

# CRISIS IN JOURNALISM

The Impact of the US Government Funding Cuts on Global Media



# Background

In January 2025, a US executive order suspended foreign assistance, leading to a disastrous reduction in support for independent media in many places where it is urgently needed. Our community moved quickly to respond, and Internews Europe led this rapid assessment in close collaboration with three consortia of media development organisations brought together under the European Commission's new Thematic Framework Partnership Agreement for Human Rights and Democracy. These include: the consortium led by BBC Media Action and including WAN-IFRA (the World Association of News Publishers), Fondation Hirondelle Media for Peace and Human Dignity, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Equal Rights and Independent Media (ERIM), SembraMedia, Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe, the Foundation ARIJ International (Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism), and the Samir Kassir Foundation; the consortium led by Free Press Unlimited and including Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), Deutsche Welle, and International Media Support (IMS); and the consortium led by Internews Europe and including ARTICLE 19, Fojo Media Institute, Thomson Media, and Canal France International (CFI).

Together, these networks span the globe and bring unprecedented insight into the needs of local, independent media. The result is a region-by-region summary of the immediate impacts (page 3) followed by a global overview of urgent needs (page 9). The information was gathered through direct interviews and surveys with our frontline media partners, but due to the sensitivity of the findings, individual identities are protected.

The findings make one thing clear: without swift and flexible support, countless journalists, outlets and communities will be left even more vulnerable to disinformation, censorship and the near-total absence of impartial information or accountability mechanisms.

# Overview

In FY2024, the US Congress approved \$271.5 million in foreign assistance through the US State Department and USAID in the category of “Independent Media and Free Flow of Information”. Of this, an estimated \$150 million directly funded journalism and media support, with the remainder supporting the wider information ecosystem and enabling environment through related topics such as freedom of expression, technology policy and digital rights (often with significant overlap between programming).

In 2025 and beyond, the vast majority of this funding will disappear – potentially for good. The sudden revocation of funding has dealt a devastating blow to local media outlets, forcing many to shut down or drastically reduce their operations. This has cut off crucial financial support and resources, leaving journalists without the means to continue their vital work when they need it most. The media outlets that have been most reliant on US Government (USG) funding are those operating in the world’s most challenging and volatile environments – conflict zones, authoritarian regimes, disaster-affected regions and underserved communities where access to reliable information can be a matter of life and death. In these contexts, other business models, such as advertising or subscriptions, are often non-existent or unreliable. And it’s not just media organisations that have been devastated by these cuts – associated support organisations, such as unions, training institutions, legal services, and advocacy bodies, have also been severely impacted.

*“I’m deeply concerned about the safety of my staff following this resolution, particularly our correspondents stationed in active conflict zones. They face extreme risks due to ongoing violence, limited evacuation options, and growing food insecurity.”*

– Media Outlet, Sudan

Many of the global media outlets that received USG funding have had to immediately cut staff and reduce coverage, while almost all face reduced ability to operate, and uncertainty around longer-term viability. For media operating in high-risk or authoritarian contexts, funding cuts have dramatically increased their vulnerability, not only by weakening operations but by exposing them to greater legal and physical threats. As “lawfare” tactics like defamation suits and restrictive media laws rise, so too do coordinated attacks on journalists’ digital and physical safety – deliberate efforts to silence dissent and suppress democratic discourse. While some partners have been able to temporarily maintain operations, without new funding, the resulting reduction in capacity looks set to deteriorate further.

When independent media deteriorate, the effects ripple far beyond the newsroom, undermining public health and safety. Without trusted local reporting, misinformation spreads unchecked, communities lose access to life-saving information, and citizens are left uninformed. Corruption flourishes in the absence of scrutiny, marginalised voices are silenced, and public trust in institutions erodes as the potential for misinformation, disinformation and other malign efforts to manipulate information spaces increases.

