



ANNUAL
**SAFETY OF
JOURNALISTS**
ASSESSMENT REPORT

2025



Annual Safety of Journalists Assessment Report

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Acknowledgements

International Media Support (IMS) extends its gratitude to all partners, stakeholders, and contributors who made this report possible. Special thanks go to the **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)** for their generous support, provided through Fojo Media Institute, to the “Ethiopian Media in a Time of Change: Promoting Journalism and Democracy” programme.

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IMS is a non-profit organisation working to strengthen the capacity of media to reduce conflict, strengthen democracy, and facilitate dialogue. Since 2001, IMS has supported independent journalism, media development, and freedom of expression in more than 50 countries worldwide. For more information, visit www.mediasupport.org

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Printed by Central Printing Press, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Produced in accordance with IMS brand and publication standards.

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Citation

International Media Support. (2025). Annual Assessment Report on Journalist Safety in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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About IMS

International Media Support (IMS) is a non-profit organisation that works to strengthen the capacity of the media to reduce conflict, strengthen democracy, and facilitate dialogue. We work in more than 30 countries across four continents, promoting press freedom, good journalism and safety for journalists. In Ethiopia, we are registered as a foreign organisation under registry number 4997 as of July 2020.

Our Mission

We support local media to reduce conflict and strengthen democracy. We promote press freedom, save journalists' lives and pave the way for good journalism and reliable information for everyone.

What We Do

We work to promote press freedom and secure safer and better conditions, as well as sound laws, for local media affected by conflict and political transition. We support the production of good journalism that meets internationally recognised standards and work to ensure safe media environments with sound laws for journalists. We do this because citizens of all gender identities, ethnic or religious background and their leaders need information they can trust to make decisions that develop their societies in a peaceful and democratic way.

Focus Areas in Ethiopia

- Fostering a supportive legal and policy environment.
- Safeguarding an enabling environment for media freedoms, freedom of expression, public access to information and the safety of journalists.
- Strengthening media independence, coalition building and coordination of media development activities.
- Supporting professional and ethical journalism and countering information disorders.

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List of Acronyms

CARD – Centre for Advancement of Rights and Democracy
CoHA – Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
CSO – Civil Society Organisation
CSoJ – Consortium for Safety of Journalists
EBC – Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation
EBS – Ethiopian Broadcasting Service
EFFORT - Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray
EGE – Editors Guild of Ethiopia
EHRC – Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
EHRCO - Ethiopian Human Rights Council
EHRDC – Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Centre
EIO – Ethiopian Institute of the Ombudsman
EMA –Ethiopian Media Authority
EMC – Ethiopian Media Council
EMMPA – Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association
EMWA – Ethiopian Media Women Association
ENA –Ethiopian News Agency
ENDF – Ethiopian National Defence Forces
EPRDF – the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
Ezema – Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party
HoPR – House of Peoples' Representatives
GSMA – Global System for Mobile Communications Association
ITU – International Telecommunications Union
LHR – Lawyers for Human Rights
MCC – Media and Communications Centre
MINT – Ministry of Innovation and Technology
MoFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
OBN – Oromia Broadcasting Network
RSF - Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières)
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
TBS – Tigray Broadcasting Service
TBS – Tigray Broadcasting Service
TIRA – Tigray Interim Regional Administration
TPLF – Tigray People's Liberation Front
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

Foreword

The IMS Ethiopia programme (2024-2028) is centred on three priorities: strengthening the legal and policy environment for media; ensuring the safety of journalists and safeguarding media freedoms and access to information; and supporting professional and ethical journalism.

IMS's Annual Safety of Journalists Assessment reports have served as a cornerstone of evidence-based advocacy, informing targeted preventive measures, supporting early warning by identifying trends before they escalate, and helping partners adapt interventions to emerging risks. This Annual Safety of Journalists Assessment Report, conducted by an independent researcher, provides an analysis of safety trends observed across all regional states in 2025 and informs coordinated responses by media sector actors. Using a standardised methodology validated with partners in 2024, it examines five domains of journalist safety: personal, infrastructural, gender, identity, and legal.

The findings provide a clear picture of the risks journalists continue to face, including detentions, abductions, enforced disappearances, digital attacks, and identity- and gender-based threats.

IMS and partners, who are at the heart of our approaches, continued to advance journalist safety and media freedom. In 2025, these investments translated into meaningful gains. The establishment and strengthening of the Consortium for the Safety of Journalists (CSoJ) emerged as a major milestone, serving as a platform for coordination, rapid response, joint advocacy, and structured dialogue with duty bearers. In 2025, joint action by CSoJ members contributed to the release of two detained and two abducted journalists. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission also played an important role by engaging proactively with security and judicial bodies, further reinforcing response pathways. The sector-wide Action Plan, adopted in 2023 and updated in 2025, continued to guide partners in reducing duplication and strengthening coordination.

More than 43 multi-stakeholder dialogues, consultative dialogue workshops, and engagements held with state and non-state actors in Addis Ababa and regional states helped rebuild trust between the media, law enforcement, the judiciary, and regulatory bodies. Platforms such as the Ethiopian Media Council’s Inter-Media Dialogues and Editors Guild of Ethiopia’s Editors’ meetings facilitated candid discussion of emerging issues and strengthened coordination across the sector.

Preventive and evidence-based approaches also expanded. Since 2022, the IMS annual safety assessment reports have shaped prevention strategies and adaptive programming. In 2025, the CSoJ and EGE began producing quarterly safety reports. This transition toward locally led monitoring and incident documentation contributed to increased awareness of safety risks, more reported incidents and collective ownership of safety issues.

Partners also worked to advance professionalism and ethical standards within the media sector. Targeted capacity-building initiatives focused on digital safety, trauma-aware practices, gender safety, and election and conflict-sensitive journalism. The Ethiopian Media Council developed essential resources, including an election reporting code of conduct. At the same time, peer learning and regional exchange visits to Africa and Asia supported more adaptive, evidence-driven practice.

The year also saw Ethiopian journalist Tesfalem Weldeyes honoured with the 2025 World Press Freedom Hero Award, inspiring many across the profession. Looking ahead to 2026, IMS and partners will deepen this progress by finalising and operationalising Standard Operating Procedures for coordinated safety response; strengthening rapid-alert and referral mechanisms; and launching a Rapid Response Safety mechanism to ensure timely support to journalists at risk.

The achievements captured in this report reflect the collective commitment of our partners, CSoJ, EGE, EMC, EMA, EHRC, CEHRO, media houses, and the many dedicated journalists who continue to serve the public under challenging conditions.

We extend our sincere appreciation to DANIDA, SIDA, the FCDO and our national and international partners for their unwavering support. We also thank the Ethiopian journalists and media professionals who shared their experiences with the research teams and partners.

IMS remains committed to transforming evidence into action, strengthening national systems and building a safer, more enabling environment where journalists in Ethiopia can work independently, ethically and without fear.

Tewodros Negash
Programme Manager and Country Representative in Ethiopia

Annual Safety of Journalists Assessment Report 2025

Priority Recommendations

-  The government should institutionalise the protection of the safety of journalists
-  The state should ensure accountability of perpetrators of crimes against journalists
-  Media associations, the Consortium for Safety of Journalists and media development organisations should establish robust monitoring and reporting of journalists' safety issues
-  Donors, media development organisations, media associations and media houses need to establish protocols for the protection of the safety of journalists
-  The government and other relevant stakeholders need to give special attention to the safety issues that women journalists are facing
-  The government, donors, media associations and other relevant entities need to introduce protection mechanisms for disabled journalists and journalists in conflict affected areas
-  All stakeholders should focus on multi-scalar and targeted advocacy and awareness creation to contribute to sustainably overcome the safety challenges journalists are facing in Ethiopia

Executive Summary

This report provides an essential, evidence-based overview of journalist safety and media freedom in Ethiopia in 2025, documenting a rise in physical attacks, arbitrary arrests, and financial threats journalists and media houses faced. The report shows the continuity in the attacks on journalists compared to 2024, when 43 journalists were incarcerated. In 2025, at least 44 journalists were either abducted or detained by security forces, insurgencies and/or unidentified assailants. As a result, the year 2025 can be described as a worrying period for journalists in Ethiopia, with widespread detentions, kidnappings, and harassment that media professionals faced throughout the year. The assessment highlights specific vulnerabilities faced by different media groups and journalists in the context of a challenging operating environment that is becoming increasingly unsafe amidst security, political, legal, and economic pressures.

This assessment, informed by interviews with over 76 journalists, media professionals, and association leaders, and by monitoring incidents and reviewing secondary sources, reveals a rapidly securitised and politicised environment. This report serves as crucial evidence to inform stakeholders and guide policy reforms, joint advocacy activities, and coordinated action necessary to protect the media landscape.

The findings of the report are presented across five core areas of risk, namely:

- > Personal
- > Infrastructural
- > Gender
- > Identity
- > Legal Safety

In addition to immediate factors affecting journalists' safety, structural elements, such as Ethiopia's political, legal, and security environment, directly exacerbate the risks they face. Political and conflict developments are routinely instrumentalised to create safety risks for journalists under the guise of "national interest." This has been compounded by a tightening legal grip, as the amended Media Proclamation 1238/2021 has strengthened the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA) by granting the executive greater power and simultaneously reducing independent oversight by allowing party members on the board. Furthermore, access to information is severely hindered, with government officials and security forces frequently employing gatekeeping tactics, demanding letters that are not legally required for photography/video and preventing scrutiny of public service and development projects. The personalised nature of power in regions where journalistic reporting is seen as an attack on authorities, journalists face harassment for perceived offences against local authorities or their constituencies.

In terms of direct harm, journalists faced death (ENA Senior Cameraperson Bizuayehu Berhanu died while on the job), death threats, detention, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, and extortion. Media houses and journalists' residences were subjected to raids, resulting in staff detentions and the confiscation of electronic equipment.

Confiscated electronic devices are sometimes returned with evidence of infection with malware, reflecting a severe digital safety threat, as was also evidenced by journalists being targeted with phone surveillance and hacking, forcing many to change phone lines and devices. Financial instability is also a core threat, as corporate manipulation (using advertising leverage), heavy taxation, and direct government interference in state-affiliated media severely undermine both editorial and financial independence.

Authorities routinely instrumentalise the law, exploiting loopholes to impose pretrial remand, often utilising the terrorism prevention proclamation and the anti-hate speech laws, while security forces have often failed to honour court-granted bail orders. Furthermore, accountability for illegal kidnapping and enforced disappearance remains absent. Women and disabled journalists face unique challenges, including sexual harassment and verbal abuse from colleagues and sources. Women are often relegated to covering "soft topics," and disabled women journalists face a double burden due to unaccommodating work environments. The assessment concludes that safety concerns are increasing, with security forces, authorities, and business interests seeking to impose their will on the media, often by force. This situation often worsens during periods of conflict or national governance processes, such as elections.

Based on these findings, the report offers several key recommendations, which include:

The government should acknowledge that journalism benefits the state; hence the need to institutionalise the protection of journalists' safety, and establish a dedicated desk (comprised of law enforcement agencies, security, media outlets, media associations, media council and international community representatives) is pertinent to deal with media issues.

The Consortium for the Safety of Journalists (CSoJ) and its member organisations are urged to provide continuous safety training (especially on digital surveillance safety) and design a specialised support system for women journalists.

Media outlets must address both in-house and external safety issues, support female and disabled journalists, and establish mechanisms for anonymous access to mental health support.

Finally, human rights defenders should continuously advocate for the improvement of the media space and provide continuous support to victimised journalists and media houses.

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Introduction

This assessment aimed to identify and document the various safety issues journalists faced in 2025 and to produce evidence for strategic engagement and evidence-based advocacy that could lead to coordinated action to promote and protect journalists' safety and end impunity for crimes against journalists. This report uncovered systemic and incidental safety issues that journalists in Ethiopia faced in 2025. The report was prepared based on data gathered from open-source information (violation monitoring reports shared on social media posts, news reports, reports from international and local organizations gathered using digital researching tools), interviews with more than 76 (30 female and 46 male) journalists and media professionals from 12 regions (see annex for regional distribution of interviewees) conducted between 14 October and 28 December 2025, as well as observations of the assessors. Open-source information was verified against other secondary and primary information gathered by the assessors to maintain data quality and credibility.

A standardised context-driven assessment methodology (briefly presented below) was used to conduct this study and prepare the report. The standardised context-driven assessment methodology was developed by local media-sector actors, with support from IMS. The contextualised method specifically addressed important elements such as identity and conflict settings, as well as commonly recognised safety issues.

