



© Mohammed Zaaroun

Annual Plan Free Press Unlimited 2025

**FREE
PRESS
UNLIMITED**

People deserve to know

Colophon

Text

Free Press Unlimited

DTP and design

Babette Hilhorst

Free Press Unlimited
Weesperstraat 3
1018 DN Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Table of Content

Foreword	4
The challenges	4
Opportunities	4
Focus for 2025	4
Mission and vision	5
Strategic ambitions	6
Long-term goals	6
2025 Goals	7
Themes	8
Access to independent information	8
Safety of journalists	9
Media resilience and viability	10
Reporters Respond	11
Donor relations	14
Private fundraising	15

Foreword

Our mission - making reliable information available to everyone - is more crucial than ever. In a time of immense challenges, Free Press Unlimited remains resilient and continues to add value by championing press freedom and safeguarding the safety of journalists. We achieve this by reflecting on our achievements and learning from them. At the same time, it is evident that in a rapidly changing world, 2025 will be a pivotal year for Free Press Unlimited.

The challenges

Democracies around the globe are under pressure. Autocracies are gaining ground, and wherever autocrats hold power, the consequences for press freedom and journalist safety are immediate and severe. Furthermore, we are seeing persistent outbreaks of armed conflict. The unprecedented number of journalists killed in Gaza and the occupied territories, the immense humanitarian crisis in Sudan, where nearly all independent media have been wiped out, and Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine: these and many other conflicts threaten press freedom and expose journalists to grave dangers.

These realities present significant challenges to our work. At the same time, our organisation is grappling with internal and external pressures, such as dwindling funding opportunities, increasingly complex donor requirements, and a scarcity of digital expertise.

We recognise that these challenges come with difficult choices. Maintaining our impact is a constant balancing act between internal strengthening and external collaboration. We recognise the need to redefine our role in a world where globalisation is giving way to localisation and decolonisation, and where our partners expect increasingly more from us.

Opportunities

In the midst of these challenges lies a world of possibilities. Our successes in areas such as psychosocial support, innovative advocacy, and

partnerships in regions like Latin America and Asia provide a strong foundation for us to build upon. By focusing on strategic collaborations - for instance, in the fields of digital media and artificial intelligence - we are able to expand our reach and deepen our impact. Moreover, we remain unwavering in our commitment to journalist safety through our emergency aid programme, Reporters Respond. In 2024 we provided over 1000 journalists with emergency support.

Focus for 2025

This annual plan reflects our ambitions and our determination to remain resilient in a challenging environment. We are committed to:

- Ensuring journalist safety and support in the most vulnerable areas.
- Advancing strategic digitalisation and innovation.
- Strengthening in-country partnerships and supporting communities facing the greatest democratic challenges.
- Proactively addressing structural challenges within our own organisation, such as knowledge sharing and capacity building.

With a clear vision, a strong foundation, and a dedicated team, we are ready to face 2025. We remain true to our core values of solidarity, innovation, and collaboration. We and our partners and supporters believe in a world where press freedom is not a luxury but a cornerstone of a just society.



Ruth Kronenburg
Executive Director

© Graciela Rossetto



Mission and vision

Our vision

Free Press Unlimited (FPU) envisions a world where everyone has the right to access independent, reliable, and timely information. Our vision is in line with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

In an era of increasing threats to press freedom, which covers anything from disinformation to authoritarian control, Free Press Unlimited remains committed to ensuring that individuals everywhere are able to make informed decisions for themselves and their communities. We believe that press freedom is a cornerstone of democracy and that reliable information is essential for a just society. In 2025, we will continue to focus our work on empowering media as agents of change in their communities, in doing so, contributing to the global movement towards more transparent, resilient, and inclusive societies.

People deserve to know

Our mission

Free Press Unlimited’s mission is to make independent news and information accessible to all people, especially those living in regions with limited press freedom. To achieve this, Free Press Unlimited partners with over 300 independent journalists, media organisations, and advocacy groups worldwide. We work with partners to strengthen the capacity of independent media, safeguarding their safety and resilience so that they can provide vital information to the public and hold those in power accountable.