*“The work we do in a context of increasing authoritarianism and violence linked to organised crime demands measures of protection and security protocols that require funding. The reduction of resources affects the way we apply these measures and therefore elevates the risks.”*

– Media Support Organisation, Ecuador

Crucially, USG funding for media came with clear guardrails around neutrality and editorial independence. Media partners are concerned that this void may be filled by parties offering less protections, giving both foreign and domestic powers greater ability to exploit weakened information environments for their own ends. Reduced support for inclusive, independent and representative media is likely to further disadvantage already marginalised communities and threaten previous development gains. Increased fragility in partner countries could translate into broader instability, including in Europe, as disinformation and propaganda cross borders, fuelling extremism, undermining elections and eroding trust in democratic institutions across the continent.

## Impacts by Region

### Sub-Saharan Africa

USG funding has supported large networks of community radio stations in Africa. In many cases, these serve as the only local or local-language media and provide an essential information service to millions of people in remote communities. Local language radio is one of the most powerful tools for information access in regions where literacy rates and internet penetration are low. In these areas, radio remains the most trusted and accessible medium, reaching communities with timely, relevant news on everything from health and education to elections and humanitarian emergencies. Without donor assistance, the viability of these media is in jeopardy.



The only independent national FM radio in South Sudan, Eye Radio, has had to reduce staff from 47 to 12, and will struggle to remain open into 2026 to cover the general election. In Zambia, also with elections in 2026, at least 25 community radio stations have been impacted, including loss of funding for gender, health, and information integrity programming. In the DRC, at least 77 community radio stations have been impacted, many of them in regions affected by active armed conflict. In addition to direct funding, USG-funded health and information campaigns were also an important source of revenue for these networks.

*“Harmful propaganda hits more rural areas, as politicians and armed groups need to manipulate rural youth to fuel local conflicts for mining and political interests. With the development of mobile internet, they use local WhatsApp groups. The community, through the community media, should be able to respond and protect peace and social cohesion in the region”*

– Media Network, DRC

In conflict-affected areas, like the DRC, Sudan, or the Sahel, donor-funded media provide potentially lifesaving information services for those inside the country and play a critical role in providing news to the outside world. In Eastern Congo, impacted radio station managers have raised concerns about propaganda from politicians and armed groups fuelling further conflict. Sudanese outlets like Radio Dabanga, Dafur24, Jubrakanews, or Al Taghyeer have had to let go of staff or reduce salaries, reduce coverage, and close offices in Kampala. Lack of funds to cover salaries and other costs, such as travel, visa, or medical fees, has left staff and correspondents stationed in active conflict zones or where food security is a growing concern at significant risk.

*“The funding cut will bring the entire information system to a standstill, as there is no reliable alternative information system in the Sudanese space. The reduction will be filled with war propaganda from both warring parties, and hate speech and calls for fighting and revenge will prevail.”*

– Media Outlet, Sudan

In countries such as Ethiopia or Zimbabwe, USG funding has supported media independence from autocratic-leaning governments, with media partners again cutting up to 80% of their staff and significantly scaling back operations. At least four media outlets receive more than 50% of their budget from US sources are therefore anticipating having to close business within the coming six months, unless new funding is unlocked. USAID funds were also critical to a national media safety fund, and the cuts impact

its capacity at a time when political tensions are posing increased threats to the safety of journalists.

USG cuts have impacted fact-checking operations and investigative research and reporting on disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference in the region, where internal, regional, and foreign political actors have been active sources of propaganda. The resulting funding vacuum opens opportunities for other international actors to gain influence. A national media outlet heavily impacted by the USG cuts reports that they have been approached about receiving Chinese funding but have so far declined due to concerns about maintaining their editorial independence.

Sub-Saharan Africa has also been a hub for innovation and learning in the media and information space, and USG cuts have impacted these forward-thinking programmes. In Cameroon, Adisi Cameroun has lost 80% of its funding for open data, digital rights and journalist training. In Zambia, programmes which train journalists in responsible use of AI and engage lawmakers on regulation of technology have been shut down. At least 28 media organisations received funding through cut programmes in Tanzania, at least 23 in Mozambique, 16 in Angola, 10 in Lesotho, 11 in Eswatini, and at least eight in Botswana. The loss of these programs will impact the future of African media, as well as the present.