The report's findings are presented in themes classified as personal, infrastructural, gender, identity, and legal /protection safety issues. The methodology helps gather reliable data by combining internationally recognised measurements while addressing Ethiopia's unique challenges. It remains strictly aligned with international human rights standards, as well as regional and global safety indicators, to ensure all findings are credible and consistent.

The assessment details the state of freedom of expression and media independence, including media self-regulation. It then provides an analysis of the political, legal, and security contexts and their influence on protecting journalists' safety. The report examines journalists' safety and protection, covering personal safety (physical and psychological), infrastructural safety (digital safety and surveillance), financial threats, and the safety of journalists in conflict-prone areas. Further sections address gender and the media, specifically looking at gender-based violence and equal opportunities for women; internet access and regulation; and legal safety and protection, focusing on instrumentalisation of the law, forced disclosure of information sources, and identity safety gathering. Finally, the report concludes and provides recommendations to various stakeholders.



H.E. Ervin Jose Massinga, United States Ambassador to Ethiopia, delivers remarks during the 2025 World Press Freedom Day commemoration in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 16 May 2025.



Panel discussion on the state of media freedoms, safety of journalists, elections, and digital rights, held on 16 May 2025 as part of the 2025 World Press Freedom Day commemoration.



H.E. Hans Henric Lundquist, then-Swedish Ambassador to Ethiopia, provides opening remarks at the 2025 World Press Freedom Day commemoration in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 16 May 2025.



Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, May 16, 2026



Assessment Methodology and Scope

This assessment applies the “Standardised Context-Driven Methodology and Tools for Monitoring and Documenting the Safety of Journalists in Ethiopia”, developed by local media sector actors with support from the IMS towards the end of 2024. The methodology provides a structured and reliable approach for capturing, verifying, and analysing information related to the safety of journalists nationwide. It ensures consistency in the monitoring process and generates evidence-based data that can inform advocacy, policy engagement, and institutional reforms.

The methodology is grounded in international and national human rights frameworks, including the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, UNESCO’s safety indicators, and SDG 16.10.1, which focuses on verified cases of killings, kidnappings, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and torture of journalists. These frameworks are complemented by localised safety indicators designed to reflect the distinct political, legal, and conflict-related realities of Ethiopia. Together, these elements guide the assessment in documenting patterns of violations, identifying emerging risks, and understanding broader systemic conditions affecting journalists.



Validation workshop on lessons learned from regional and international exchange visits, held on 9 December 2025 in Bishoftu, Ethiopia.



Validation of the 2025 Annual SoJ Assessment Report, held on 10 December 2025 in Bishoftu, Ethiopia.



Validation workshop on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Journalist Safety, held on 11 December 2025 in Bishoftu, Ethiopia, to support the development of stronger protection mechanisms for journalists and media professionals.



The Validation Workshop Series, held from 9 to 12 December 2025 in Bishoftu, brought together journalists, media associations, civil society organisations, government regulatory bodies, and human rights actors - strengthening evidence based and coordinated planning and responses.

3.1. Data Sources and Data-Gathering Methods

The assessment draws on multiple, triangulated data sources to ensure accuracy, credibility, and context. The methodology allows for qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, as it requires recording the number of journalists subjected to various forms of harassment, as well as analysing the context and personal experiences of journalists under threat. Primary data was collected using tools recommended in the methodology:

In-depth interviews

Semi-structured interviews with 76 journalists, media workers, editors, victims, and journalism associations. These interviews provided qualitative insights into experiences of threats, harassment, and attacks, as well as institutional responses.

Surveys and reports

Information submitted through the standardised CSoJ attacks and risks monitoring template, as well as web-based reporting portals of member organisations, served as self-reported data on incidents.

Monitoring of workshops

The assessor attended workshops organised by IMS and its partners organized to discuss issues related to the changing legal landscape, such as the amended CSOs law ¹. IMS also organised a validation workshop for this assessment, where the findings were presented to CSoJ member associations and journalists. ² The workshops had participation from journalists, including women journalists and reporters working in high-risk areas, as well as government representatives, media associations, and development partners. These workshops encouraged group reflection and open sharing of experiences that may not surface in individual interviews, particularly in restrictive or hostile environments.

Remote monitoring

Phone, digital communication platforms, and open-source tools such as "WhoPostedWhat" and advanced Google Search (Boolean and Dork) were used to gather information from conflict-affected or inaccessible areas.

Desk review and media reports

Secondary data such as human rights reports, legal documents, regulatory records, periodic SoJ monitoring reports compiled by the EGE/CSoJ, ³ local and international media coverage were analysed to provide context, validate claims, and identify legal and policy changes affecting journalist safety.

¹ EGE and IMS Joint Workshop on "Bridging the Gap: Building Trust Between Media, Regulators, and Civil Society" on 19 August 2025. Addis Ababa.

² 2025 SoJ Assessment Report Validation Workshop Held on 11 December 2025. Bishoftu.

³ State of Media and Safety of Journalists in Ethiopia Analysis Report June-August 2025. 2025. Editors' Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) in collaboration with Consortium for Safety of Journalists (CSOJ). https://sojethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/State_of_Media_and_the_Safety_of_Journalists_in_Ethiopia_June_August.pdf; State of Media and Safety of Journalists in Ethiopia Analysis Report March - May 2025. 2025. Editors' Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) in collaboration with Consortium for Safety of Journalists (CSOJ). https://sojethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/State_of_Media_and_the_Safety_of_Journalists_in_Ethiopia_March.pdf; CSoJ Data Set October 2025 (Unpublished)

3.2. Classification of Safety Issues

The assessment used the five documentation categories defined in the methodology to classify and analyse risks faced by journalists. These categories capture the wide range of threats documented across Ethiopia:

Personal Safety	Includes physical threats such as killings, beatings, torture, abductions, ransom kidnappings, arbitrary arrest, detention, imprisonment, and psychological threats, including intimidation, verbal aggression, stalking, vigilantism, orchestrated office raids, and coercion.
Infrastructural Safety	Covers digital threats (hacking, surveillance, cell phone spying, identity theft, blocking of digital content) and financial threats such as forced leave, dismissal, demotion, denial of benefits, job insecurity, government interference in editorial processes, and closure of media outlets.
Gender Safety	Encompasses risks uniquely faced by women journalists, including sexual harassment, gender-based violence, sexist hate speech, technologically facilitated gendered abuse, denial of maternal rights, and discriminatory workplace practices.
Identity Safety	Addresses threats linked to perceived ethnic, religious, or political identity, as well as mobility restrictions, exclusion from sensitive reporting areas, denial of opportunities, heavy editorial scrutiny based on identity, and forced disappearance.
Legal Safety/ Protection	Covers instrumentalisation of the law, arbitrary detention without warrants, prolonged or fragmented court cases, legal harassment, denial of due process, and coercion to disclose journalistic sources.

These categories allow incidents to be grouped in a structured manner and support detailed trend analysis over time.



Panelists from the Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA), the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA), the Federal Police Commission (FPC), and the Information Network Security Administration (INSA) participate in a strategic dialogue on **Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence (TF GBV)** at the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) Studios on 5 December 2025. The televised discussion enhanced public awareness of the rising digital threats facing women journalists and highlighted priority areas for stronger national protection mechanisms and cross-sector collaboration.



Panelists discuss the state of public access to information in Ethiopia during the commemoration of the **International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI)** on 28 October 2025, highlighting opportunities to strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.



Consultative Dialogues facilitated by the **Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)** in **Arbaminch, Dire Dawa, Addis Ababa, and Bishoftu** throughout 2025 brought together regional law enforcement officials, judicial actors, media institutions, and civil society. The consultations underscored that stronger cross sector coordination is essential to safeguard journalists and uphold freedom of expression ahead of the 2026 elections.

3.3. Application of the Methodology in the Assessment

The assessment documented and analysed individual incidents and examined recurring patterns, systemic gaps, and changes across the reporting period. Localised safety indicators (highlighting identity-related threats and threats to journalists in conflict settings) were applied to evaluate the enabling or inhibiting conditions affecting journalists, including political developments, legal reforms, conflict dynamics, regulatory practices, and the performance of state and non-state actors. Confidentiality and informed consent were strictly observed throughout data collection. Personally identifiable information was removed during data processing, and sensitive cases were coded to protect the safety of sources and victims. While the assessment used random sampling of journalists, it combined this with a snowball approach to identify and speak with journalists who faced challenges or knew someone who faced challenges during the year. The random sampling method helps avoid selection bias, while snowball sampling enables reaching journalists whose experiences are relevant to understanding the safety issues they face. A semi-structured interview was used, along with neutral, thorough, open-ended questioning to foster a non-judgmental environment. A common understanding approach (defining success as allowing interviewees to speak their objective truth without imposing presumptions) was employed to help the interviewers manage their own biases.



A national consultative dialogue facilitated by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in Addis Ababa on 25 July 2025 convened judicial bodies, law enforcement agencies, media institutions, and civil society to identify cross sector measures that better protect journalists and uphold freedom of expression.

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Assessment Results

4.1. Political, legal, and security context analysis and its influence on the protection of the safety of journalists

The decade leading up to 2025 is characterised by hope, turbulence, reform, violence, instability, and uncertainty. In late 2014 and early 2015, protests erupted⁴ in the Oromia and Amhara regions, sending a shockwave across the country and ultimately deposing the infamous Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) after 27 years in power. The country has not seen a calm period since then, despite the positive changes the country went through from early 2018 to 2019⁵. Insurgency movements, large-scale conflicts, and internal and external political and geopolitical tensions animated this period, with chilling impacts on the civic and media spaces. The reignited state narrative of access to the sea for Ethiopia that reached a new height in January 2024, following the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland⁶ continued to dominate the media and security context in the country, in addition to conflicts in northern Ethiopia. The fallout with Somalia as a result of the MoU was resolved by the February 2025 Ankara Declaration,⁷ about which the Ethiopian media learned from Turkish outlets.

⁴ Human Rights Watch. (NA). Ethiopian Protests. <https://www.hrw.org/tag/ethiopian-protests>. Accessed on 15 October 2025.

⁵ The International Institute of Strategic Studies. (2024). The Ethiopia-Somaliland deal. <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2024/03/the-ethiopia-somaliland-deal/>

⁶ <https://addisstandard.com/pm-abiy-accuses-some-media-outlets-of-prioritizing-self-interest-over-national-interest/#:~:text=PM%20Abiy%20accuses%20some%20media,on%20how%20it%20is%20used.>

⁷ Anadolu. 2025. FACTBOX - Ethiopia-Somalia dispute: What to know. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/factbox-ethiopia-somalia-dispute-what-to-know/3495459>

Most of the time, national interest is used to prevent journalists from seeking information on certain issues, such as access to the sea and large-scale investments such as mining. PM Abiy, for instance, directed scathing criticism at the Ethiopian media, accusing them of working “to serve their own interests rather than putting national interest first.”

“Media is like fire; it can either destroy or build, depending on how it is used. Like a machete, it can serve good or bad purposes. There is no such thing as independent media in the world. Some media outlets in Ethiopia are working to serve their own interests.”

PM Abiy Ahmed, Interview with EBC ⁸

In October, during the inauguration of the Ethiopian Media Excellence Centre at Addis Ababa University, the Prime Minister’s Social Affairs Advisor said that the Ethiopian media has deficits in ensuring the country’s national interest, as they report on the location of Ethiopia’s strategic minerals, unlike the US media that do not report on where nuclear warheads are located.⁹ This demonstrates a clear confusion between the concepts of “national interest” and “national security,” where the former is related to moral options, while the latter indicates clearly stated grounds on legal limitations. Therefore, while locating nuclear warheads is a crime even under Ethiopian jurisdiction, reporting mining areas is a different matter, which is difficult to justify under the pretext of national security.

Such national narratives, coupled with conflicts and political tensions in multiple parts of the country, have resulted in the over-securitisation of the state, manifested by extrajudicial killings, civilian casualties, and arbitrary arrests.¹⁰ Hence, reporting on public-interest issues, such as corruption in investment sectors like mining, has frequently been linked to national security/interest, leading to intimidation of reporters working on these issues.¹¹ Such messages do not always come explicitly, and communications from various institutions require reading between the lines to discern them.