Strategic ambitions

Free Press Unlimited's work is guided by three aims set out in our Multi-Annual Strategic Plan (MASP) for 2023-2026. These are the foundation for all of our programmes and partnerships:

- 1** Global leadership in press freedom: Free Press Unlimited strives to be a trusted, influential advocate for press freedom worldwide, recognised for our innovative approaches and dedication to journalist safety.
- 2** Ensuring access to reliable information: We work to create a pluralistic and independent media landscape where journalism serves the public, counteracts disinformation, and supports democratic accountability.
- 3** Building financial sustainability: To ensure that Free Press Unlimited can remain flexible, agile, and impactful, we seek to diversify and expand our funding sources, increasing unearmarked funds that allow us to pioneer and innovate.

These ambitions are woven into Free Press Unlimited's long-term goals and steer our annual objectives, ensuring a cohesive strategy for safeguarding press freedom and human rights globally.

Long-term goals

In collaboration with our partners, Free Press Unlimited strives to build a resilient, inclusive, and professional global media landscape where independent media and journalists operate safely, serve the public interest, and uphold democratic values by providing citizens with reliable information.

We contribute to this goal through the following three long-term goals:

- 1** A diverse and resilient information ecosystem where independent media thrive, disinformation is effectively countered, and press freedom is robustly protected, enabling access to reliable information.
- 2** Journalists, regardless of their identity, are respected, can work securely and without constraints.
- 3** An enabling environment for viable, independent, and resilient media organisations that effectively serve the public interest, maintain journalistic independence, and adapt to changing environments.

These long-term goals guide our commitment to press freedom and human rights and form the foundation for all Free Press Unlimited initiatives.

2025 Goals



Building on our long-term goals and MASP ambitions, our specific objectives for 2025 focus on addressing emerging global challenges and strengthening Free Press Unlimited's capacity to respond dynamically. We have organised our goals for 2025 to reflect each of the three MASP ambitions, addressing pressing issues while enhancing Free Press Unlimited's capacity to respond effectively. These goals are:

- 1** Strengthen regional and cross-border collaborations: To reinforce Free Press Unlimited's presence and impact, we will develop regional journalism hubs that support journalists in hostile environments, fostering resilience and shared learning on issues such as misinformation and democratic decline.
- 2** Enhance support mechanisms for media in conflict zones: Recognising the rise in global conflict, Free Press Unlimited will implement robust response frameworks for journalists in high-risk areas, including increased support for media in exile.
- 3** Expand digital competency and resilience: In response to the rapidly evolving digital landscape, Free Press Unlimited will empower media partners with skills and tools to counter digital threats, such as disinformation, surveillance, and online censorship.
- 4** Increase financial resilience and partnership diversity: Free Press Unlimited will seek unrestricted funding and broaden its network of partnerships, especially in the Global South, to ensure greater financial flexibility and sustainable support for press freedom initiatives.

These annual goals reflect our priorities for 2025; they are structured to advance our MASP ambitions and respond effectively to today's most urgent needs.

Themes

In 2024, as planned, Free Press Unlimited developed comprehensive Theories of Change (ToCs) for each of our core themes:

- **Access to independent information (previously titled Media in shrinking civic spaces)**
- **Safety of journalists**
- **Media resilience and viability**

These ToCs provide clear pathways for addressing the complex challenges facing independent media worldwide and guide Free Press Unlimited's efforts in 2025 to build a resilient, inclusive, and impactful global media landscape. Each theme represents an essential focus area in our mission to empower independent media as pillars of democratic societies, and together,

they form a cohesive strategy for fostering a free and safe environment for journalism.

The following sections provide an overview of each theme's objectives, challenges, and key strategies.

Access to independent information

Problem statement:

Disinformation, censorship, and a lack of media diversity threaten the availability of reliable information and erode public trust. These challenges are compounded by legal, economic, and digital barriers that restrict independent media, especially in fragile or authoritarian contexts.



Journalists report on protest rally ahead of the general election in Dhaka, Bangladesh. © EPA/MONIRUL ALAM



Objective:

To establish a diverse and resilient information ecosystem where independent media thrive, disinformation is countered effectively, and press freedom is protected, thus ensuring public access to reliable information.

