Grant for Core-Support to Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood

GUIDELINES

# How to apply

Before applying to the grant for Core-Support to Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood please read the following guidelines as well as the description of the application process, which can be found [here](https://www.mediasupport.org/news/open-call-for-independent-media-outlets-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-to-apply-for-core-support/). The application must be submitted to [OpenProcess@mediasupport.org](mailto:OpenProcess@mediasupport.org) in either Arabic, English, or French using the application form, which can be found [here](https://www.mediasupport.org/news/open-call-for-independent-media-outlets-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-to-apply-for-core-support/) together with the documents “Grant Guidelines” and “Description of the application process”. The deadline for submission is 14 March 12.00 CET.

Applicants who wish to obtain additional information should submit their questions solely in writing via email to [OpenProcess@mediasupport.org](mailto:OpenProcess@mediasupport.org). If the application is selected and a grant contract is awarded, International Media Support (IMS) will make a partner assessment of the applicant organisation.

Background  
Independent media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) faces significant systemic challenges that undermine and severely restrict sector capacities to effectively serve public interests, defend against authoritarian erosion of fundamental (media) freedoms, and counter polarising discourses and disinformation. Witnessing the largest decline in media freedom and ranked as the most difficult and dangerous region in the world for journalists (2019 World Press Freedom Index, RSF), critical voices are increasingly repressed through judicial and extrajudicial means.

# The overall context in the MENA region makes independent media more essential than ever, but 3 closely inter-linked problems hinder the sector from fulfilling its primary role. 1) Dysfunctional media markets and investment regulations, combined with (re)current economic crises, authoritarian regimes have long co-opted state and private media via subsidies and politically driven distribution of advertising revenues, resulting in mainstream media reporting biased government narratives, or acting as mouthpieces. These dynamics severely constrain opportunities for the sector to secure core funding and financial stability, with large-scale repercussions; notably, editorial freedom, self-censorship. 2) Populations in the region consequently have restricted access to the alternative sources of independent factual news and information they need to hold government duty-bearers to account, a situation that is compounded by significant sector capacity and resource deficits to produce and distribute quality public interest media content. While digital resources provide new opportunities for critical voices, they compete against well-funded propaganda channels of ruling political/economic elites, are easily manipulated by specific (self-serving) interests, and expose users (especially women) to growing digital security risks. 3) These problems are exacerbated by inadequate regional infrastructure to exchange knowledge that can contribute to greater effectiveness and resilience, and better ensure that such knowledge remains in and benefits the region.

Independent media actors consistently indicate widespread need for sustained core support to continue developing sector capacities. They also recognise the urgent need to diversify their revenue streams and increase their resilience to external pressures, given the growing repression under which they work. Directly responding to partner and broader sector requests, the grant for core support aims to make a strategic impact by identifying and supporting media outlets and initiatives with clear potential to contribute to overall sector development as a result of the support they receive.

# Purpose

The overall objective of the grant is to provide core financial support to well established independent media outlets with stable operational and production capacities. It targets outlets mature enough to engage in concrete planning for organisational development and improved managerial/editorial practices, as well as greater business viability and exploring revenue generation streams. The financial support will be combined with needed capacity building, training and coaching/mentoring and opportunities for networking and collaboration, and grant awardees will be asked to participate in these based on needs and capacity.

# General eligibility requirements (in line with EU guidelines). Persons or categories of persons eligible for financial support under the grant-making scheme must meet all of the following criteria: 1) must be legal persons; 2) may be non-profit or profit-making entities (although this financial support may not be directly used to generate profit; if the activities funded by the grant do result in profits, the partner is obliged to reinvest such profits in further organisational development and may not personally benefit from such profits); 3) must be independent media outlets, and 4) must be established in one of the target countries[[1]](#footnote-2) in the MENA region or diaspora countries and producing media content covering one of the target countries or MENA regional content. In addition, grantees must adhere to the IMS Code of Ethics[[2]](#footnote-3).

# Exclusion criteria (In line with EU guidelines). The following activities are ineligible to receive grants: individual sponsorships to participate in workshops, seminars, conferences (unless they are part of a wider range of activities to be implemented during the grant), congresses; individual scholarships for studies or training courses; academic research; individual political parties; proselytising activities. Moreover, no offer, payment, consideration or benefit of any kind, which constitutes illegal or corrupt practice, shall be made—neither directly nor indirectly—as an inducement or reward in relation to grant making. This also applies to grantee tendering, award of contracts or execution of contracts. Any such practice may be grounds for immediate cancellation of grant awards, civil and/or criminal actions and future exclusion.