⁸ EBC. 2025. ከጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር ዐቢይ ለሕመድ (ዶ/ር) ጋር የተደረገ ቆይታ - ክፍል 4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN38XANMKWY>

⁹ ENA. 2025. ጠቅላይ ጥበብን ዲያቆን ዳንኤል ክብረት በሚዲያ ልህቀት ማዕከል ማስጀመሪያ ጦርነ ግብር ላይ ያስተላለፉት ጠልዕክት።2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In1T436N4X0>

¹⁰ The Reporter. 2025. EHRC reports increase in extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/43497/>

¹¹ State Department 2025. Ethiopia 2024 Human Rights Report. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/62451_ETHIOPIA-2024-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

The media also face frequent accusations from the government of disturbing peace and spreading terror. A statement from the Ethiopian National Security Council in April, for instance, accuses various actors of hiding in the media to spread terror, obstruct the work of the government, and spread false information. The Council vowed to identify, bring to justice, and eliminate these entities.¹² Such statements and assertions draw undue attention toward the media and journalists, making them vulnerable to attacks. Such rhetoric gives security forces and others *carte blanche* to harass, intimidate, and constrain civic and media space, mainly because of a lack of accountability for those who overstep their legally stipulated mandates.

Cementing this concern, the 2025 report by Freedom House highlights that government forces and armed groups have committed serious abuses with impunity as ongoing conflicts contributed to insecurity in several regions of Ethiopia.¹³

As a result of the continued clampdown on the civic space,¹⁴ CSOs engaged in media development and related activities, such as the Centre for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD), Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) and the Ethiopian Human Rights Defenders Centre (EHRDC) were suspended in late 2024, only to be reinstated in March 2025.¹⁵ The government alleges that the organisations engaged in activities “overstepping their stated objectives” and “against national interests,” violating “their obligation to operate independently from political involvement”.¹⁶ However, the suspended CSOs contend that the ACSO lacked a substantial basis for suspending them.¹⁷

Consequently, during a parliamentary address, PM Abiy criticised human rights organisations, which he said receive government funding but report to outsiders, immediately recommending legal, procedural, and institutional actions against such organisations.¹⁸ In another incident, the PM criticised the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for producing biased reports about alleged incidents in various parts of the country.¹⁹

¹² PMO. 2025. ከብሔራዊ የደገነት ምክር ቤት የተሰጠ መግለጫ. https://www.pmo.gov.et/media/documents/April_9_-_በወቅታዊ_ሀገራዊ_የደገነት_ፀጥታ_ጉዳዮች_ተራፊ_በመምከር_ከብሔራዊ_የደገነት_ምክር_ቤት_የተሰጠ_መግለጫ.pdf

¹³ Freedom House. 2025. Freedom in the World 2025. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2025>

¹⁴ Amnesty International. 2024. Ethiopia: Suspension of three human rights organizations highlights growing crackdown on civic space. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/ethiopia-suspension-of-three-human-rights-organizations-highlights-growing-crackdown-on-civic-space/>

¹⁵ EHRC. 2025. Lifting of the Suspension of Four Civil Society Organizations. <https://ehrc.org/lifting-of-the-suspension-of-four-civil-society-organizations/>

¹⁶ UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders. 18 April 2025. Ethiopia: alarming rise in the cases of suspension of civil society organizations at the end of 2024 (joint communication). <https://srdefenders.org/ethiopia-alarming-rise-in-the-cases-of-suspension-of-civil-society-organizations-at-the-end-of-2024-joint-communication/>

¹⁷ Addis Standard. 2024. News: Suspension on three rights groups lifted amid criticism of civil society crackdown. <https://addisstandard.com/suspension-on-three-rights-groups-lifted-amid-criticism-of-civil-society-crackdown/>

¹⁸ The Reporter. 2024. News: ‘We don’t commit mass killings’ - PM Abiy Ahmed denies accusations of mass killings by gov’t forces. <https://addisstandard.com/we-dont-commit-mass-killings-pm-abiy-ahmed-denies-accusations-of-mass-killings-by-govt-forces/#:~:text=Covering%20broader%20human%20rights%20issues,currently%20free%20from%20government%20influence.>

¹⁹ Ethiopia Observer. 2025. Abiy Ahmed criticizes human rights reports. <https://www.ethiopiaobserver.com/2025/06/08/abiy-ahmed-critical-of-human-rights-reports/>

Moreover, advocates and human rights defenders argue that this is a testament to the continued shrinking of civic space, with the state increasingly intolerant of critical voices.²⁰ International organisations like Amnesty International also state that such a trend of crackdown on civic space, compounded by the lack of accountability for the recent targeting of human rights defenders²¹, is a systemic problem.

Moreover, conflicts in the Amhara and Oromia regions between government security forces and insurgency groups, as well as the political tension in Tigray, have cast their shadows on the civic and media space in the country. The EMA permanently suspended²² two Deutsche Welle's local correspondents, officially citing bias as the reason. Initially, a total of nine DW local correspondents were suspended, but later two were permanently suspended.²³ The Human Rights Watch says this attack on the correspondents is another blow to media freedom in Ethiopia.²⁴

Ethiopia also saw a reversal of legal instruments that cemented the 2018/19 reform activities. In this regard, the 2021 Ethiopian Media Proclamation 1238/2021 was revised, while the Civil Society Organisations Proclamation No. 1113/2019 is undergoing revisions with significant implications for the civic space. The media regulator, the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA), argues that the changes would improve efficiency and streamline governance; however, media houses and concerned CSOs fear that the changes would compromise the EMA's independence. The major changes to the Media Proclamation 1238/2021 include:

Regulatory Power

Issuing warnings, renewing, suspending, and revoking licenses, and imposing fines, which were previously overseen by the Board of EMA. These are now directly under the EMA's mandates, rather than a board that was, in principle, composed of representatives of the media and civic sectors

Appointment of Director-General

The power to gather public inputs for the EMA Director-General appointment has moved from the House of Representatives to the Prime Minister's office.

Board Membership

The power to gather public inputs for the EMA Director-General appointment has moved from the House of Representatives to the Prime Minister's office.

²⁰ Civicus. 2025. Suspension of human rights NGOs indicates further crackdown on critical voices. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/suspension-of-human-rights-ngos-indicates-further-crackdown-on-critical-voices/>

²¹ Amnesty International. 2024. Ethiopia: Suspension of three human rights organizations highlights growing crackdown on civic space. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/11/ethiopia-suspension-of-three-human-rights-organizations-highlights-growing-crackdown-on-civic-space/>

²² DW. 2025. DW protests Ethiopia's suspension of 2 correspondents. <https://www.dw.com/en/dw-protests-ethiopia-suspension-of-2-correspondents/a-75137491>.

²³ CPJ. 2025. Ethiopian authorities suspend licenses of Deutsche Welle's local correspondents. <https://cpj.org/2025/10/ethiopian-authorities-suspend-licenses-of-deutsche-welles-local-correspondents/>

²⁴ HRW. 2025. Another Blow to Media Freedom in Ethiopia. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/15/another-blow-to-media-freedom-in-ethiopia>

While the EMA argues that this will enhance its regulatory mandates, journalists and civil society organisations are concerned that transferring licensing, registration, suspension, and warning powers from the board could lead to undue influence. Others also argue that there was a lack of transparency and inclusiveness in the amendment process and that no independent body or study presented evidence for the need for the amendments. Hence, the amendment process lacked thorough study and stakeholder consultation before submitting the draft amendment, a significant departure from the process that produced the proclamation that was amended. The government is also introducing an amendment to the CSOs²⁵ proclamation that could limit foreign and CSO support for pertinent media reporting during national events such as elections. The draft proclamation prevents any entity from receiving any foreign support to engage in election-related work without prior approval from the Authority for CSOs. Media that are reporting on elections have received support and capacity-building training from CSOs in the past, and the new law could curtail this.

One important missing element in this spree of legal changes is the Access to Information Proclamation. Previously part of the repealed Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008, access to information was expected to be provided for in a separate law under the auspices of the Ethiopian Institution of the Ombudsman (EIO).

The draft Access to Information bill, expected to be tabled before the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) soon, scraps previous provisions to establish an Information Commission that would compel the government to provide information. A significant portion of the bill also focuses on classified information,²⁶ ongoing court cases, health records, individual and property-related information, and third-party information. On the positive side, the bill provides that information of immense public interest should be released and imposes penalties for the dissemination of misinformation, while providing immunity for officials and whistle-blowers who disclose information in good faith.²⁷ The draft also provides for a 48-hour response for urgent requests for information. It also places a duty on the government to encourage a culture of openness and educate the public on their right to access to information. It also imposes a fine of 150,000 ETB on any official that denies information.²⁸

On the other side, the government's zeal to generate increased domestic resources has posed a significant challenge for media houses. As private media are established as commercial entities, they are subject to tax-related administrative hurdles, a challenge that has remained unaddressed from previous years. Support from media development organisations is considered a profit gain, and this is added to all transaction hikes tax payable by media houses that run on meagre resources.²⁹ Months ahead of the seventh general elections, the political, legal, and security situation in the country remains constraining for journalists and media operations.

²⁵ BBC Amharic. 2025. የሚሻሻለው የሲቪክ ማህበረሰብ ድርጅቶች አዋጅ በሲቪል ምኅዳሩ ላይ የደቀው ስጋት. <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cly1x190g80o>

²⁶ The Reporter. 20 August 2025. Ombudsman Resurfaces with Restrictive Access to Information Law. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/46672/>

²⁷ Draft bill

²⁸ Ethiopia Insider. 25 December 2025. ሠረጸ በሚከለክሉ ኃላፊዎች ላይ በአዋጅ የሚጣል ቅጣት ከ150 ሺህ ብር በላይ እንዲሆን ጥያቄ ቀረበ. <https://ethiopiainsider.com/2025/16910/>

²⁹ Interview private media owner

4.2. The State of Freedom of Expression and Media Independence

4.2.1. Media self-regulation

According to the 2021 Media Proclamation 1238/2021, the EMA has the mandate to “regulate broadcasting media to ensure they are operating in accordance with the law.” Similarly, providing proper support to strengthen the organisational structure and operations of the media self-regulation mechanism falls within the EMA’s powers and duties. Simultaneously, media self-regulation structures can be allowed to enforce the code of conduct, contingent upon a capacity review the EMA conducts every three years into the strength of self-regulation structures.

In 2016, the Ethiopian Media Council (EMC) was formed (but formally registered as an independent body in 2019) based on various self-regulatory models to serve as a self-regulatory platform for the Ethiopian media. Its stated goal is to promote ethical practices within the media industry and to serve as a forum for complaints against the government, the public, and its members. Comprised of more than 109 members³⁰ from media houses and journalist associations, the Council instituted a tribunal to arbitrate media-related issues brought before it, in addition to introducing a code of conduct for media operations³¹.

The EMC formed this tribunal/ombudsman to arbitrate cases related to the media, and the Ministry of Justice had agreed to refer issues involving journalists and media houses to the tribunal when it starts operating in full swing.³² But even if the MoJ has the goodwill to cede part of its prosecutorial power to the EMC, this might require an overhaul of the legal system to legally enable it.

In 2025, there were several hiccups in ensuring media self-regulation in a context where media professionals were detained and intimidated for doing their jobs. Media professionals suspected of violating several laws, including media-related ones, were frequently brought before the courts. One such case is the broadcast by Ethiopian Broadcasting Service (EBS) on 23 March 2025, during the “Addis Mieraf” episode, in which the media house was accused of wrongful coverage allegedly linked to the insurgency in the Amhara region. Audio recordings of alleged phone conversations between the person in the coverage and alleged accomplices abroad were later released, followed by documentaries on state- and state-affiliated media, to cement the alleged link (see details under Physical Safety).

³⁰ EMC. nd. About us. <https://ethiopianmediacouncil.org/about-us/>

³¹ EMC. 2022. የኢትዮጵያ ጠንቅቶች ስርዓት ማክሮ ስት የጋዜጠኝነት የሥነ-ምግባር ደንብ (የቤይ ስርዓት ጋዜጠኝነትን ያካተተ).

<https://ethiopianmediacouncil.org/amharic/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/05/Ethiopian-Media-Council-code-of-ethics-Amharic.pdf>

³² The Reporter. 2022. Media Council tribunal to arbitrate journalists, media. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/12727/>

On 2 April 2025, after police raided the media house and apprehended media staff, the EMA suspended EBS's "Addis Mieraf" (New Chapter) program, alleging that it violated media laws by broadcasting false and misleading content. The EMA cited Media Proclamation 1238/2021 and the Anti-Hate Speech Proclamation 1185/2012 to justify its suspension, accusing the station of unprofessional conduct and "para-journalism" for failing to verify sensitive claims. This sudden action has raised serious concerns regarding transparency and proportionality, as the suspension occurred without warning or an opportunity for the station to issue a correction. Such abrupt regulatory measures risk fostering an environment of self-censorship among journalists who fear arbitrary penalties.