Expected outcomes:

- Independent media have greater capacity to produce high-quality, diverse content that effectively counters disinformation.
- Public access to reliable information is strengthened, as press freedom and media diversity are more robustly protected.
- The impact of disinformation is minimised, as independent media are equipped to counter false narratives and provide reliable information.
- Legal frameworks and advocacy initiatives create a more supportive environment for independent media.

Key strategies:

- Strengthening independent media: Provide direct support, training, and resources to help independent media produce diverse, high-quality content.
- Advocating for press freedom: Collaborate with local and international networks to promote legal and policy frameworks that protect press freedom.
- Countering disinformation: Provide media with tools and support to identify and address disinformation, thereby promoting reliable and diverse information sources.

Safety of journalists

Problem statement:

Journalists face increasing threats; these include physical violence, digital harassment, and gender-specific risks, especially in repressive and conflict-prone regions. Impunity for the perpetrators of attacks on journalists, propagates a cycle of fear and self-censorship, undermining press freedom.

Objective:

To create a safe environment where journalists can operate without fear, supported by accessible protection mechanisms, embedded safety practices, and legal safeguards.

Expected outcomes:

- Journalists and media professionals are better protected through comprehensive safety protocols and access to immediate support when needed.
- Accountability mechanisms are reinforced, with improved legal protections and documented cases of press freedom violations.
- Journalists, particularly those in high-risk environments, have greater resilience and security to continue their work.

Key strategies:

- Prevention and preparedness: Develop safety protocols and provide training to help journalists assess and manage risks.
- Protection and emergency support: Offer legal, medical, and psychosocial assistance to journalists under threat.
- Advocacy for accountability: Work with legal experts to document violations and advocate for accountability.

Media resilience and viability

Problem statement:

Financial instability, media capture, and competition from tech platforms threaten the sustainability and independence of media organisations. Rapid digital change and misinformation are a further strain on media viability, making it difficult for independent outlets to adapt and thrive.

Objective:

To foster a supportive environment where independent media organisations are resilient, financially viable, and able to adapt to changing political, economic, and technological landscapes.

Expected outcomes:

- Media organisations demonstrate improved financial resilience, supported by diversified revenue streams and sustainable business models.
- Independent media strengthen their role as reliable sources, building public loyalty and engagement.
- Fair regulatory conditions and advocacy efforts provide media organisations with a more equitable operating environment.

Key strategies:

- Building audience trust: Support media in their efforts to engage with their communities and to build credibility and loyalty.
- Driving innovation: Facilitate partnerships to help media diversify revenue streams and leverage new digital tools.
- Advocating for a level playing field: Engage policymakers to create fair regulatory conditions, protecting media independence.

Through Free Press Unlimited's Reporters Respond emergency fund, the Safety team provides immediate assistance to media workers in distress, addressing a wide range of threats through preventative and protective measures. This work is supported by the Safety of Voices programme, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2024, journalists and media workers have been navigating an increasingly hostile environment. The number of elections globally was at an all-time high. Also, the safety of journalists was impacted by ongoing and new crises all over the world. The crisis in Gaza is unparalleled, where at least 137 journalists have been killed (cpj.org) since 7 October 2023, the highest number ever documented. In response to these challenges, we saw an increase in requests for help with relocation, and a significant number of requests for subsistence support from journalists in exile. Additionally, we have observed more requests related to threats and violence within newsrooms, an issue we intend to focus on more in the future.

Follow up on vetting training

Safeguarding the physical safety of media workers is our highest priority. When we receive cases involving life-threatening situations, our case workers handle them with utmost care to avoid exposing media workers to any additional risk. This year, our team received vetting training that also included a session on managing sensitive cases. They will continue refining these skills, with a follow-up training planned in 2025. During armed conflicts, media workers reporting from conflict zones are in constant danger. To give them the best support possible, we have funded on-the-ground organisations in places like Gaza and Lebanon that can directly reach and assist these media workers. These organisations have the best understanding of the environment in which these media workers find themselves, allowing them to quickly assess risks and priorities, which is crucial in these circumstances.

