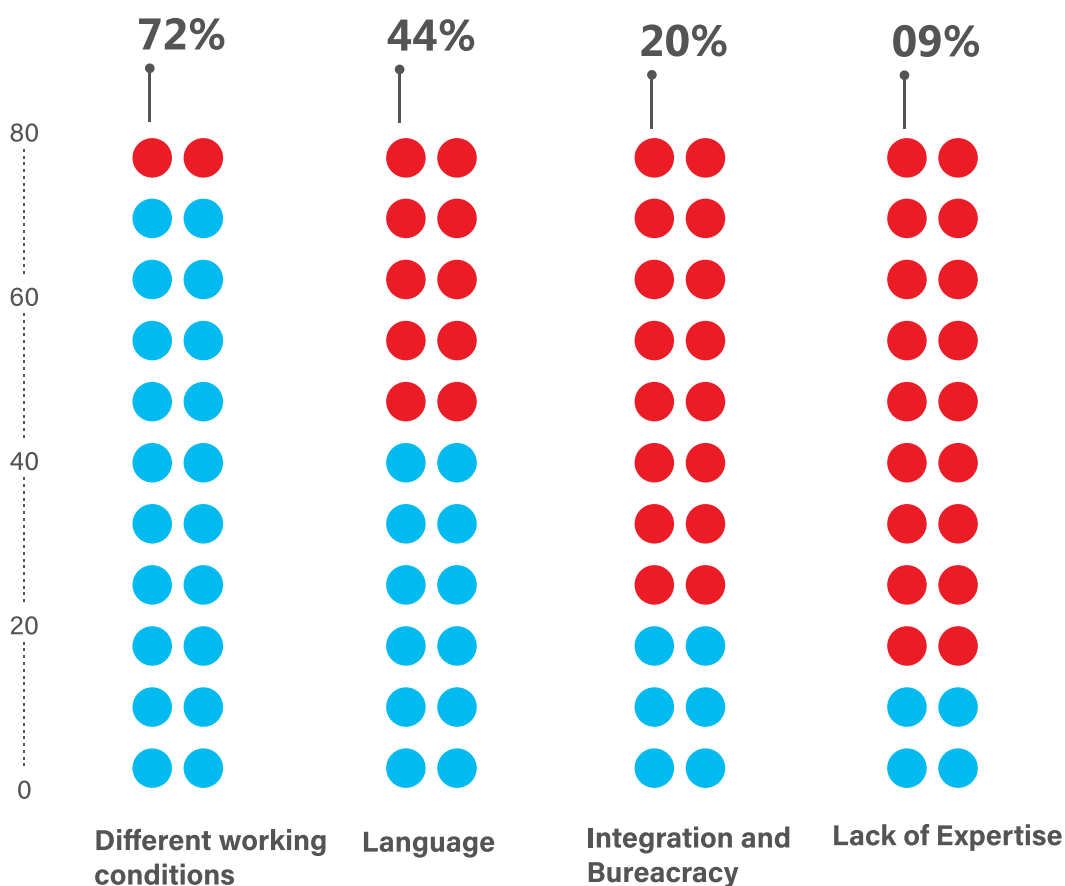


Table 2: Challenges for Afghan journalists in Exile

Asked similar questions regarding best practices to disseminate accurate information to Afghans both inside and outside Afghanistan, they prefer and value almost equally three types of media: Afghan media in exile (62.1%), international media with focus or for Afghanistan (61.6%) and producing media content on social media (59.6%) whereas media in Afghanistan are the least preferred (30.3%) channel they marked. It is noteworthy here again that the respondents are dominantly (88%) Afghan journalists currently in exile.

How they receive accurate information, the surveyees relied primarily on international media (57%), social media (50%), media in Afghanistan (43%), independent journalists (35%), and media in exile (26%); this is despite the fact that 94.6% said they trust and would like to work with Afghan media in exile and believe such media have positive impacts on their audiences.