## **Middle East, Asia, and The Pacific**

In Asia, we estimate that the USG funding freeze led to the loss of half of the total official development assistance dedicated to media and information. The impacts have been widespread and significant.

In countries where independent media struggles to operate profitably, from Myanmar to Afghanistan, to Tunisia or Cambodia, the USG funding cuts meant the loss of all or the majority of their operating budgets, meaning the entire sector is under threat. In countries like Indonesia or the Philippines, individual news outlets have been generally less reliant on USG funds for core operational costs, but hundreds of organisations had previously received support in various forms, from training to small grants to business development. In 2024, more than 300 media and support organisations were assisted with USG funds in Indonesia alone.

In Afghanistan, there has been an escalating wave of repression and dozens of journalists have been arrested, tortured or forced into hiding by the Taliban since the fall of Kabul in 2021. Therefore, the cuts hit hard. 13 radio stations contacted for this assessment reported that an average of 72% of their budgets came through USAID, 65% of their staff have been impacted through job losses or salary reductions, and nine stations said

they were at risk of closure. Many Afghan media outlets operate in exile, including in the US, Türkiye, and Pakistan, and in addition to the immediate financial effect, many Afghan journalists now find themselves at legal jeopardy in their host countries as their permission to live and work is tied to employment or reliant on consistent financial status. Simultaneously, journalists who have been cleared for evacuation to the US have been informed that the US will not approve new cases and have started to deport people from the country. Following the US lead, countries like Pakistan have now started to deport Afghan media workers to Kabul. Due to the US cuts, safety and emergency systems, such as safe houses inside Afghanistan, that could support at-risk media workers have now been closed or are operating at reduced capacity, as the responsible international organisations have also had their funding cut.

In Myanmar, a country whose local press has always been characterised by its entrepreneurship, commitment and resilience, the funding cuts present a new, heavy blow. More than 70 media and related entities received USG funding that has now been cut. While older, national outlets like the Irrawaddy or Myanmar Now have had some donor diversification, many smaller outlets, including those that serve minority language communities, have lost 100% of their revenue. All independent media have had to make cuts or accept reduced pay for their staff while reducing coverage, and many are now operating on effectively a voluntary basis. Mizzima was forced to suspend FM and shortwave broadcasting soon after the cuts were made, although they were able to resume their shortwave broadcast for 20 days following the March 28th earthquake thanks to an in-kind donation from their Europe-based shortwave company.

Disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference are major concerns, with USG cuts impacting a wide range of programmes countering known disinformation actors, including Russia, China and Iran, as well as regional and domestic players. These programmes range from efforts to identify foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) in Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, to regional investigative journalism programmes in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. This is specialist work that is difficult to fund without donor support, and the media outlets and civil society partners engaged in the programmes have already had to cut or redirect staff with technical and contextual expertise. This is particularly troubling as AI has helped turbocharge the financially motivated disinformation and scam industry in the region.

In autocratic and autocratic-leaning states, USG funds helped promote freedom of expression and supported independent media to hold governments accountable and reach audiences in challenging and heavily censored contexts. In Cambodia, almost all media critical of the regime had already been shut down via legal attacks, and the remaining outlets and support organisations now face imminent closure due to a lack of

funding. In Central Asia, independent media outlets are facing closure, while civil society leaders face growing threats of surveillance, and NGOs are being shut down. Where media and civil society operate in exile, like Afghanistan, Myanmar, or Iran, funding cuts jeopardise not just operations but safety.

In other parts of Asia, USG-funded projects were focused on strengthening technical capacity, specialist reporting, and sustainable business models for independent media. The Media Viability Accelerator, a partnership between USAID, Internews and Microsoft, supported 565 media outlets to strengthen business practices before it was closed down in its first year. Reporting programmes which have been cut range from corruption investigations in the Pacific to specialist training for female journalists in Pakistan.