Safe houses and exile hubs

Also, since conflicts drive many media workers into exile, we have supported safe houses and exile hubs, allowing them to find refuge and continue their work safely. In 2025, we plan to continue with these approaches, but will also continue to reflect on our experiences and incorporate any lessons learned in order to enhance our support efforts. We will also look into approaches to safely entering conflict and heightened crisis situations, and to having a plan for a structured exit when our support in prolonged crises no longer serves the purpose of keeping media workers actively reporting.

Legal safety

Legal persecution—in the form of restrictive legislation, policies, and arbitrary prosecutions—is increasingly used worldwide to silence journalists. To ensure their legal safety, we provide financial support for legal aid to journalists and, in some instances, legal advice, while our consortium partner Media Defence offers direct court representation for journalists facing prosecution. In 2024, the Safety team organised a safety meeting with African partners to address critical legal issues and trends impacting journalists in the region, gathering insights to strengthen our legislative and advocacy strategies. In 2025, we will expand this initiative to Europe by organising a regional safety meeting focused on prominent legal challenges faced by journalists there.

Psychosocial safety

Recognising the mental toll that high-risk and stressful situations take on media workers, as well as the vicarious trauma they may experience, we are prioritising initiatives that promote psychosocial safety. Through Reporters Respond, we offer direct aid for psychosocial services. In 2025, we will expand these efforts by supporting research in Latin America



Photographer captures soldiers of the Sudanese army amidst fights in Khartoum. © Amaury Falt-Brown / AFP

to explore the impact of high-stress reporting on journalists, in conjunction with developing a PSS manual for use by Free Press Unlimited teams. The insights gained from this research will help us further refine our psychosocial support approach.

Digital safety

We recognise that digital safety is an area that needs further development within our mandate. Up to now, our focus has primarily been on providing media outlets with VPNs, aiding digital security training, and referring cases of reported online violence to a team of digital security experts at Access Now. However, with the rapid advancement of AI and the rise of deepfakes—both threatening news integrity and increasingly used to directly target media workers—we understand we need to expand our efforts in this critical area to better respond to new threats arising in the digital domain.

Safety for women journalists

Lastly, we continue to focus on prioritising support for vulnerable groups, particularly women media workers who face unique challenges, who are targeted not only for their journalism but also because of their gender. Over the past two years, we have conducted focus group discussions with women media workers from various regions to gain deeper insights into these gender-based safety concerns. In 2025, we will build on these findings by collaborating with partners to develop tailored approaches that address the specific needs of women media workers in their respective countries.

Worldwide collaboration

Our emergency response efforts are closely coordinated with those of other international organisations, regional and in-country partners. By distributing small grants



we have empowered trusted in-country partners to support media workers within their regions, broadening our reach and impact. Looking ahead, we will reassess our unique contribution—being the quickest responder in the Journalists in Distress network which Free Press Unlimited co-coordinates— to determine where we can make the greatest impact. This may involve deepening our established connections and safety networks in Latin America and Asia or expanding new partnerships in Africa and MENA. We would like to implement our efficient crisis response in MENA and Africa, which we have previously only been able to do to a limited extent due to the need for trusted networks on the ground.

Joint efforts on advocacy

To advocate for the safety of journalists, we have pursued global strategic litigation, working together with the Policy and Advocacy team. Our focus here remains on confronting targeted violence against media workers in conflict zones and addressing the forced exile of media workers facing repression. Therefore, in 2025, we will further support exiled media workers through partnerships with UNHCR, international donors, and host countries, combining emergency assistance with efforts for long-term, systemic change. Through this approach, we try to combine emergency assistance with working towards long-term, systemic changes.

Donor relations

While the pressure on democracies around the world increases, and donor markets are shifting, now more than ever Free Press Unlimited underlines the need to be strategic, proactive, and locally driven in its fundraising endeavours. Capitalising on our strengths and successes, fostering partnerships with donors and (inter)national partners and exploring potential avenues of collaboration with complementary and like-minded organisations are critical aspects for maintaining Free Press Unlimited's operations and maximising impact.