Journalists were also asked if they wanted to share specific suggestions, points, and ideas in a comments section. We noticed **three categories** of comments based on their current location and geography: **a) settled in exile** (mostly from European countries, Australia, the USA, and Canada); **b) in transition** (Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian countries, and India), and **c) in Afghanistan**. Again, employment opportunities were echoed by all (a, b, and c). Besides employment, settled journalists or category (a) asked for more support to establish new and expand current media in exile, accelerate integration, and provide training to help enable them to work as journalists. Category (b) specifically requested more attention and cooperation from international media assistance organizations to raise their voices and hardships vis-à-vis local security authorities and countries who have been processing their cases. They specifically asked for financial support as they were running out of money and speeding up the visa process. Journalists in Afghanistan or category (c) demanded international support for media that still operate inside the country because they said funds and financial resources are draining, and media will further dwindle unless international assistance organizations intervene.

Multiple comments also sought particular attention, though without more clarification, for female journalists both inside and outside the country, as they have suffered more than their male counterparts. Establishing and supporting psychological or post-trauma centers was another suggestion. Around 88% believe the media is and shall be supported by governments and organizations that believe in and champion freedom of speech.

Although resilient, 58% of the respondents said they see their future professional careers as full of challenges, and 14% believe they may need help to work as journalists. Most surveyees know the recently established media outlets in exile, and online media and television enjoy relatively great popularity among others. Besides that, the journalists in exile seem connected with each other through multiple groups on social media and messaging apps. However, they still need a more robust network where they can share opportunities and help each other access the required information for their professional work.

AFGHAN JOURNALISTS' NEEDS



AFGHAN JOURNALISTS' NEEDS

Almost all journalists require training, albeit in different areas. Category (a: settled in exile), around 87% need to improve their journalism expertise to work in today's media market. When asked if they are interested and want to have training programs, they expressed great interest in attending such training. Their interest was higher (97%) than their needs (87%); we asked two different questions: a) they are interested, and b) if they need. Professional training is the most demanding; language courses, media establishment, and management coaching and skills follow it. In multiple-choice questions, 72% chose professional training programs, 57% chose language, 37% preferred to learn about establishing and managing media outlets, and 4% wanted to attend training about how to change and find jobs in other fields.