"አዲስ ምዕራፍ" የቴሌቪዥን ፕሮግራምን በተመለከተ የተወሰደ አስተዳደራዊ እርምጃ

መጋቢት 23 ቀን 2017 ዓ/ም አዲስ አበባ፣ ኢትዮጵያ

የኢትዮጵያ መንግሥት ብዙ-ጋን ባለሥልጣን በኢ.ቪ.ሲ. ቴሌቪዥን ጣቢያ አዲስ ምዕራፍ በተሰኘ ፕሮግራም አኩሪ መጋቢት 14 ቀን 2017 ዓ.ም ያለፈውን ፕሮግራም ከመንግሥት ብዙ-ጋን አዋጅ እና ከዘርፍ ሕጎች አንጻር በመገምገም አስተዳደራዊ እርምጃ ወስዷል።

በዚሁ መሰረት በቴሌቪዥን ጣቢያው የተረጎመ ፕሮግራም በሐሰተኛ መረጃ ላይ የተመሰረተ፣ ሕዝብን የሚያስከትና ጥርጣሬን የሚፈጥር፣ የመንግሥት ብዙ-ጋን አዋጅ 1238/2013፣ የጥላቻ ገገግርና ሐሰተኛ መረጃ ስርዓትን ለመከላከልና ለመቆጣጠር በወጣው አዋጅ 1185/2012 አንጻራዊ የጋቢ.ጠንት ሙያ ስነ-ምግባርን የሚጥስ የፓራጆርናሲዝም አስራርን የተከተለ ሆኖ ተገኝቷል። ጣቢያውም በፕሮግራሙ ዙሪያ ተጠይቆ ለባለሥልጣኑ በሰጠው ምላሽ ያለፈው ፕሮግራም ሐሰተኛ መሆኑንና ስህተት መፈጸሙን ገልጿል።

በመሆኑም ባለሥልጣኑ ጉዳዩን መርምሮ በጣቢያው የሚሰራው "አዲስ ምዕራፍ" የተሰኘ ፕሮግራም በኢዲዮራፊያል አሰራር ላይ አስፈላጊውን እርምጃ ወስኖ ለባለሥልጣኑ እስኪያስወግድ ወሳኔ እስኪያገኝ ድረስ የአዲስ ምዕራፍ ፕሮግራም በመንግሥት ብዙ-ጋን አዋጅ መሰረት ከስርዓት ታግዶ አንዲቆይ የተወሰነ እና የጸሀፍ ግክጠንተኔያ የተሰጠው መሆኑን ባለሥልጣኑ ያስወቃል።

የኢትዮጵያ መንግሥት ብዙ-ጋን ባለሥልጣን



Image 1: A press release from EMA on the suspension of Addis Mieraf

The Ethiopian Media Authority has taken administrative action against EBS TV's "Addis Mieraf" (New Chapter) program following a review of its 23 March 2025 broadcast, considering the Media Proclamation and other laws regulating the sector. The Authority determined that the program relied on false information, misled the public, and fueled suspicion. Specifically, the broadcast was found to violate Media Proclamation 1238/2021 and the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation 1185/2020, while also breaching professional journalistic ethics through "para-journalism" practices.

In its response to the EMA's inquiry, the station admitted that the program was indeed based on false information and acknowledged that a mistake had been committed. Consequently, after investigating the matter, the Authority has decided to suspend "Addis Mieraf" from broadcasting -in accordance with the Media Proclamation - until the station implements the necessary editorial corrections on its editorial process, notifies the Authority of these corrections, and receives a final decision.

While EBS CEO Aman Fisehatsion publicly apologised³³ and admitted to journalistic errors and fact-checking failures, the situation quickly escalated into a criminal matter. Despite the station’s pledge for internal accountability, police have alleged that the media staff engaged in “terrorism-related acts.” This escalation has led to the detention of several key media professionals, including CEO Nebiyu Tiumelisan, Program Director Tariku Haile, Deputy Program Director Hiwot Tarekegn, Programs Head Kidist Getachew, Studio Manager Girma Tefera, Studio Director Nitir Dereje, Editing Supervisor Henok Abate, and Editor Habtamu Alemayehu.³⁴ Journalists’ defence lawyers argued that the case should be treated under the anti-hate and disinformation proclamation, as police had primarily accused their clients of spreading false information.³⁵

Similarly, the detention³⁶ and the trial of journalists from Sheger 102.1 FM for coverage of health professionals’ protests for improved livelihoods shows that the media self-regulatory regime has a long way to go before self-regulation emerges as a viable platform for media regulation in Ethiopia.

While the Ethiopian Media Council (EMC) says it has repeatedly engaged the EMA to refer ethics-related cases to the tribunal/ombudsman established for such purposes, little has happened in that regard.³⁷ Meanwhile, on 18 March 2025, the EMC introduced³⁸ an accreditation regime for journalists to issue press IDs, conduct professional registration, and grant recognition and certificates of competence. While the EMC argues that this complements the self-regulatory efforts and opens doors for opportunities for Ethiopian journalists, others, however, criticised it for creating more safety concerns than resolving them. Others also argue that it could be a barrier to entry into the sector and could lead to selective safety protection for accredited and non-accredited journalists, citing continental regimes that demonstrate the risks of mandatory accreditation, which expose them to arbitrary denials and revocations.³⁹ Nonetheless, EMC says accreditation is voluntary, although it acknowledges that there could be exploitation for unintended purposes⁴⁰

³³ EBC. 2025. ኢ.ቢ.ኤስ ቴሌቪዥን ቡብርቱካን ተመሰገን ዙሪያ ለስተላላፊው ዶክመንተሪ ደቅርታ ጠየቀ. <https://web.facebook.com/EBCzena/posts/pfbid02pxixueedct5uFpQZc2gx8vejrcUtorHv56CDhFeps4MDy7AZ3PDAcBeScBkRhRDEI#:~:text=Ethiopian%20Broadcasting%20Corporation-.o,m-%C2%B7>
³⁴ Addis Admas News. 2025. መንግሥት ያሰራቸውን የኢ.ቢ.ኤስ ጋዜጠኞች እንዲፈታ ሲፒጂ አሳስቦ: [https://web.facebook.com/AddisAdmasNews/posts/pfbid0e69S4fi6eGpUwTQwdBdoe83CA8KAfbjn3F1d9WQYLyHvE5sz237o3XEgxaWg64e5l?_cft__\[0\]=AZY9JP4hPaQ-05ZjilrAh-TQOu53sLcfHksQjLZCAqbMTCVUBs_Qsez8At024zCif9-VHW0L17puy4sow_m-rNiii7EfpPa_YaX3z_Bfhu7JhEqwLpSETtaUDAG30Ky0b0HicfU7TUHWGjZfOadLajnqwcns6U5EP1eusn2Vew&__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R](https://web.facebook.com/AddisAdmasNews/posts/pfbid0e69S4fi6eGpUwTQwdBdoe83CA8KAfbjn3F1d9WQYLyHvE5sz237o3XEgxaWg64e5l?_cft__[0]=AZY9JP4hPaQ-05ZjilrAh-TQOu53sLcfHksQjLZCAqbMTCVUBs_Qsez8At024zCif9-VHW0L17puy4sow_m-rNiii7EfpPa_YaX3z_Bfhu7JhEqwLpSETtaUDAG30Ky0b0HicfU7TUHWGjZfOadLajnqwcns6U5EP1eusn2Vew&__tn__=%2C0%2CP-R)
³⁵ Addis Standard. 2025. ዜና: ሲፒጂ የኢትዮጵያ ባለሥልጣናት በኢ.ቢ.ኤስ “ጋዜጠኞች” ላይ የተጀመረውን የሽብርተኝነት ክስ ምርመራው ውድቅ እንዲያደርጉ ጠየቀ፤ እርምጃው “ተመጣጣኝ አይደለም” ብሏል። <https://addisstandard.com/Amharic/?p=7531>
³⁶ Shegger FM. 2025. የሽገር ኤፍ ኤም ጋዜጠኞች ትዕግስት ዘረሀንና ምንታምር ፀጋው የፈራራ ጠቅላይ ፍርድ ቤት በወሰነው መሰረት ዛሬ ከእስር ተለቀቀል። <https://web.facebook.com/100064825447015/posts/1235470018623835/?rid=sdKzZzyNfZxBIQ7a#>
³⁷ Interview, EMC
³⁸ EBS. What’s New. የመ-ያ ብቃት መታወቂያ ጉዳይ፣ መጋቢት 09, 2017 What’s New Mar 18, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fN_qdtBm_jk
³⁹ Validation workshop participant. 11 December 2025. Bishoftu.
⁴⁰ Interview, EMC

The EMA, nonetheless, rejected the EMC's initiative, stating that only the EMA has the legal power to license and regulate media entities and professionals. The EMA also has the power to issue written warnings, impose fines, or suspend/revoke licenses for non-compliance with media laws, which it doesn't seem ready to forfeit, given the recent tightening of its regulatory frameworks through amendments to the Media Proclamation 1238/2021. Hence, a significant missing element in ensuring the protection of journalists and media in Ethiopia is self-regulation, allowing for continued state interference in media affairs. As a result, authorities tend to intimidate journalists and media houses whenever they believe that there is a breach of ethical and legal standards. Moreover, as the EMA has the legal mandate to adjudicate legal, ethical, or other breaches in the media, it emphasises legal measures and calls on the public to report such breaches to it whenever they observe them. In exercise of this power, EMA writes letters to media houses demanding corrections and publicly issues statements rebuking them.

Nonetheless, EMC says it continues working with the EMA, and that the former is allowed to deal with ethical issues concerning the media through its tribunal.⁴¹

To this end, the EMC and EMA signed an MoU that includes case referrals to EMC in a manner that complements EMA's complaints handling directive that aspires to exhaust remedies at EMC. While this is a work in progress, EMC receives public complaints, but few of them relate to the issues they intend to arbitrate.

4.2.2. Gender and the media

Although there have been few comprehensive censuses of the Ethiopian media that examine the sector's nature, several studies have demonstrated that women are disproportionately represented in the media.⁴² One report recorded that there are 5,659 journalists in Ethiopia, and women journalists represent 37.9 percent of this.⁴³ Several barriers, ranging from stereotyping to safety concerns, hinder women journalists' active roles in the media. Intersectional factors, such as economic, marital, and parenthood status, continue to pose challenges for women journalists. Because of limited awareness of this disparity, many Ethiopian media houses lack gender policies, except for Oromia Broadcasting Network (OBN). With support from Fojo, the Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA) signed an MoU with Capital newspaper, Wazema Radio, and Ahadu Radio to collaboratively develop a gender-responsive policy and promote gender equality in workplaces.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interview, EMC

⁴² Mulatu Alemayehu. 2022. Post-2018 Media Landscape in Ethiopia: A Review. Centre for Advancement of Rights and Democracy. <https://www.cardeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CARD-Media-Landscape-in-Ethiopia.pdf>; Yemisi Akinbobola. 2025. Barriers to women journalists in Ethiopia. Fojo Media Institute. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1985193/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

⁴³ Klein, T. & Skjerdal, T. in Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Lauerer, & Slavtcheva-Petkova, V. [eds.] (2025). Journalism Under Duress: Worlds of Journalism Study Report (Wave 3: 2021-2025). Munich: WJS Center. <https://www.worldsofjournalism.org/wp-content/uploads/WJS3-Report-Country-Reports-Ethiopia.pdf>

⁴⁴ Fojo. 2025. A milestone for gender equality in Ethiopian media. <https://fojo.se/en/a-milestone-for-gender-equality-in-ethiopian-media/>

Back in 2021, EMA, with support from UNESCO, launched “Guideline for Gender Sensitive Conflict Reporting for Media in Ethiopia” to support journalists to “portray and represent women and men accurately and ethically in their conflict reporting”.⁴⁵ EMWA, with support from UNESCO, has also introduced the “*Capacitate Women Journalists on Mental Health Safety and Trauma Reporting*” project aimed at empowering women journalists in dealing with trauma and work-related mental health issues.⁴⁶

Women journalists frequently face gender-based abuses both by their supervisors and informants. Women journalists interviewed for this assessment say they face harassment ranging from demeaning insults to discrimination in assignments, financial challenges, gender-based harassment, as well as sexist comments and advances from informants, including officials.

Out of fear of further repercussions or lack of trust in the system that their complaints will be addressed, these cases remain unreported. As a result, psychological pressures, including traumatic experiences, remain buried, burdening women journalists.