## **Latin America and The Caribbean**

Proportionally, the Americas are the region most impacted, with USG funding making up more than 75% of donor funding to the media from 2020 to 2024. At least 60 media outlets have been directly affected by cuts to around 450 projects in 22 countries in the region. These cuts come at a time in when many countries in the region face democratic decline and increased repression, serving the goals of autocratic leaders to increase their power. In Central and South America, reporting on organised crime and government corruption exposes media and civil society staff to significant safety and legal risks, meaning the work is heavily reliant on donor funding. Following the cuts, disinformation campaigns have emerged in several countries, portraying international support as foreign interference.

In El Salvador, four outlets have already shut down completely, while others like Voz Pública have lost 70% of their revenue, halving their newsroom staff. In Honduras, with elections this year, several organisations face imminent closure. In Cuba, over a dozen independent media outlets are under threat following the loss of \$9.7 million in USAID programmes. Argentina's Revista Anfibia closed its Buenos Aires newsroom, and regional platform Factual/Distintas Latitudes lost 30% of its annual funding, endangering its programme that has trained over 450 young journalists across Latin America. In Venezuela, where Russia has been offering a training programme for government-aligned online content creators, US-funded media outlets report losses of up to 40% of their revenue and a third of their staff.

In Nicaragua, multiple media outlets, currently operating in exile from Costa Rica, have had their funds frozen. As a result, they are unable to pay journalists' salaries or cover essential operating expenses. Divergentes has immediately cut 20% of staff and reduced remaining salaries by 50%. Staff who have recently been forced into exile have been left



without assistance due to project closures. In Ecuador, Fundamedios, an organisation which investigates and documents attacks on journalists, has had to reduce work monitoring attacks and provide training to journalists. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, a regional organisation supporting freedom of expression and the media, may close in late 2025 after 32 years of work.

*“Since we work on issues related to disinformation and influence operations, we will not participate in projects offered by authoritarian countries or countries that have been repeatedly involved in the dissemination of disinformation and influence operations, such as Russia and China. This leaves as our only options private foundations, some European countries or the European Union itself as possible promoters of projects aligned with our interests.”*

– Media Outlet, Venezuela

With approximately 560 indigenous languages in the region, USG funding supported local language media and information services through several different impacted work streams. Cuts to these programmes will impact everything from civic engagement and participation to education and health services. Minority language populations in countries like Colombia, Bolivia and Peru are also targets of disinformation by both state and non-state actors, who are well positioned to exploit emerging information vacuums.

As in other regions, the USG cuts will also impact a wide range of forward-thinking initiatives designed to develop the media and information landscape. Around 90% of digital independent media outlets in Bolivia currently rely on donor funding, with a majority now cut. In Mexico, funding has been halted for a journalist network specialising in capacity building for young journalists, placing the organisation’s very existence at serious risk. US funding has also been vital in supporting cross-border networks and coordination, and reducing this capacity will impact the region’s ability to address shared challenges collaboratively. Affected media are currently trying out various actions to overcome the cut in resources, including crowdfunding campaigns, and offering workshops, diploma courses, and communication services to companies and universities. They are also creating alliances between independent media and organisations that support democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights.

# Summary of Needs

With around \$150 million of highly targeted annual media funding cut from the sector, the range of needs are enormous, and prioritisation and efficiency are crucial. While immediate safety measures should rightly take precedence, the sector cannot afford to be only reactive; long-term strategic support is the key to supporting the sector to recalibrate to new funding levels. The needs outlined here are divided into four categories: access to emergency support, core operational support for strategic partners, continued support for public interest media, and donor coordination and sectoral review.

## Access to emergency support

### Rapid response funds

The immediate and unexpected nature of these funding cuts have left media outlets without plans or options, forcing immediate cuts and in some cases exposing staff to risk. Flexible, rapidly deployable funding will assist media outlets in transitioning to new models in an orderly fashion, while maintaining operational continuity and preserving assets and networks. In the current context of rapid transition, flexible funding will have an outsized benefit. In high-risk contexts, rapid response funds - potentially as low as \$1000 - are urgently needed to provide safety, supporting relocation of vulnerable staff, or provide other forms of protection.

### Flexibility in existing funds

The rapid transformation in the funding landscape has changed priorities for media and media support organisations. Providing greater flexibility in the use of already allocated funds would reflect this reality. Funding designated for new programming or capacity building could be redirected to core costs or towards adaptation and efficiency. In some cases, administrative procedures could also be simplified, reducing associated costs and labour time.