TRAININGS JOURNALISTS NEED

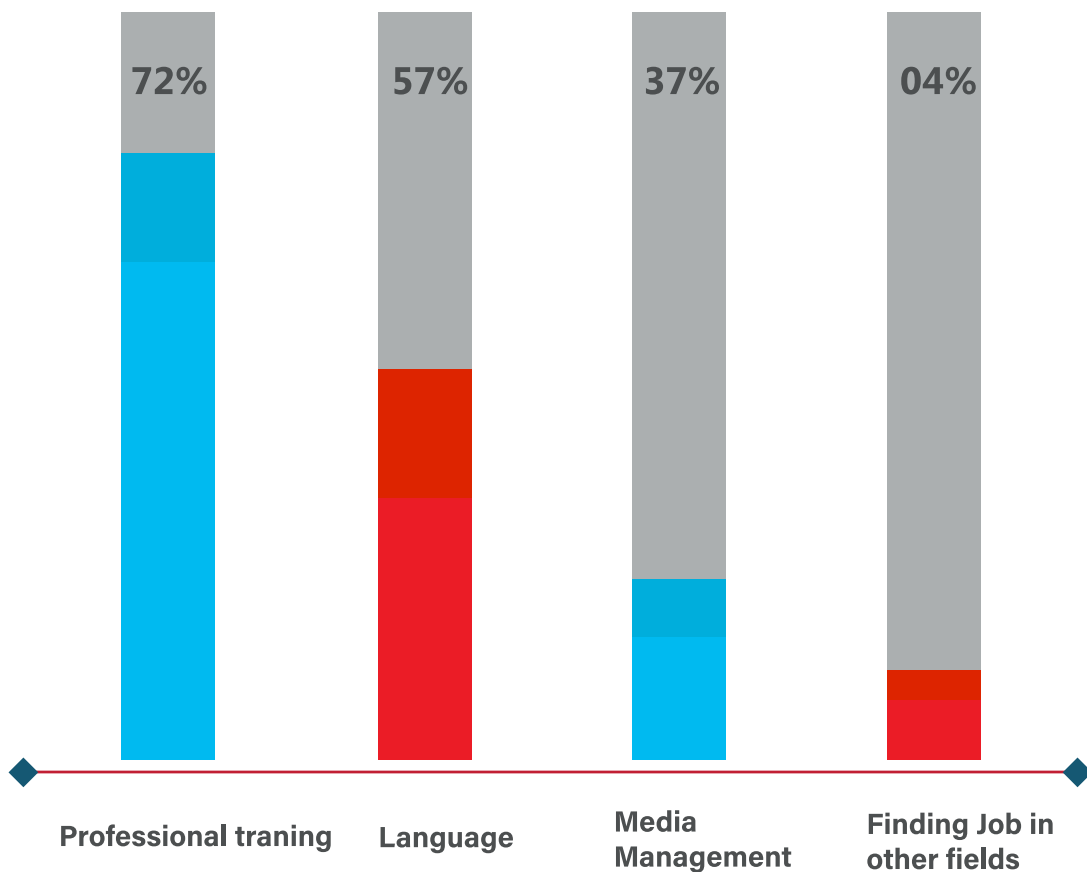


Table 3: Trainings journalists need

Training in-person was marked higher (74%) than online (55%). However, interest in on-line training is convincing enough to organize such programs; besides that, few comments from Afghanistan showed more interest in online as they think in-person training may not be possible, though such possibility can be checked.

SPECIALIZED TRAINING IN JOURNALISM

Professional training is a broad concept, and we broke it down into sub-categories to identify more specific and topic-wise areas. Through multiple-choice questions, we asked them to mark what training best suited their interest. Their response on the topics were almost equally divided, ranging from 31% to 48%. Among settled in exile (category a), training in job hunting in media attracted the highest responses (48%), followed by digital media and its monetization (46%), freelance journalism, and connecting them with potential employers (42%). Categories (b and c) asked for training regarding safety and physical security for journalism in Afghanistan and a third country (38%), peace and crisis reporting (31%), and cyber or digital security for journalists (31%). The respondents had the option to propose any other areas or training if they wanted, but only two answers were registered.

Safety and (digital) security topics were more associated with Afghanistan and third countries, whereas job hunting with people in European countries, the US, Canada, and Australia. In other words, those who are settled seek to find and start work, and those in transition (in third countries waiting for evacuation and settlement) or Afghanistan are concerned about their safety.