Women are also particularly subjected to technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the form of continued online threats, abuses, defamation campaigns, degrading messages that focus on personal and family life, as well as attempts to hack social media accounts.⁴⁷ Women journalists interviewed for this assessment have also reported online harassment from their audience as well as colleagues.⁴⁸

Ethiopia’s digital governance and policies, including the artificial intelligence (AI) policy, tend to overlook gendered perspectives in these technological advancements that perpetuate gender discrimination, given algorithmic bias, or AI-facilitated abuse.⁴⁹

The recently released Digital Ethiopia 2030 Strategy mentions gender only twice while promising to ensure gender and geographic inclusivity through intentional design.⁵⁰

While gender-based violence of any form against journalists has multiple impacts both at group and individual levels, studies highlight that online violence against women journalists is “designed to silence, humiliate, and discredit” them professionally.⁵¹

⁴⁵ EMA. 2021 Guideline for Gender Sensitive Conflict Reporting for Media in Ethiopia. https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Guideline%20for%20Gender%20Sensitive%20Conflict%20Reporting%20for%20Media%20in%20Ethiopia%20English_0.pdf

⁴⁶ EMWA. 2025. [https://web.facebook.com/Ethiopianmediawomen/posts/pfbid02PkQEbAPUbBoznNc8soWdbHBcqwkJhCanudLyibgPqMb9A687AACzq4PmabF4uXBI?_cft__\[0\]=AZawSSGVvP5Kmw0GJksTY10wEXX1pfxXc0PHU1LpzLiJfxrY1uD2W7A0gJB_Z55RnQB0yLcgFQ68za1hKOBgXOrbxzLPDYv4s4bqKCKRftdnf5rpsXtENOQvvgEyHt2iBlkuGMn80Im2A6N-8cLuGdYVSttZuLdldL3YVBUHxHNa87TW8Q8RdB2SJo7_u3rhdI&__tn__=%2C%2CP-R](https://web.facebook.com/Ethiopianmediawomen/posts/pfbid02PkQEbAPUbBoznNc8soWdbHBcqwkJhCanudLyibgPqMb9A687AACzq4PmabF4uXBI?_cft__[0]=AZawSSGVvP5Kmw0GJksTY10wEXX1pfxXc0PHU1LpzLiJfxrY1uD2W7A0gJB_Z55RnQB0yLcgFQ68za1hKOBgXOrbxzLPDYv4s4bqKCKRftdnf5rpsXtENOQvvgEyHt2iBlkuGMn80Im2A6N-8cLuGdYVSttZuLdldL3YVBUHxHNa87TW8Q8RdB2SJo7_u3rhdI&__tn__=%2C%2CP-R)

⁴⁷ Dire Tube. 2025. <https://web.facebook.com/reel/2303500640163130>

⁴⁸ Interview, newspaper journalist, Addis Ababa; Interview, a TV journalist, BSG

⁴⁹ Addis Standard. 2025. Technology of Freedom, Risk of Violence: Digital divide facing women in post-war Tigray. <https://addisstandard.com/technology-of-freedom-risk-of-violence-digital-divide-facing-women-in-post-war-tigray/>

⁵⁰ FDRE PMO. 2025. Digital Ethiopia Vision 2030. https://www.pmo.gov.et/media/other/Digital_Ethiopia_2030.pdf

⁵¹ Posetti, J. and Shabbir, N. 2022. THE CHILLING: A global study of online violence against women journalists. International Center for Journalists. https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/ICFJ%20Unesco_TheChilling_OnlineViolence.pdf

4.2.3. Internet access and regulation

Despite expanding connectivity and additional resources, including those from foreign direct investment, the country's internet connectivity remains limited. Moreover, freedom of speech and access to information were curtailed because of restrictions on connectivity, as this section demonstrates. According to Datareportal, there were a total of 93.2 million cellular mobile connections active in Ethiopia in late 2025, representing 68.4 percent of the population. A total of 29.5 million Ethiopians accessed the internet at the end of 2025, with the rate of online penetration standing at 21.7 percent. Out of the total internet users, there were 9.8 million social media user identities as of October 2025, making up 7.2 percent of the total population.⁵²

On the other hand, Ethio Telecom reports that mobile voice subscribers reached 77.7 million, mobile data and internet users 43.5 million, and fixed broadband 784.1 thousand⁵³, representing a disparity with the Datareportal report, which draws its data from the GSMA and the ITU. The Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MINT) credits the increase in internet users from 17 million to 42 million to the Digital Ethiopia strategy introduced in 2020.⁵⁴

⁵² Datareportal. 2025. Digital 2026: Ethiopia. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-ethiopia>

⁵³ Ethio Telecom. 2024. Ethio telecom 2024/25 Semi-Annual Business Performance Report. <https://www.ethiotelecom.et/ethio-telecom-2024-25-semi-annual-business-performance-report/2/>

⁵⁴ FANA TV. 2024. Digital Ethiopia 2025 Strategy increases internet users by over 42 million – MinT. <https://www.fanamc.com/english/digital-ethiopia-2025-strategy-increases-internet-users-by-over-42-million-mint/>

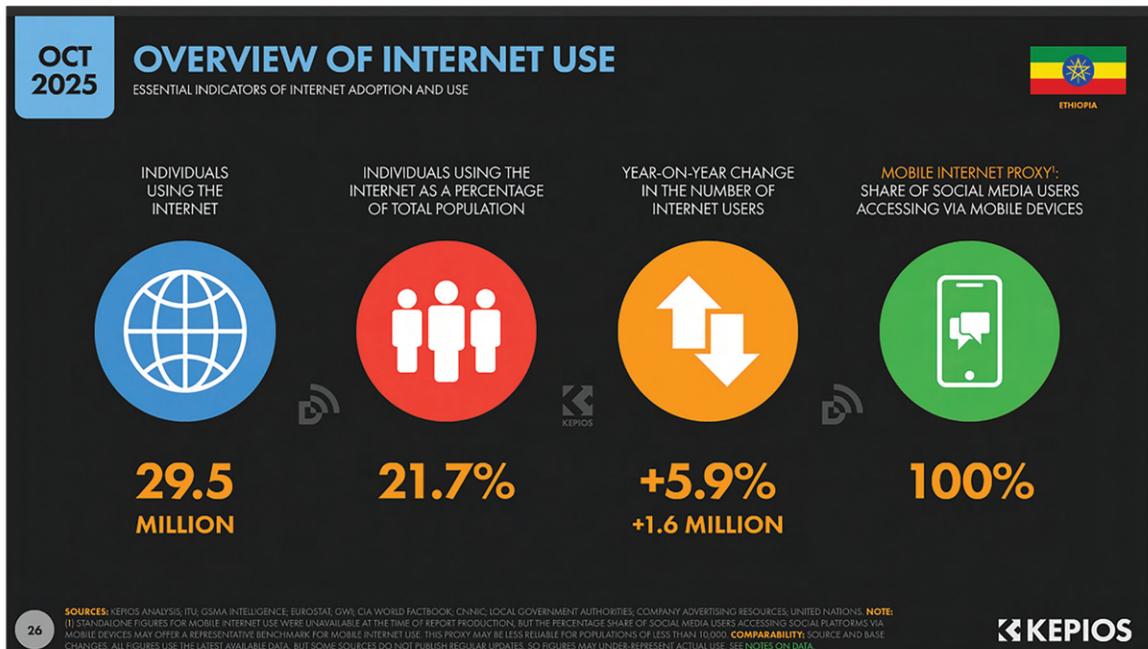
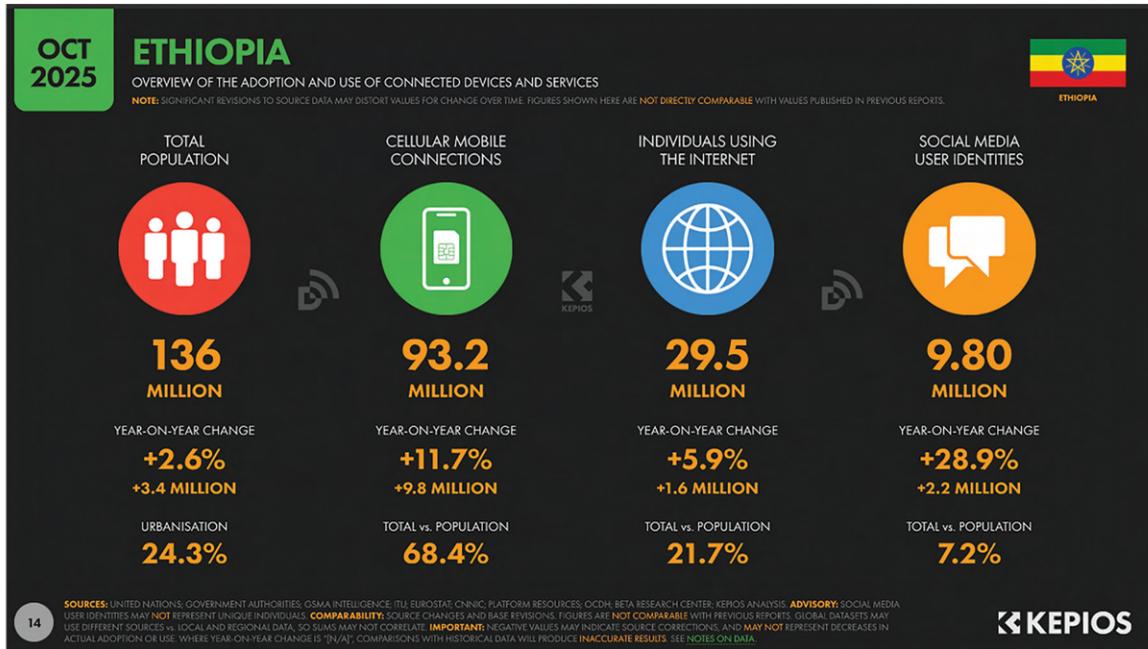


Image 2: Population and internet usage data for Ethiopia⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Datareporta. 2025. Digital 2026: Ethiopia. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-ethiopia>

Another report by UNESCO indicates that only 25 percent of Ethiopians are regular internet users, and 79 percent of the population remains unconnected due to limited infrastructure and low digital literacy.⁵⁶ The report highlights that the rural-urban digital divide, as well as the absence of robust data protection frameworks, remains a critical concern in ensuring equitable internet and digital access in Ethiopia.

Freedom House’s Freedom on the Net index also places Ethiopia as an unfree state, given restrictions on certain platforms and internet shutdowns in conflict-affected areas.⁵⁷ Because of challenges related to copyright protection, researchers recommend a bottom-up, multistakeholder internet governance ecosystem in which all stakeholders participate in the policy development process. Both the government and non-governmental actors have so far paid little, if any, attention to the bottom-up, multi-stakeholder Internet governance.⁵⁸

During the year, Ethiopia experienced a partial internet blockade in conflict-affected areas, and some sources indicate that there were at least seven (7) instances of network restrictions nationwide.⁵⁹ Although this report did not detail the times and areas of restrictions, other sources show that internet restrictions have “become a go-to tactic of the state in their attempt to silence dissent in the Oromia and Amhara regions.”⁶⁰ Ooni probe’s data for one month between 29 November 2025 and 29 December 2025, shows that some sites, including Addis Standard (addisstandard.com), Addis Zeybe (addiszeybe.com), Ahadu Radio (ahaduradio.com), and Business Negarit (businessnegarit.com) sites experienced an ‘anomaly’, which could be an indication of potential network interference or censorship.⁶¹ Addis Standard experiences DDoS attacks, sometimes reaching 10,000 requests at a time from unidentified attackers.⁶²

Internet restrictions in conflict-affected areas limit access to information regarding conflict situations or travels exposing journalists and others to unnecessary risks.