With the number of autocracies around the world on the rise, democracy and human rights are increasingly under pressure. This opens up the gap for disinformation and makes the safety of journalists a critical issue. In order to fight disinformation, journalists need to be safe.

In times of crisis, taking action to support and maintain independent media is urgently needed, otherwise societies will lose access to reliable information and the vacuum will be filled by disinformation. Free Press Unlimited will continue to invest in safeguarding the safety of journalists in crisis situations so they can continue to do their jobs, sometimes from exile. We aim to strengthen global mechanisms to combat mis/disinformation, enhance response mechanisms to journalists and media workers in distress. We are also exploring innovative approaches to supporting journalists in exile and in conflict-zones. Additionally, the boom of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is of key importance to Free Press Unlimited. We have explored and will continue to explore funding opportunities for investigating how new technologies can be leveraged to protect freedom of expression and journalists, and not harm them.

Strengthening, maintaining and building new partnerships with donors and in-country partners, is crucial for successful and impactful fundraising. As part of our donor relations strategy for 2025, Free Press Unlimited will continue to focus on strengthening existing strategic partnerships with bilateral and multilateral entities, for example the European Commission (EC), UNESCO and various concurring governments. This includes utilising our position as a Strategic Partner of the EC to address specific and

priority support for the media development sector worldwide. Furthermore, Free Press Unlimited provides thematic expertise and input to the Team Europe Democracy (TED) Network, specifically on Media and Digitalisation. Working in close cooperation with DG INTPA and 14 EU Member States in several countries across the world, TED creates a coordinated strategic European response in support of democracy.

Pressure on democracy and shifting donor markets present Free Press Unlimited with an opportunity to continue innovating. In 2025, we will broaden our partnerships beyond traditional collaborators, focusing on complementary alliances to address capacity gaps, embed the organisation more deeply in local contexts and expand our impact. These strategic alliances may be (southern) organisations working on themes that are broader, yet complementary, to media development and freedom of expression, like democracy, gender, AI, digitalisation, and humanitarian aid.

A guiding principle of Free Press Unlimited's operations, particularly in our fundraising efforts, is localisation. Free Press Unlimited prioritises locally driven and owned approaches where in-country partners articulate and set target priorities. Moving into 2025, Free Press Unlimited will further develop and improve the execution of this localisation approach. This involves co-designing projects and programmes, supporting in-country partners in establishing relations with donors, and forming coalitions and consortia with in-country partners. In addition, Free Press Unlimited seeks to bridge the gap between donor organisations and in-country partners and advocates that donors be more responsive, need-based, and participatory.

Global political developments show that traditional institutional funds are becoming more precarious. In response to this, Free Press Unlimited will also direct efforts into establishing relations with private international foundations to diversify funding streams and decrease donor dependency on governmental or multilateral entities. We anticipate that these private international foundations will play a critical role in 'filling the gap' left by dwindling public donors. Our efforts are aimed at ensuring that support for independent media and press freedom, especially in times of crisis, does not disappear.

Private fundraising



Press freedom and the safety of journalists are issues that resonate with a diverse group of people. Therefore we will continue to build a larger and more engaged audience. An audience that not only donates, but also reinforces our messages and supports our reputation for being the right organisation to fund. We aim to build trust in smaller communities where people feel a strong connection with the issues we cover, in order to create a vocal audience of dedicated believers in our mission. The long term goal is to realise a growing budget through private funding that enables Free Press Unlimited to cover organisational costs.

2024 was a year of staff transition for the private fundraising team. Despite this transition and due to efforts of the communication team, we managed to close the year 2024 on target. The result is estimated at EURO 500,000. Initiatives like the World Press Photo event, the masterclasses, Free Press Live and the personal approach for large donors have paid off. While we saw good initiatives come to life in the past few years, we will adjust our strategy for 2025. We will retain and build on what works, stop what doesn't work, and initiate new initiatives to connect with our audiences.

Overall we will focus on showcasing successful projects and will address the need for unearmarked funding more explicitly. We will continue our partnership with World Press Photo, seek other partnerships to organise in-person events and participate on the 5th of May (Liberation day) with our own event. We will open our doors to meet with our private donors twice a year. We will implement what we learned from the masterclasses and we will increase the number of sessions. The overall aim is to create more moments for connection.

