

4.6. Journalists and media workers

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Media freedom has continued to decline, with increasing limitations placed on national and international broadcasters.1519 According to the 2025 RSF World Press Freedom Index, Afghanistan ranked 175 out of 180 countries, reflecting a decline of 23 positions compared to year 2023.1520 By 2025, the Afghan media landscape has been 'decimated', as described by RSF, and 'devoid of pluralism and dissenting voices'.1521 More information on civic space and freedom of expression is available in section 1.1.1. Political opposition and civic space.

Since the Taliban takeover, the de facto authorities have issued several verbal and written instructions limiting the work of Afghan media,1522 including on publishing content that is indecent, profane,1523 insulting national figures,1524 or considered defamation and 'unproven criticism' of de facto officials.1525 Article 17 of the 'Morality law' specifies that de facto MPVPV inspectors are to ensure contents of publication or public information do not contradict *sharia*, 'deride or humiliate Muslims', or include pictures of 'animate objects'.1526 A compilation of relevant national decrees and instructions issued since the Taliban takeover is available in Annex 3: Lists of decrees and instructions.

Issued restrictions on the media have been vague and difficult to follow in practice.1527 According to a compilation of the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC), the de facto authorities have issued a number of directives that run in parallel with official laws. Although these directives have not been 'issued by a single authority or following proper legal procedures', they have restricted the work of journalists and media personnel.1528 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) also noted a 'particularly confusing situation for journalists' receiving directives from various de facto authorities.1529 UNAMA also outlined how the de facto authorities have established various 'red lines' for reporting, i.e. 'no-go areas', which are informal and broad. These include any content deemed contrary to *sharia*, Afghan culture, and national interests, and have been subject to ongoing and fluctuating interpretation.1530

In the period 29 September–1 October 2025, Afghanistan experienced an almost complete shutdown of internet connectivity and mobile phone services.1531 UNAMA reported that media outlets relying on the internet to transmit, halted operations entirely, and journalists could not collect information via internet or telephone.1532 More information on this event is available in section 1.1.1. Political opposition and civic space.

The prohibition of images of living beings and music further limits the public information space and freedom of expression, as reported by UNAMA.1533 While prohibitions on images of living

beings existed in some areas prior to the issuance of the ‘Morality law’, these rules were progressively enforced in the media sector starting with September 2024.1534 More information is available in section 1.2.7(c) The ban on images of living beings.

After the Taliban takeover, there was a large exodus of journalists,1535 and some went into hiding.1536 Many media outlets moreover closed.1537 Out of the roughly 12 000 journalists that were active in Afghanistan in 2021, more than two thirds were estimated to have quit the profession after the Taliban takeover. In particular the number of active women journalists decreased significantly.1538 84 % of female journalists reportedly lost their jobs within two months of the Taliban takeover.1539 Around half of Afghanistan’s 4 748 journalists, of which 747 are female journalists, receive no pay or benefits, and AIJU warns that job security remains uncertain even in major media outlets.1540 Reports suggest that 11 television stations and one radio station reportedly closed during 2024.1541 According to IFJ, approximately 470 media outlets remain operational in Afghanistan in 2025.1542

Media workers have also been facing threats, intimidation, harassment,1543 arbitrary arrests and detention by the de facto authorities.1544 AFJC recorded at least 140 incidents of media freedom violations across Afghanistan during the first six months of 2025, representing an increase of approximately 56 % compared to the same period in 2024.1545 Human Rights Watch reported that media restrictions in Afghanistan have led many journalists to self-censor and to concentrate their reporting on official events. In addition, journalists failing to cover such events may face reprimands, threats, or, in some instances, detention.1546

One journalist was killed within the reference period of this report as per CPJ’s records.1547 The journalist reportedly died in crossfire on 15 October 2025 during a battle between Afghan de facto security forces and Pakistani security forces.1548

Sources recorded cases in which journalists had been detained during 2024–2025 on allegations of various crimes, such as links to media outlets operating in exile,1549 or producing content considered hostile to the de facto authorities.1550 The number of arrests differs between sources, with RSF recording 17 detentions of journalists and media workers in 2025,1551 while AFJC recorded at least 20 cases in the first half of the year alone.1552 There were cases of journalists being arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for producing ‘propaganda’ against the de facto government.1553 Some journalists were humiliated in videos with forced confessions, as reported by RSF.1554 According to AFJC, reporting in May 2025, at least 13 journalists and media workers were being held in detention or serving prison sentences ranging from several months to multiple years.1555

As reported by Human Rights Watch, collaborating with Afghan media in exile is ‘particularly dangerous’ as the de facto authorities perceive them as linked to the opposition, a threat to their control, 1556 and as operating illegally.1557 Various sources have reported on journalists being arrested on accusations of having collaborated with exile media,1558 and Human Rights Watch also noted severe beatings and death threats against such individuals.1559

Female media workers have been particularly affected by restrictions,1560 including prohibitions on broadcasting women’s voices in some provinces,1561 gender segregation at media offices,1562 as well as general restrictions on women,1563 including requirements for

women to cover their faces1564 and to be accompanied by a *mahram*.1565 Female journalists have been excluded from press conferences, and are regularly denied interviews with de facto officials.1566 In 2024, the Afghanistan Journalists Support Organization (AJSO) highlights reported on 38 % of women journalists facing major barrier to accessing information due to gender discrimination.1567 According to the IFJ, the number of employed female journalists has dropped from 2 833 before 2021 to only 747 in 2025, a decline of 74 %.1568

Although not specifying certain profiles, sources consulted by ACCORD reported that the de facto authorities threaten family members of individuals not complying with their rule, making it difficult for people in general to speak up.1569 The Swiss Refugee Council furthermore reported on threats towards *inter alia* journalists extending to their family members, and that the issue of family members being targeted was most probably an underreported issue.1570 For more information on family members of critical voices, see chapter 4.11. in the 2024 EUAA Country Focus – Afghanistan.

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