⁵⁶ UNESCO. 2025. Assessing Internet development in Ethiopia. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000393847/PDF/393847eng.pdf.multi>

⁵⁷ Freedom House. 2025. Freedom on the Net. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-net/2025#footnote3_cbWzqCIF2ctHJenDJRD8Qaz5czhEMb8IY9e4GPzBgY_t4IduJe7GWn2

⁵⁸ Kinfe Micheal Yilma and Halefom Hailu Abraha. 2025. The Internet and Ethiopia’s IP Law, Internet Governance and Legal Education: An Overview. Mizan Law Review. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283342438_The_Internet_and_Ethiopia's_IP_Law_Internet_Governance_and_Legal_Education_An_Overview

⁵⁹ Surfsharks. 2025. Where has the internet been restricted? <https://surfshark.com/research/internet-censorship>

⁶⁰ The Conversation. 2025. Internet shutdowns are increasing dramatically in Africa – a new book explains why? <https://theconversation.com/internet-shutdowns-are-increasing-dramatically-in-africa-a-new-book-explains-why-271222>

⁶¹ Ooni Explorer. 2025. Web Connectivity Test. <https://explorer.ooni.org/country/ET?since=2025-11-29&until=2025-12-29>

⁶² Interview

4.3. Freedom of Expression

The state of freedom of expression in Ethiopia remains “in crisis” according to the Media Freedom Worldwide report.⁶³ Freedom House’s 2025 report stresses that security concerns limiting journalists’ ability to work and travel, as well as government pressure, arrest, and the threat of expulsion constrained freedom of expression in the country during the year.⁶⁴ While the early days of political reform offered a glimpse of a more open and diverse media landscape, subsequent reversals in legal reforms, as well as the contraction of the space due to conflicts and the instrumentalisation of the law, have significantly affected freedom of expression in the country. Authorities frequently exploit vague provisions within the Anti-Terrorism and Hate Speech proclamations to bypass standard legal safeguards, and “legal ambiguity, together with the nascent jurisprudence, poses problems for freedom of expression.”⁶⁵ Other studies have also emphasised that Ethiopia has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, with high levels of political interference and threats to professional autonomy.⁶⁶ The US State Department’s human rights report also highlights that human rights abuses in Ethiopia included “serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests of journalists, and censorship.”⁶⁷

In conflict-prone regions like Amhara and Oromia, the situation is even more precarious, as the country experienced setbacks in the media landscape. Conflicts have also resulted in the prevalence of disinformation and propaganda.⁶⁸ As recorded elsewhere in this report, the rise of kidnappings, newsroom raids, and the confiscation of equipment has created an environment of fear extending from the regional states to the federal level. The 11 December 2025 detention of TikTok creators also shows the government’s growing weariness with limiting freedom of expression. While the official narratives stated that the arrests were “intended to protect cultural values and young audiences,” they had a chilling effect on creators, who have begun avoiding “sensitive” topics that do not align with the government’s interests.⁶⁹ One TikTok-based reporter, Eyob Shimelis, was also arrested for reporting on corruption.⁷⁰ In a 21 December 2025 speech at the launch of the Digital Ethiopia 2030 Strategy, PM Abiy justified the arrest of the TikTok as they must be “rebuked and advised” for failing to consider local culture when taking lessons in creativity from abroad.⁷¹ The trend shows that freedom of expression is under duress in Ethiopia, and the government is expanding its suppressive reach in the realms that previously appeared free.

⁶³ Media Freedom Worldwide. 2025. Freedom of expression is under threat across the world. <https://www.globalexpressionreport.org/>

⁶⁴ Freedom House. 2025. Freedom in the World 2025. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2025>

⁶⁵ Abebe, Henok. 2025. Freedom of Expression and the Ethiopian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation: A Comparative Analysis. SSRN Electronic Journal. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5342446>

⁶⁶ Addis Standard. 2025. News: Ethiopian journalists caught between severe safety threats, political pressure and ethical dilemmas -new study. <https://addisstandard.com/ethiopian-journalists-caught-between-severe-safety-threats-political-pressure-and-ethical-dilemmas-new-study/>

⁶⁷ US Department of State. 2025. Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 2024: Ethiopia. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/ethiopia>

⁶⁸ Capital Ethiopia. 2025. Ethiopia slips in 2025 World Press Freedom Index as conflict and repression reverse recent gains. <https://capitalethiopia.com/2025/05/06/ethiopia-slips-in-2025-world-press-freedom-index-as-conflict-and-repression-reverse-recent-gains/>

⁶⁹ Addis Standard. 2025. News: Inside Ethiopia’s TikTok detentions: law, culture, freedom of expression, and what’s at stake for young creators. <https://addisstandard.com/inside-ethiopias-tiktok-detentions-law-culture-freedom-of-expression-and-whats-at-stake-for-young-creators/>

⁷⁰ CPJ. 2025. Ethiopian TikTok journalist Eyob Shimelis detained after corruption reporting.

⁷¹ SciTech Media. 2025. ሰበር ዜና | ታሰረው ሰለጠኛ ተክቶክ ጽሑፍ ሚኒስትር ዶክተር ዐብይ ኢህመድ ማብራሪያ ሰጥተዋል። <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjN66sx5Ik0>

4.4. Journalists' safety and protection

As several rankings demonstrate, it is a global phenomenon that the safety of journalists and freedom of the press are under duress. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranking of 180 countries, press freedom exhibited a decline in 112, more than in 60 percent of countries, while conditions for practising journalism are categorised either difficult or very serious in over half of the world's countries.⁷² Ethiopia ranked 145 in the Index, sliding from “difficult” to the “very serious” category. Ethiopia's slide in the index is attributed to the rising inter-ethnic conflict resulting in increased violence and reprisals against journalists especially in the Amhara region, propaganda and disinformation both from authorities and insurgents, government's control of narratives, circumvention of legal safeguards with arbitrary arrests under vague anti-terrorism and hate speech laws, the widespread censorship and self-censorship as well as economic hardship putting journalists in precarious work. The country has been regressing in its press freedom ranking over the years.

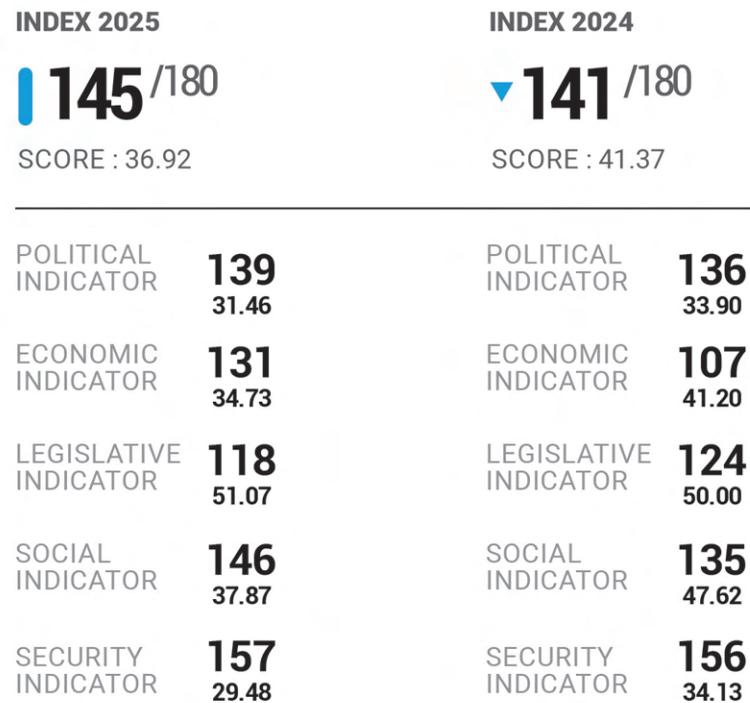


Image 3: RSF's Ranking of Press Freedom in Ethiopia

⁷² RSF, 2025. RSF World Press Freedom Index 2025. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-world-press-freedom-index-2025-economic-fragility-leading-threat-press-freedom>

4.5. Personal Safety

The personal safety of journalists includes a wide range of issues that journalists face, including, but not limited to, killings, abductions, arrests, imprisonment, detentions, beatings, shoving, harassments, stalking, intimidation, office raids, coercion, intrusion in homes and houses, travel and movement restrictions, and the like that personally affect professionals with a long-term impact on their endeavours. Personal safety for journalists encompasses the physical and psychological pressures they face while conducting their professional duties.

This assessment found that at least 44 Ethiopian journalists were subjected to several safety issues that compromised their physical and psychological well-being in 2025. These safety concerns had a multi-layered impact on journalists' livelihoods and practices, including self-censorship, precarious work, risks to newsroom sustainability, sleep deprivation, trauma, and heightened caution in private life even when off duty.

4.5.1. Physical safety

Several journalists were subjected to detention, arrests, and abduction during this year. One journalist, Bizuayehu Birhanu, a senior cameraperson for the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), died while on the job. His death was reported in June 2025 following an incident involving a military helicopter in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, the details of which remain unclear. A statement from ENA just indicated that Bizuayehu passed away after receiving medical treatment for an injury he sustained while on duty.⁷⁹ CPJ indicates that Bizuayehu “died in a helicopter crash near Debresina Monastery in West Dembiya, Central Gondar Zone, in Amhara Regional State.”⁸⁰ Because of the growing secrecy from government offices, when media are invited to provide coverage for events, the journalists assigned to report often make little or no preparation, either in terms of safety or content, as they are not given information regarding the events.⁸¹

⁷⁹ ENA. 2025. የኢትዮጵያ ዜና አገልግሎት የካሜራ ባለሙያ ብዙአየሁ ብርሃኑ በስራ ላይ ባጋጠመው ድንገተኛ አደጋ ህይወቱ አለፈ. https://web.facebook.com/ethiopianewsagency/posts/%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A2%E1%89%B5%E1%8B%AE%E1%8C%B5%E1%8B%AB-%E1%8B%9C%E1%8A%93-%E1%8A%A0%E1%8C%88%E1%88%8D%E1%8C%8D%E1%88%8E%E1%89%B5-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%AB%E1%88%9C%E1%88%AB-%E1%89%A3%E1%88%88%E1%88%99%E1%8B%AB-%E1%89%A5%E1%8B%99%E1%8A%A0%E1%8B%A8%E1%88%81-%E1%89%A5%E1%88%AD%E1%88%83%E1%8A%91-%E1%89%A0%E1%88%B5%E1%88%AB-%E1%88%8B%E1%8B%AD-%E1%89%A3%E1%8C%8B%E1%8C%A0%E1%88%98%E1%8B%8D-%E1%8B%B5%E1%8A%95%E1%8C%88%E1%89%B0%E1%8A%9B-%E1%8A%A0%E1%8B%B0%E1%8C%8B-%E1%88%85%E1%8B%AD%E1%8B%88%E1%89%B1-%E1%8A%A0%E1%88%88%E1%8D%88-%E1%8A%A0%E1%8B%B2%E1%88%B5-%E1%8A%A0%E1%89%A0%E1%89%A3-%E1%88%B0%E1%8A%94/1160688879436058/?_rdc=1&_rdr#

⁸⁰ CPJ. 2025, Bizuayehu Birhanu Killed. Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) | Killed in Ethiopia <https://cpj.org/data/people/bizuayehu-birhanu/>

⁸¹ Interview with broadcast journalist

Meanwhile, in the conflict-ridden Tigray region, two camera people working for the state-owned Tigray TV were abducted in the northwestern part of the region as they went to investigate illegal gold mining and smuggling. Tigray TV journalist Tesfazgi Asbey, cameraperson Isayas Beyene, and their driver Ataklti Nigus were interviewing people and videotaping in the area for three days before their abduction.⁸² Meanwhile, the regional Peace and Security Bureau said that it wasn't informed that these journalists were travelling to that location for reporting, which it later learned that they were captured as they failed to produce proper identification when the formal government militia (security forces at lower levels of administration akin to the police) asked them to.⁸³ Nonetheless, an account of the journalists speaks otherwise, as their abductors declined to look at their proof of identification.

Later, in a phone interview with Tigray Television,⁸⁴ Tesfazgi explained that they were speaking to residents living around gold mines who claimed that people have died because of the chemicals used in mining. Meanwhile, armed people in plain clothes stopped them and inquired into what they were doing. Later, their phones and other equipment were confiscated. They were released after several hours of detention, following the intervention of a district administrator.