Selection Criteria  
(successful applicants must fulfil at least 3 criteria. To be documented in the application form. Only applications who meet the above-mentioned eligibility criteria will be assessed based on the selection criteria):

* Be able to demonstrate adherence to with core journalism principles: fact-based, accurate, independent, fair, impartial, accountable
* Demonstrate leadership and innovation, and disseminate public interest media content for diverse MENA populations (for a specific country, regional audience, geographic area)
* Promote learning, leadership, innovation and opportunities that explore timely and emerging issues related to content production, dissemination and engagement with audiences
* Explicitly address national/regional socio-economic disparities, youth and gender gaps in media representation and provide voice to marginalised groups
* Apply new technical solutions and create innovative media platforms to expand reach and contribute to a stronger sense of community in the public
* Provide information and encourage information exchange and debate on public interest issues
* Grow and engage with their audiences in ways that build trust in the media and enable audiences to more critically and thoughtfully engage with information; encourage citizen input
* Show strong willingness to diversify their income streams, develop and apply innovative business models,
* Show strong willingness to develop and apply inclusive organisational strategies
* Engage in collaborative projects and/or support networking (in-country, regional, global)

# Eligible actions

Types of eligible activities (fixed list – meaning only activities included here should be included in the application be supported by the grant): Funds may be sought for continuing or improving vital operations, content production, co-productions and distribution, audience engagement, exploring and experimenting with business models/revenue generation streams, improving/developing organisational capacity and policies as follows:

1. Eligible core costs: a) Salary for core staff (remuneration to employed journalists, translators, editors, designers, the freelance contributors/journalists, in-house full-time accountants, fundraising and/or business development staff, insurance, safety resources, etc.); b) Rent and related costs; c) External services for production of media products; i.e. payment for provision of external media production services, such as article production, translation, editing, production of video or audio material, etc.; d) External basic/core/operational services such as external financial auditors, legal advice fees, tech development fees, software/tech subscriptions, online marketing costs, etc.

2. Travel and accommodation costs (directly related to implementing the proposed activities): a) International travel; i.e. expenses for economy flight, train and bus tickets, insurance, per diem, etc.; b) Local travel; i.e. economy local transport tickets, car rental, etc.; c) Accommodation; i.e. economy hotels, etc.

3. Other necessary costs (directly related to implementing the proposed activities) such as equipment rental, distribution/promotion of media products, etc. (maximum 10% of the overall grant budget.)

4. Indirect costs (Overheads) related to the administration of the grant such as office supplies, communication costs, etc. (maximum 7% of the overall grant budget.)

Funds can only be spent from the date of signing the contract. Retroactive spending is not possible.

Process for applying

To apply for the grant the following documents must be submitted 1) Application Form (Arabic/English/ French; legal status, target audience, organisational values, etc.); 2) Detailed project budget in Excel sheet; 3) Overall organisational budget (all sources of funding) for the proposal period;

The amount of grant is EUR 60.000 per year. Applicants can apply for grants of 2,5 years running from 1 May 2022 until 31 October 2024, for a total amount of 150.000 EUR. A second call for a two-year grant of 60.000 EUR per year (or 120.000 in total) will be published after the first grant period. The second call will be open to both grantees from the first grant period and applicants that were not included in the first 2,5-year grant. Applicants can across the two grants receive up to a maximum amount of EUR 270.000 per recipient and with a maximum length of 4.5 years.

The award criteria are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Evaluation parameters for “Large Core Support” Grants for Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood** | **Max points** |
| Proposed action’s contribution and relevance to independent media production in the region | 25 |
| Previous experience with quality independent media production | 15 |
| Proposed action’s contribution to business viability and diversity in income and/or previous experience with implementing income generation solutions | 15 |
| Proposed action’s contribution to organisational development and/or previous experience with organisational development | 15 |
| Budget transparency/efficiency: rates, salaries etc. For activities under the grant | 15 |
| Integration of human rights-based approach, gender aspects, and inclusion of marginalised communities in proposed action’s contribution to content production, business viability and organisational development | 15 |

IMS will strive towards diversity in terms of countries and media content producers selected for grants.

Please find the timeline for the process below:

Processing application [insert dates]

## Complaints procedure

Applicants for the grant can submit a complaint in situations where they consider that an error has been made in the administration or a factual error in the assessment of the application.

Applicants must submit their complaints to IMS no later than 10 days after the notification of the results. The complaint must include the full application and the notification provided to the applicant by IMS. Further, the applicant must disclose a written statement to IMS with a concrete explanation of why the complaint has been filed.

IMS will assess the complaint as fast as possible. If IMS decides that the complaint is valid, the application will undergo a revised assessment. Contracts will not be signed before potential complaints have been assessed.

Reporting

Successful grantees will be required to submit the following reports to IMS:

* Interim financial (as per EU guidelines/requirements) and narrative report (as per IMS’s templates) depending on the amount and length of the intervention.
* Final financial and narrative reports.
* One-pager learning brief produced.

If some of the proposed activities could bring about security concerns and considerations, this can be bi-laterally discussed with grantees.

1. Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Code of Ethics | IMS (mediasupport.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)