### Legal and security support

Unexpected funding cuts expose media partners to a variety of increased risks, including digital and physical security, and intimidating legal challenges. In some cases, funding cuts have directly led to increased attacks on media while simultaneously reducing organisational capacity to respond, and impacting the wider ecosystem of support

organisations, many of whom were also recipients of USG funding. In this context, it is vital to ensure that organisations capable of providing this specialist support to media outlets in high-risk contexts can continue to engage with partners and maintain services.

## **Core operational support for strategic partners**

For different reasons, many media outlets cannot operate effectively without donor funds. Many of these will be forced to close. While each loss has a real impact, some will be greater than others. Strategic outlets and support organisations must be prioritised and enabled to continue operations through core funding. Once media are closed, it will be harder, and in some cases impossible, to reopen them.

While any media that receives core funding must have a proven record of accuracy and balance, the exact criteria for selecting strategic targets for ongoing operational support will vary from case to case. It may be a national media outlet that is required for transparent elections, a local language outlet that is the only reliable information source for its target community, or the last independent outlets in an autocratic country. In each case, a small investment in core operational support will have an outsized impact.

Core funding that is not tied to specific outputs has often been very hard for media partners to access; however, this kind of support can provide partners with both certainty and flexibility that is urgently needed in the current context. Strategic operational support for key media partners will help protect European long term strategic interests, ranging from protecting regional stability, to countering foreign malign influence operation, to promoting public health information.

## **Continued support for public interest media**

Producing accurate, timely, and reliable information requires skills and resources. Globally, the media sector is already facing both profound technological disruption and challenges from a rise in autocracy. In many media markets, donor funding remains essential to the production of key forms of public interest media, which struggle to be economically viable without such support. This includes everything from civic media and election coverage, to health, climate, and science journalism, to investigative journalism, fact-checking, or countering of FIMI.

This work is regularly supported through a combination of capacity building and grants, as well as other targeted technical assistance, often with a specific thematic focus. If

donors do not continue to support this work, then vital public interest journalism will decline in key contexts. Knock-on effects will impact everything from public health to polarisation and democratic processes.

## **Donor coordination and sectoral review**

While the immediate impacts of USG funding cuts, such as job losses and media closures, are already emerging, second-order impacts resulting from the loss of independent media capacity will take longer to become visible. Even with time, it is difficult to quantify a negative. We know that community radio stations played a key role in limiting the last major Ebola outbreak, but how will we measure their absence during the next one? The medium-to-long-term sustainability of public interest media requires that we plan now.

### **Sectorial review**

Ongoing research is needed to understand and respond to this reshaping of the global media sector. This could take many forms, including more quantitative research, which was outside the scope of this rapid assessment. A sectoral review could also provide more evidence-based recommendations for efficiency, improved coordination, new financing models and policy instruments to support independent media in the massively reduced pool of donor funding.

### **Coordination**

With a massively reduced funding pool, coordination is more necessary than ever. Donors and media support organisations need to ensure that funding for the sector is reaching where it is most needed and being efficiently utilised. Coordination is required at a global, regional, and national level. While donors are well placed to shape and mandate this coordination, it must be inclusive and responsive to the needs of media partners.

## Conclusion

When independent media deteriorate, the effects ripple far beyond the newsroom, undermining public health, safety, and democracy itself. The USG funding freeze has been a huge blow to the sector and the free flow of information. That's undeniable.

However, even small investments in public interest media can make lasting change, ensuring that vital journalism continues to serve communities and democracy. This is especially true in contexts where information is urgently needed, where press freedom is under threat, misinformation is spreading, and marginalised voices struggle to be heard. There are clear actions that can be taken which will have significant results, even at a fraction of the funding gap resulting from the USG cuts. Increased coordination and providing greater flexibility for existing funding are steps that can be taken right away.

What is also clear is that the dedication demonstrated by media partners around the world, many facing extreme hardship, shows that the sector has the will to meet this moment.



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