“They were harassing us; we were insulted, and they shoved us while they took us away,”

Tesfazgi Asbey on Tigray Television

⁸² Meseret Media. 2024. ህገወጥ የወርቅ ቁፋርን በተመለከተ ለመዘገብ የተሰማሩ ሁለት ጋዜጠኞች እና ሹፊራቸው ትግራይ ውስጥ መታገታቸው ተሰማ: https://web.facebook.com/61562533862014/posts/%E1%88%85%E1%8C%88%E1%8B%88%E1%8C%A5-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8B%88%E1%89%85-%E1%89%81%E1%8D%8B%E1%88%AE%E1%8A%95-%E1%89%A0%E1%89%B0%E1%88%98%E1%88%88%E1%8A%A8%E1%89%B0-%E1%88%88%E1%88%98%E1%8B%98%E1%8C%88%E1%89%A5-%E1%8B%A8%E1%89%B0%E1%88%B0%E1%88%9B%E1%88%A9-%E1%88%81-%E1%88%88%E1%89%B5-%E1%8C%8B%E1%8B%9C%E1%8C%A0%E1%8A%9E%E1%89%BD-%E1%8A%A5%E1%8A%93-%E1%88%B9%E1%8D%8C-%E1%88%AB%E1%89%B8%E1%8B%8D-%E1%89%B5%E1%8C%8D%E1%88%AB%E1%8B%AD-%E1%8B%8D%E1%88%B5%E1%8C%A5-%E1%88%98-%E1%89%B3%E1%8C%88%E1%89%B3%E1%89%B8%E1%8B%8D-%E1%89%B0%E1%88%B0%E1%88%9B-%E1%88%98%E1%88%A0%E1%88%A8-%E1%89%B5-%E1%88%9A%E1%8B%B5/122117589380417795/?_rdc=1&_rdr

⁸³ Tigray Region Peace and Security Bureau. 2024. https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid01MSVaStCQqFsUgFFs2X7Y4VcBkoisbrfS7F246YKxHF95uASCZ3LF5NRpxmrzUJWI&id=61555414958092

⁸⁴ Tigray Television. 2024. ሎማንጥ ነጥ ነብ ዘባ ሰሜን ምዕራብ ትግራይ ወረዳ ኣስገደ ሜዲያ ተባህሮ ኣብ ዘፍለጥ ከባቢ ኣብ ዘይኸጋዊ ዕድፍ ፀብፃብ ኣናበርሓ ኣብ ልዕሊ ዝነበረ ገጅለ ጋዜጠኛታት ትግራይ እንታይጎሉ፣ ኣጋጠሙ? ሓይ ኣባል ገጅለ ጋዜጠኛታት ቴሌቪዥን ትግራይ ተስፋኪሪ ዓስሰይ ብዛዕባ እኒ ዝነበረ ኮነታት ብሰልቢ ዝሃየ መብርሂ: <https://web.facebook.com/reel/625765776570970>

Similarly, Tigray Broadcasting Service (TBS) journalists were arrested⁸⁵ by the police in Tigra in the town of Axum while on duty. TBS later reported⁸⁶ that its camera crew was interviewing residents in Axum to listen to their grievances when security forces came and demanded what they were taking the videos for, before immediately taking them into custody. Later, the regional party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), claimed the journalists failed to identify themselves because they lacked IDs or letters of assignment from their media houses. The statement accused the TBS of working to create unrest and sent its crew to Aksum city to create riots and violence in Aksum.⁸⁷ Now, fearing that their cameras and other equipment could be confiscated, TBS journalists have limited field work.⁸⁸

Consequently, in a meeting with state and party-affiliated media on 19 September 2025, a senior TPLF official Fetlewroq Gebreagziabher, declared, “We will shut down the media called TBS. We will not tolerate it. Even the military has made its decision,” raising alarm regarding the party’s intention to suppress the space.⁸⁹ Fetlewroq is later seen in a video released by the party on its YouTube Channel, saying the regional government, the party and the security forces have tolerated that there will be no tolerance for people dividing the public in the name of freedom of the press.⁹⁰

This shows a pattern of intimidation against journalists and media houses, in which they are demanded to produce letters of assignment or permission to do their jobs. Similar trends are also seen in other regions, such as the Somali Regional State (SRS) and Addis Ababa, where journalists are harassed and intimidated by security forces who demand that they produce letters of permission to videotape or take pictures of places or events. In the SRS, journalists Khadar Ismael, Abdirahman Buux, and Muqtar Sheikh were arrested on 5 August, 17 July, and 17 June 2025, respectively relation to their professional work. Abdirahman Buux, a BBC Somali correspondent in SRS, for instance, was taken into custody from a coffee shop, and his phone was broken as security forces dragged him to the police station. The police mocked him for not being exiled like other journalists who have left the country since 2023.⁹¹

Similarly, journalists face harassment and sudden searches at checkpoints while on the job, especially in regions where regional licenses are requested from federally licensed media. No law prevents federally registered media from working in regions. The experiences of these journalists reveal a consistent pattern of intimidation, arbitrary detention, and attempts to silence critical reporting in the SRS. Personal and work equipment of journalists have been damaged as a result of these harassments.

⁸⁵ Yabelle Media. 2025. TBS TV Media Crew Arrested in Aksum City. <https://yabelemedia.com/2025/06/06/7528/>

⁸⁶ TBS. 2025. #ሰበር-ጉጅላ ቀረፃ ቲቢኤስ ተአሲረ! <https://web.facebook.com/tbstvinternational/posts/pfbid03SZkQzf7bg3EKNPi8it8KrY3EQgS8p1LWMBn9J4t3dUZdvMUemM8vem9votgnjZ3l?rldid=cXj1ULSde21VW3AM#fbt> ፅሕፈት ህወሓት ከተማ ኣክሱም (TPLF). 2025. ሓበሬታ. https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02WjEiYqNr6jSyRDaptfydogjds9ZTjEG14bYzsnFN3jJbw8iNrQJDCGqjL7zaBi9hl&id=61576891447416&rdid=U98ghJmya5EUWT6D#

⁸⁷ Interview with a journalist

⁸⁸ UMD Media. 2025. TPLF Threatens to Suppress Independent Media in Tigray. <https://umdmedia.com/tplf-threatens-to-suppress-independent-media-in-tigray/>

⁸⁹ TPLF Official. 2025. መድረክ ወፍራ ብሄራዊ ሓድነት ምስ ኣመራርሓን ሰብ ሞያን ሚድያ. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNFxiMgCFlI>

⁹⁰ Interview

⁹¹ Interview

"I don't expect to get compensated for my damaged device. I am grateful if I live safely."

A journalist from the Somali Regional State

Abductions and home and office raids targeting journalists and media houses have been one of the defining features of the state of media and journalism in 2025. At least seven journalists were abducted in 2025 either by unknown assailants or insurgent groups, and at least three media houses (Addis Standard, EBS TV, and Wazema Radio) were raided during this period. Nonetheless, the number of abducted journalists could be significantly higher than this, as the reported cases and the findings through interviews might not have captured all cases. In Addis Ababa, two journalists, Abdulsemed Mohammed, host of the Kidame Gebeya show on Ahadu Radio, and Yonas Amare, editor of the Ethiopian Reporter newspaper, were taken from their homes by uniformed masked people. Their whereabouts were not known for 10-12 days until their release.



Image 4: Statement ⁹² from the Ethiopian Mass Media Professionals Association, regarding the abduction of Abdulsemed Mohammed and Yonas Amare

⁹² EMMPA. 2025. የጋዜጠኞች ከሕግ አግባብ ውጪ ማሰባሰቢያ ስልጠና ላይ ቋጭ. [https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0fiNwm71yc2xhmQw7YeDdkFQjHmUjebHyxPE5VSDGQR1a5oudLMfvMGRcmQuPoL5bl&id=100064684121536&_cft_\[0\]=AZV_kqEF_Z43AHaTrOVf9L-Nqa30mWAs_4t-LmGfXbmSISf2D5ekhtAC6ifx4dFR0uC716ZMMgeG80Nx750BitGeLRQ291KpzpDPxX99jRBcgWurkTLzD-kjbc1eE5FrrT91FmWuAxZc8wG6cpx7ByhpDg1a6ocrYjezfr42_raQBSw94j28rISNZRM-wMU&_tn_=%2C0%2CP-R](https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0fiNwm71yc2xhmQw7YeDdkFQjHmUjebHyxPE5VSDGQR1a5oudLMfvMGRcmQuPoL5bl&id=100064684121536&_cft_[0]=AZV_kqEF_Z43AHaTrOVf9L-Nqa30mWAs_4t-LmGfXbmSISf2D5ekhtAC6ifx4dFR0uC716ZMMgeG80Nx750BitGeLRQ291KpzpDPxX99jRBcgWurkTLzD-kjbc1eE5FrrT91FmWuAxZc8wG6cpx7ByhpDg1a6ocrYjezfr42_raQBSw94j28rISNZRM-wMU&_tn_=%2C0%2CP-R)

Yonas was taken by uniformed and masked people who did not identify themselves from his house in Koye Feche, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, at around 9:30 PM on the night of 13 August 2025.⁹³ Immediately after, the publisher of Ethiopian Reporter and The Reporter newspapers, Media and Communications Centre (MCC), wrote a letter to at least eight organisations, including the Office of the Prime Minister (PMO). While the Addis Ababa police said the letter should be sent to the specific district police station, the Federal Police confirmed that they don't have a person named Yonas Amare in custody. On the eve of his release, the PMO returned the letter to the media house without any further explanation.⁹⁴

Similarly, the families and friends of Abdulsemed Mohammed could not locate him despite requests made to all 11 sub-cities of Addis Ababa and to the Federal Police, which replied that it is also looking for him.⁹⁵ When situations like this occur, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) works with security and other government institutions to resolve safety issues. The EHRC acknowledges that enforced disappearance has become especially prevalent in the post-Tigray war period, and journalists who report on “non-sensitive” issues have also been targets.⁹⁶ But, as the identities of the perpetrators of enforced disappearance are not known, their motives could not be empirically attested, but the general targeting of journalists and the media is intended to silence critical voices. The EHRC believes that the return of phones and other devices confiscated from media houses such as Addis Standard is a result of their lobbying.

“When the abductors release their victims, they force them not to speak about the nature of their abduction, stay, or the identities of the perpetrators.”

Interview with the EHRC

Other journalists, one working for a state media in one region, were subjected to abduction, which ultimately ended in physical harassment and harm, as well as ransom paid to the perpetrators. Later, the journalist was forced to leave their profession in fear of further victimisation.⁹⁷ In the Amhara region, journalists were also subjected to abduction, sometimes singled out from bus commuters because they are journalists. In addition to abductions and enforced disappearances, several journalists were subjected to arrests and detention in Addis Ababa and beyond.

⁹³ The Reporter. 2025. Ethiopian Reporter's Yonas Amare Abducted by Masked Men. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/46502/>

⁹⁴ Interview

⁹⁵ Tikvah. 2025. “ፖሊስ ጣቢያም በ11ዳም ክፍለ ከተሞች ተፈልጎልኑ። እስር ቤት ውስጥ የለም፤ በፌደራል ፖሊስ እስር ቤትም የለም” - የጋዜጠኛ አብዱልሰመድ ቤተሰብ. <https://t.me/tikvahethiopia/99324>

⁹⁶ Interview

⁹⁷ Anonymous informant

Tesfalem Waldyes, the founder and editor of Ethiopia Insider, was one of the many victims of detention in 2025. Tesfalem Waldyes was taken into custody by plain-clothed security personnel. He was later brought to the court on charges of disseminating false information regarding the tense football match at Addis Ababa Stadium, at which Tesfalem wasn't present. The whereabouts of Tesfalem remained unknown despite citywide searches by colleagues and friends. He was released on 13 June on 15,000 Birr bail, after three separate court orders granting him bail.⁹⁸ Tesfalem was forced to spend the night of his arrest on a chair at a police station around Estifanos (Mesqel Square) area.⁹⁹

Abebe Fikir, a reporter at the weekly Ethiopian Reporter newspaper, was also detained on 23 April 2025¹⁰⁰ while attempting to speak with Lideta Sub City officials to gather information for a report he was working on, following a complaint brought by informants to the media house. Police charged him with “inciting violence”. He was released on a 10,000 Birr bail after three days of detention.¹⁰¹