DEMANDED TRAINING IN JOURNALISM

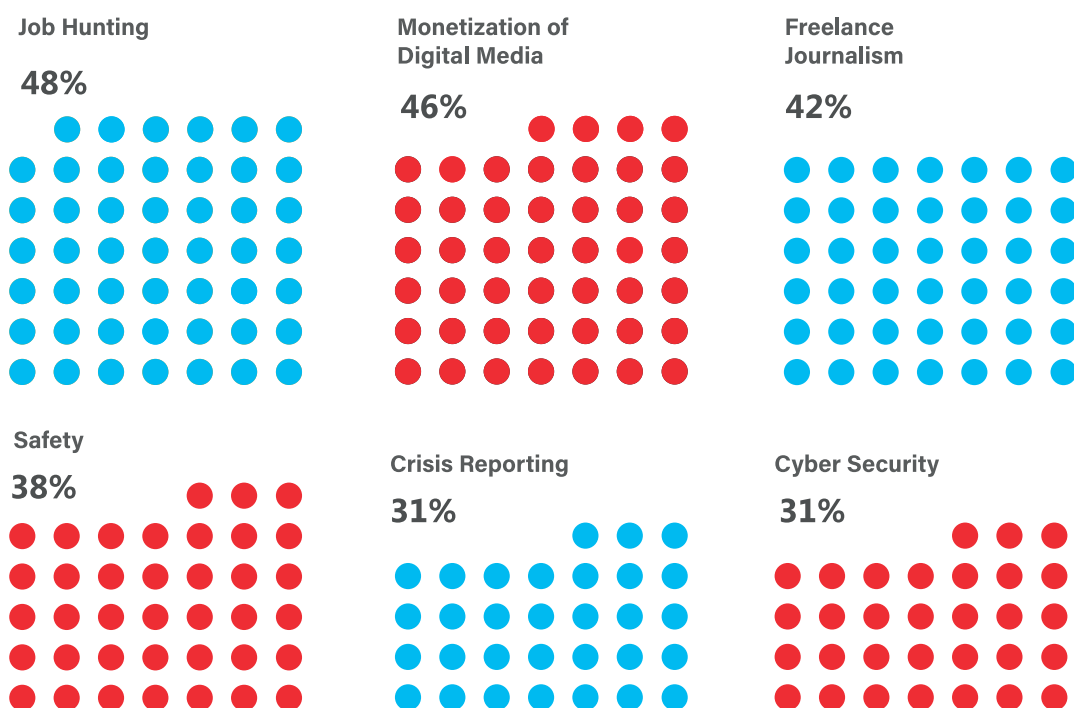


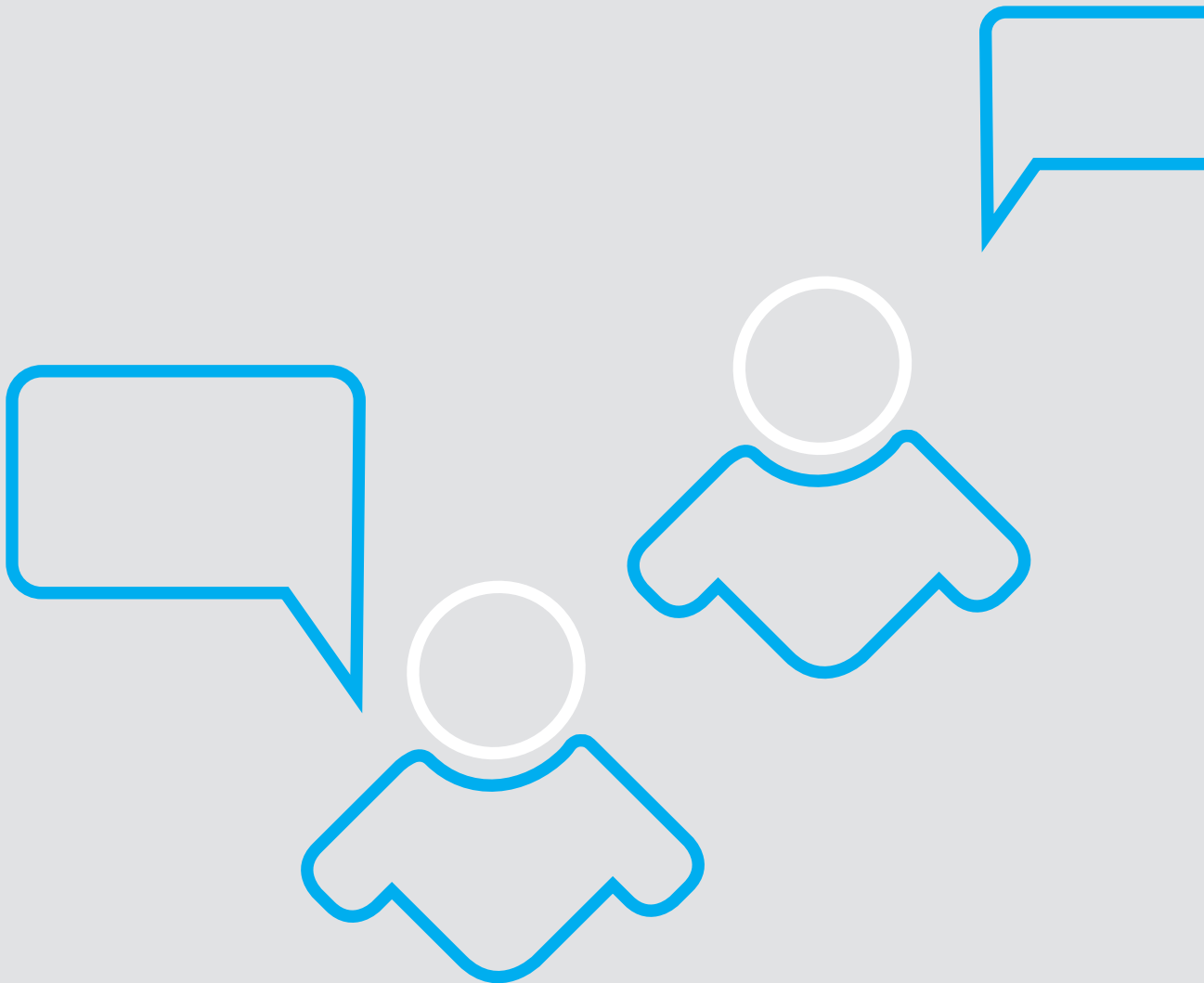
Table 4: Demanded Training in Journalism

EQUIPMENT

Almost all those who want to work in media and journalists (97%) said they need equipment. The remaining (3%) seem to be those who decided to change their profession and work in other areas. Responding to multiple-choice questions, they marked their needs as follows: camera (85%), laptop computer (81%), tripod (49%), smartphone (45%), and internet (42%). Only 0.5% said they have everything.