To reach the target of EURO 550,000 in 2025, we have formulated a strategy for four target groups. Each target group has its own strategy and targets.



Free Press Live 2024 took place on 21 October in Nieuwspoor The Hague. The theme was Media: a lifeline in times of conflict. © Graciela Rossetto.

- **Foundations:** Focus on building deeper relationships. We will maintain close contact with our current donors (six) and strive to build new relationships with five foundations, based on their interest in democracy / human rights / press freedom.
- **Companies:** Companies will be given more ready-made opportunities to sponsor us; events like our Free Press awards and Free Press Live can be great opportunities for companies to offer us support.
- **Large donors:** We will strengthen current relationships with large donors through personal contact and incentives like meeting the director, invitations to events or home visits. Building a network among charities and building trust with philanthropy professionals take priority.
- **Online donors:** We keep track of profiles in our database to help improve on the ways we engage with our online donors.

Policy and advocacy

The international context in which we operate is becoming more and more complex. Due to geopolitical tensions, it is increasingly challenging to reach agreements on an international level. International fora are becoming more and more politicised and efforts are often focused on preserving existing agreements and human rights vernacular, rather than making progress. Furthermore, it is becoming more commonplace in conflicts and wars for journalists and media outlets to be targeted because of their work. Still, we take encouragement from the small victories we achieved in 2024, and aim to build on those in the year ahead.

In 2024 we saw the publication of the [research report on an international investigative task force on crimes against journalists](#). The research report concludes that there is a need to establish such a body, and points out that support for the investigative process in murder cases is the most important gap that needs to be

bridged. The collection and preservation of evidence must be at the core of a task force's functions. 2025 will provide a key moment to support the necessary steps to be taken by States, multilateral bodies and other stakeholders to follow up on these recommendations to establish an international investigative support body.

Building on the work with the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE), to advocate for robust EU legislation against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), we will continue to advocate for strong anti-SLAPPs provisions in national legislation during the transposition phase of the EU anti-SLAPP Directive. As part of the Steering Committee of CASE and as the convener of the Dutch Working Group on SLAPPs, we play a key role in this process, both in the Netherlands and in Europe. Lessons learned from our experiences in Europe regarding anti-SLAPP legislation and advocacy will be shared with partners across the world working on this topic, such as the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Africa (CASA).



The Al Jazeera office in Ramallah was raided and forcefully closed by Israeli authorities on 22 September. © Al Jazeera through AP



Furthermore, in cooperation with Media Defence and other legal actors such as the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, we will focus on advocacy surrounding a stronger pushback on the global legal crackdown on journalists. We will advocate around specific cases, such as bringing to court cases of journalists facing online harassment, or journalists threatened by foreign agent laws or other abusive legislation.

In addition, we will continue as an active member of the Consultative Network of the Media Freedom Coalition in 2025 and present specific cases for diplomatic action to the Media Freedom Coalition Member States as we did in past years, through the embassy networks and the like that have been set up.

In 2025, we will continue our work on online violence against (women) journalists. We will continue to work together with the Coalition Against Online Violence (CAOV), an international coalition of over 80 organisations cooperating specifically in research, advocacy and campaigns to address online harassment of women journalists. We also collaborate with (inter) national partners to collect and analyse data on online violence against (women) journalists. Through a joint campaign, we want to increase journalists' reporting on online violence and map out and analyse the scale and systematic nature of online violence against journalists. This will strengthen our advocacy, as new international legislation, such as the Digital Services Act, offers promising advocacy opportunities to hold Big Tech platforms accountable for failing to meet their responsibilities regarding online violence.

Due to increasing violence and repression, an unprecedented number of media workers are being driven into exile abroad. A trend which is likely to grow exponentially in the coming years. In 2025, we will continue to advocate for the protection and support of journalists and media in exile, at the UNHCR, with donors, and in countries of exile. We will do this both at the international level, and at the regional and in-country level during our regional safety meetings.

**FREE
FREE
PRESS
UNLIMITED**

People deserve to know