04

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS:

Professional Training Initiatives:

Given the interest expressed by Afghan journalists, particularly those settled in exile (**category a**), in professional development, it is advisable to develop tailored training programs. These programs should cover a wide range of topics, including journalism skills enhancement, language proficiency, media establishment, and management, as well as job hunting strategies in the contemporary media landscape. Specialized training sessions focusing on safety and security, peace and crisis reporting, and digital security should also be prioritized for journalists operating in volatile environments, both within Afghanistan and in third countries (**categories a & b**).

Training Delivery Methods:

While in-person training remains the preference for a majority of respondents, the significant interest in online training suggests an opportunity to diversify delivery methods. Hybrid models combining in-person workshops with online modules could effectively cater to diverse preferences and logistical constraints. Given the geographic dispersion of respondents, online training platforms should be optimized to ensure accessibility and effectiveness, particularly for journalists located in remote areas or facing mobility restrictions.

Equipment Provision:

The overwhelming demand for equipment underscores the necessity of ensuring journalists are adequately equipped to fulfill their professional responsibilities. Efforts should be made to facilitate the provision of essential tools such as cameras, laptops, smartphones, tripods,

and reliable internet access. Collaborative initiatives involving governmental agencies, international organizations, and private sector partners can help alleviate financial barriers and expedite the procurement and distribution of necessary equipment.

Support for Media Establishment and Sustainability:

Recognizing the vital role of media outlets in fostering informed discourse and accountability, concerted efforts are needed to support the establishment and sustainability of Afghan media, both within the country and in exile (**categories a & c**). Financial assistance, capacity-building initiatives, and technical support should be provided to bolster the resilience of media organizations and enhance their ability to produce high-quality content. Emphasis should be placed on fostering a conducive regulatory environment that safeguards press freedom and fosters journalistic independence.

Coordination and Collaboration:

Given the multifaceted challenges facing Afghan journalists, effective coordination and collaboration among stakeholders are essential. International media assistance organizations, governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and donor entities should work in tandem to optimize resource allocation, minimize duplication of efforts, and maximize impact. Regular consultations and information-sharing mechanisms should be established to facilitate the exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and emerging priorities within the media sector.

Gender-Sensitive Support:

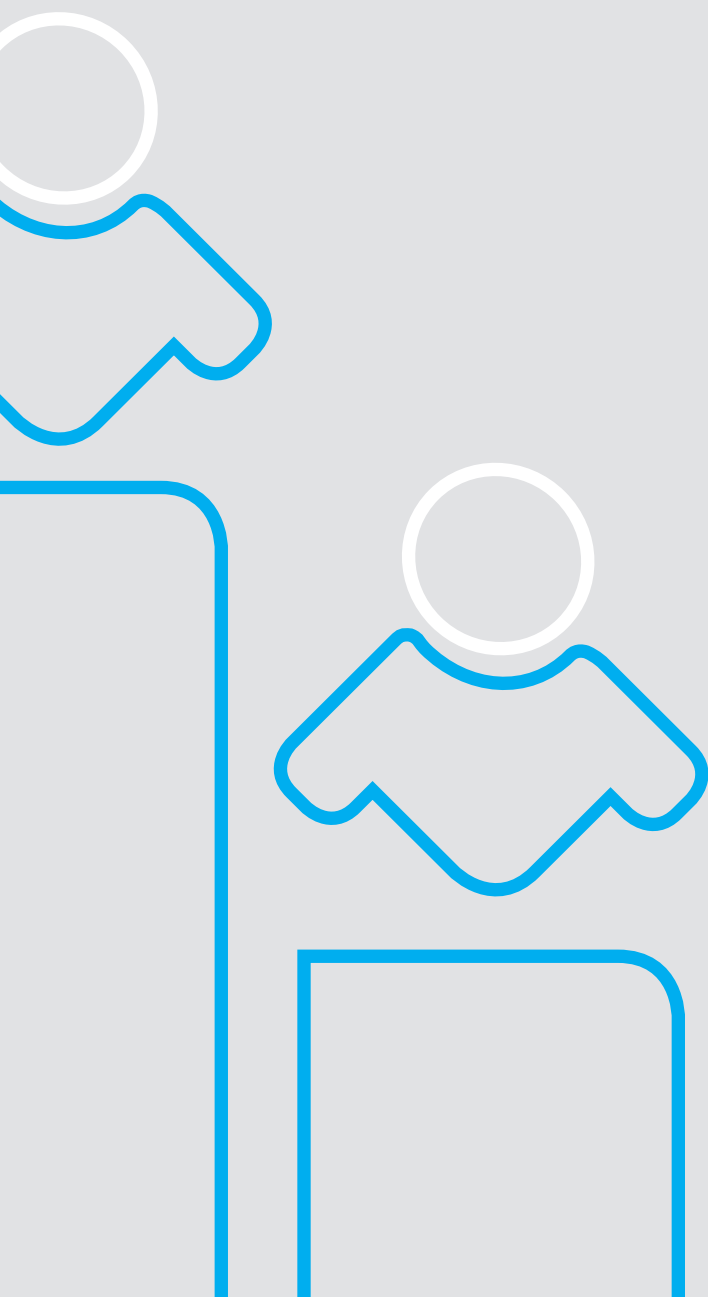
Recognizing the unique challenges faced by female journalists, both inside Afghanistan, in transition, and in exile (**categories a, b & c**), targeted support measures should be implemented to address their specific needs. Initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality within the media sector, including mentorship programs, leadership training, and safe reporting environments, should be prioritized. Additionally, efforts should be made to establish psychological and post-trauma support centers to address the mental health needs of journalists, particularly those exposed to trauma and violence in conflict settings.

Promotion of Media Literacy:

In tandem with efforts to strengthen professional capacities within the media sector, there is a need to promote media literacy among Afghan audiences. Public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and community engagement programs should be launched to enhance critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and media literacy among diverse segments of the population (**categories a & c**). By empowering citizens to discern credible information from misinformation and disinformation, these initiatives can contribute to the resilience of Afghan media and foster a more informed and engaged society.

05

CONCLUSION



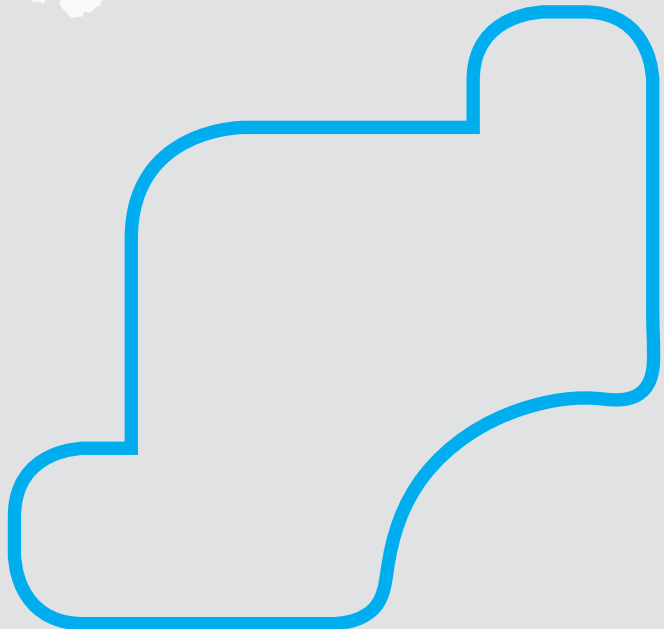
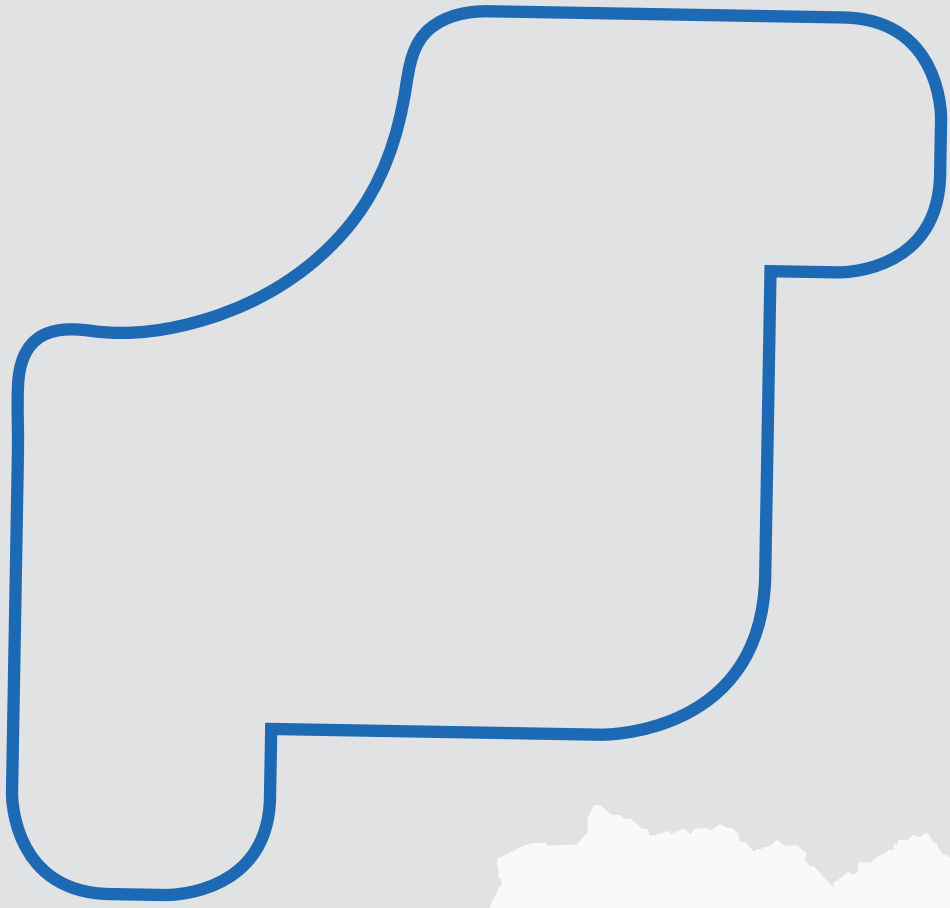
CONCLUSION

The findings underscore a notable commitment among Afghan journalists in exile to furnish accurate information for both their compatriots residing abroad and those within the country. Given the prevailing circumstances, particularly within Afghanistan, harnessing and bolstering this enthusiasm is imperative to forestall further deterioration of the media landscape. Additionally, areas of potential interest and necessity have been identified. It behooves international media assistance organizations and governments to intervene, bridging the competency gap and enhancing the skill sets of relocated and aspiring journalists to meet the dynamic exigencies of the media marketplace and secure employment in their new locales (**category a**).

Furthermore, equipping media practitioners (categories a & c) with appropriate tools is imperative, facilitating the creation of online media content, notably through social media platforms, which represent the most viable avenue for disseminating critical news information in Afghanistan. However, achieving this objective necessitates training in content generation and monetization. Consequently, a concerted effort is warranted among donor organizations to meticulously strategize and coordinate their initiatives, ensuring sustained and incremental support for journalists.

Moreover, amid diminishing financial resources within Afghanistan's media landscape, it is imperative to uphold and sustain these entities (**category c**). Such endeavors are contingent upon a reinvigorated focus on Afghanistan by the international community; failure to do so portends dire consequences for Afghan

media. Organizations with established access to Afghanistan and its media ecosystem can strategically target interventions therein. Simultaneously, auxiliary supporting entities and donors can extend assistance to media outlets and journalists in exile. However, effective implementation of these initiatives necessitates coordinated action among international donors to optimize impact and efficacy. Last but not least, journalists who are currently in transition (**category b**) need urgent and regular attention of the international community and media supporting organizations in financial support, case follow-up, and coordination with hosting countries to avoid unnecessary hurdles created by local security organizations.



THIS SURVEY IS SUPPORTED BY



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** *For Freedom.*