Similarly, EBS’s “Addis Mieraf” (New Chapter) program producers, hosts, and management team, namely, CEO Nebiyu Tiemelisan, Program Director Tariku Haile, Deputy Program Director Hiwot Tarekgn, Programs Head Kidist Getachew, Studio Manager Girma Tefera, Studio Director Nitir Dereje, Editing Supervisor Henok Abate, and Editor Habtamu Alemayehu, were detained and interrogated by the police on 28 May 2025 for alleged dissemination of fabricated information. They were charged with terrorism, although this was later changed to charges under the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation. The *Addis Mieraf* episode featured a person called Birtukan Temesgen, who said she was abducted and raped¹⁰² when she was a student in 2020. She later retracted these claims on the state-owned Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation¹⁰³. Amah Fisehatsion, the CEO and founder of EBS, apologised the following day for the editorial overlook.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Haq Media and Communication. 2025. Statement. <https://web.facebook.com/100063797570663/posts/1245871674216073/?rpid=jZZQmd5SaZwqgi6P#:~:text=Ethiopia%20Insider,-t,-%C2%B7>
⁹⁹ Haq Media and Communication. 2025. <https://ethiopiainsider.com/2025/16143/>
¹⁰⁰ Ethiopian Reporter. 2025. የሪፖርተር ጋዜጠኛ ታሰረ: <https://ethiopianreporter.com/140591/>
¹⁰¹ BBC Amharic. 2025. የሪፖርተር ጋዜጠኛ በ10 ሺህ ብር ዋስትና ከእር ተለቀቀ. https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cvg7111ny20o?at_link_type=web_link&at_link_id=08237334-21E2-11F0-94AB-86E35F493A8F&at_campaign_type=owned&at_bbc_team=editorial&at_campaign=Social_Flow&at_link_origin=BBC_News_Amharic&at_ptr_name=facebook_page&at_format=link&at_medium=social&fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR7prtmYn28Z-xniKvEalSnyAJyc8LL8KoOjJh8csEIAROTgsggkEyTvXLTpA_aem_Y_9uSKNOcZalGrObO-Qk9Q&sfnsn=mo
¹⁰² Addis Standard. 2025. News: Ethiopian Media Authority suspends EBS TV program over “false information”, “misleading the public”. https://addisstandard.com/ethiopian-media-authority-suspends-ebs-tv-program-over-false-information-misleading-the-public/#google_vignette
¹⁰³ EBS. 2025. የብርቱካን እውነት. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS3o9vcAFtU>
¹⁰⁴ Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation. 2025. ኢ.ቢ.ኤስ 'ቴሌቪዥን' በብርቱካን ተጠብቶ ዙሪያ ለተለፈው ዶክመንተሪ ደቅርታ ጠየቀ: https://web.facebook.com/EBCzena/posts/%E1%8A%A2%E1%89%A2%E1%8A%A4%E1%88%B5%E1%89%B4%E1%88%8C%E1%89%AA%E1%8B%A5%E1%8A%95-%E1%89%A0%E1%89%A5%E1%88%AD%E1%89%B1%E1%8A%AB%E1%8A%95-%E1%89%B0%E1%88%98%E1%88%B5%E1%8C%88%E1%8A%95-%E1%8B%99%E1%88%AA%E1%8B%AB-%E1%88%8B%E1%88%B5%E1%89%B0%E1%88%8B%E1%88%88%E1%8D%88%E1%8B%8D-%E1%8B%B6%E1%8A%AD%E1%88%98%E1%8A%95%E1%89%B0%E1%88%AA-%E1%8B%AD%E1%89%85%E1%88%AD%E1%89%B3-%E1%8C%A0%E1%8B%A8%E1%89%80-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A2%E1%89%A2%E1%8A%A4%E1%88%B5-%E1%8B%8B%E1%8A%93-%E1%88%A5%E1%88%AB-%E1%8A%A0%E1%88%B5%E1%8D%88%E1%8D%83%E1%88%9A-%E1%8A%A0%E1%89%B6-%E1%8A%A0%E1%88%9B%E1%8A%95-%E1%8D%8D%E1%88%B5%E1%88%90/1093450312809147/?_rdc=1&_rdc#

Addis Standard’s IT and HR managers were also detained following a raid on the home of one of the journalists and on the Addis Standard office. Addis Standard’s statement indicates that Federal Police forces raided the house of a senior member of the publisher at 05:00 am on 17 April 2025, and took electronic equipment while filming the victims.¹⁰⁵ The police seized one laptop, two phones, one flash drive, and one external hard disk, which were later returned to the media with malware installed on them.

Similarly, three Sheger FM journalists, editor Tigist Zerihun, reporter Mintamir Tsegaw, and editor-in-chief Eshete Assefa, were detained by the police on 3 September 2025, because of a report on the protest and strike by Ethiopian medical professionals who demanded better pay and improved working conditions. Eshete was immediately released after giving a statement to the police. Tigist and Mintamir were later released on a 50,000 Birr bail after more than 21 days of detention.¹⁰⁶

In the Somali Regional State, Ahmed Awga was arrested on 23 April 2025 and charged with incitement and disseminating hateful information for interviewing a man whose son died following an alleged police beating. He was later sentenced to two years by the Fafen Zone High Court in Jijjiga¹⁰⁷. Ahmed was one of the journalists pardoned by the region in November 2025, following the EHRC’s recommendation to address broader human rights issues in the region.¹⁰⁸ The other is Khadar Mohammed Ismael, a journalist for Somali Regional Television. Khadar was detained on 5 April 2025 after he posted a video on the station’s social media page showing people complaining about the regional government. He was brought before a court on 9 August 2025, but did not reappear for more than a month, during which he remained without charge.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Addis Standard. <https://web.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1086482266850342&set=pcb.1086482996850269>

¹⁰⁶ Shegger FM. 2025. የሽገር ኤፍ ኤም ጋዜጠኞች ትዕዛዝ ዘረሀንና ምንጥምር ፀጋው የፈደረሉ ጠቅላይ ፍርድ ቤት በወሰነው መሰረት ዛሬ ከአስር ተለቀዋል። <https://web.facebook.com/Sheger102.1/posts/pfbid033SQaEUjwTMp9U8kEKmvoyCuVnUpueKzklRDY6jsVSgJ1xicoUhSW1jFSMGqz4H8l>

¹⁰⁷ CPJ. 2025. Ethiopian journalist Ahmed Awga sentenced to 2 years in prison. <https://cpj.org/2025/05/ethiopian-journalist-ahmed-awga-sentenced-to-2-years-in-prison/>

¹⁰⁸ EHRC. 2025. ሶማሊ፡- በኢሰመኮ የተሰጡ ምክረ ሐሳቦችን ለመረጸም ክልሉ የወሰዳቸውን ተጨባጭ እርምጃዎች በተመለከተ.

<https://ehrc.org/somali-region-frees-121-unlawfully-detained-people-pardons-two-jailed-journalists-rights-commission-says-addis-standard/>

¹⁰⁹ Voss TV. 2025. https://web.facebook.com/VOSSTV/posts/pfbid0D6jpVm9S3z1NSp6pRjcr9Y34oJ1TWaovsMP6rUVEX9qi8fgPLgkk2Z54u3hpBdBl?_rdc=1&_rdfr#

Nejashi TV journalist Hayat Kemal and cameraperson Khalid Teki were also arrested by Akaki Sub City Police while interviewing people on 25 June 2025 and released on 28 June 2025, after three days of detention, following a court order granting bail. ¹¹⁰ The police asked them to produce their broadcasting license, which the CEO of Nejashi TV, Jamal Ahmed, later brought to the police. The police said they should have sought permission from the police station and denied their release.

On the other hand, Journalist Muhyidin Abdullahi Omar, a former Harari Mass Media Agency journalist and owner of the YouTube channel Biyoo Production, was detained by regional police on charges of defamation and disseminating false information. Muhyidin was detained because of Facebook posts in which he alleged mismanagement at a local mosque and corruption at the regional public prosecutor’s office. He was later released on a 20,000 Birr bail on 26 June 2025. After his arrest on 5 April 2025, Harari Mass Media Agency suspended his salary pending disciplinary review. ¹¹¹

Two other journalists, Andualem Sisay and Wudineh Zenebe of New Business Ethiopia and Green Media & Communication, were detained by Addis Ababa Police for allegedly mentioning the name of a government official while chatting at a bar on 21 June 2025. Both were later released after three hours in detention. ¹¹²

On 10 April 2025, Fanuel Kinfu, founder of the online outlet Fentale Media, was taken from his home ¹¹³ in the capital, Addis Ababa. CPJ reported that police questioned him over alleged defamation related to commentary videos published between April 2023 and June 2024. On 15 April 2025, he was released on bail of 15,000 birr. ¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ NEJASHI TV. https://web.facebook.com/nejashitv/posts/update-%E1%8B%9B%E1%88%AC%E1%88%9D%E1%8A%A0%E1%88%8D%E1%89%B0%E1%8D%88%E1%89%B1%E1%88%9D%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%90%E1%8C%83%E1%88%BA-%E1%89%B2%E1%89%AA-%E1%8C%8B%E1%8B%9C%E1%8C%A0%E1%8A%9B-%E1%88%90%E1%8B%AB%E1%89%B5-%E1%8A%A8%E1%88%9B%E1%88%8D-%E1%8A%A5%E1%8A%93-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%AB%E1%88%9C%E1%88%AB-%E1%89%A3%E1%88%88%E1%88%99%E1%8B%AB%E1%8B%8D-%E1%8A%BB%E1%88%8A%E1%8B%B5-%E1%89%B0%E1%89%82-%E1%89%A0%E1%88%B5%E1%88%AB-%E1%88%8B%E1%8B%AD-%E1%8A%A5%E1%8B%AB%E1%88%89-%E1%89%A0%E1%8D%96%E1%88%8A%E1%88%B5-%E1%89%B0%E1%8B%AD%E1%8B%98%E1%8B%8D-/1149664077181635/?_rdc=1&_dr#

¹¹¹ CPJ. 2025. <https://cpj.org/2025/05/7-journalist-arrests-in-a-month-as-ethiopia-quashes-independence-of-media-regulator/>

¹¹² New Business Ethiopia. 2025. Ethiopian Police Detain Two Journalists for Hours. <https://newbusinessethiopia.com/politics/ethiopian-police-detain-two-journalists-for-hours/>

¹¹³ Horizon Free Media ሆራኒዝን ነፃ ሚዲያ. 2025. “ከላባቴ መኖር አልቻልም” ልጁ “በሌሊት በብዙ መኪና መተው ወሰዱት” ከፋትኤል ባለቤት ጋር የተደረገ ቃለ መጠየቅ. <https://www.youtube.com/live/V3ChcDR64c>

¹¹⁴ CPJ. 2025. <https://cpj.org/data/people/fanuel-kinfu/>

Another journalist, Nile Woldegiorgis, a former journalist at Tigray Television and now owner of the YouTube Channel Nile TV, was arrested on 25 August 2025, for undisclosed reasons after travelling from Mekelle to Addis Ababa to visit her children, and was held at the Lideta 5th Police Station after being accused of “spreading and promoting violence.” She was released after spending six days in police custody.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, the EMA had also temporarily suspended the accreditation of the DW Amharic Service in October 2025, citing accusations of bias¹¹⁶ without disclosing the duration of the suspension. Subsequently, the EMA reviewed the cases of the nine DW Amharic Service journalists affected by the decision. Seven were reinstated, while accreditation for the remaining two, who were responsible for reporting from the Amhara and Tigray regions, was permanently revoked.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, the government reportedly demanded the repatriation of two journalists, Yayesew Shimeles and Abebe Bayu, whom it accused of disseminating “false information” and undermining Ethiopia’s interests. The request was reportedly raised during Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s visit to Paris but was reportedly declined by the French government.¹¹⁸

These arrests and detentions, as well as the sentencing of journalists, had an immense psychological toll on several media professionals whose works were affected by what was going on in their respective newsrooms and around them. As much as the physical threats to the safety of journalists are not fully recorded and observed, an incomparable level of psychological impact of working as a journalist remains unrecognised.

4.5.2. Psychological safety

Multiple journalists and media professionals interviewed for this assessment have admitted that media work is walking on eggshells, and because of fear of repercussions, both from immediate supervisors or higher-ups in the government, they practice self-censorship even before pitching a story of public interest. A female journalist noted that supervisors often implied her role was expendable, creating a sense of insecurity and leaving her feeling guilty for being unable to report on the sufferings she witnesses.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Wegahta Facts. 2025. https://web.facebook.com/61560093106337/posts/pfbid0XLLmkyujtFmuzk3mb39fn56AggxkzU1aLwicqN8JAXQBnff9Jzdb89m6h1j7i47l/?app=fbl&_rdc=1&_rd=1

¹¹⁶ DW. 2025. Ethiopia suspends DW correspondents, tightens grip on media. <https://www.dw.com/en/ethiopia-suspends-dw-correspondents-tightens-grip-on-media-ahead-of-2026-vote/a-73780742>

¹¹⁷ DW. 2025. Ethiopia: Two DW correspondents permanently suspended. <https://corporate.dw.com/en/ethiopia-two-deutsche-welle-correspondents-permanently-suspended/a-75127182>

¹¹⁸ Meseret Media. 2025. በፈረንሳይ ይገኛሉ የተባሉ ሁለት ጋዜጠኞች ለኢትዮጵያ ተላልፈው እንዲሰጡ በመንግስት ጥያቄ ቀርቦ እንደነበር ታወቀ. <https://www.meseretmedia.org/p/592>

¹¹⁹ Interview with a female journalist

Several journalists have also faced harassment, verbal aggression, intimidation, and public shaming during this period, while phone calls from unidentified persons, and coercion were common. Media houses repeatedly received letters from the EMA for alleged misquoting or misappropriation of information, mainly provide on the record or publicly stated issues by government officials.¹²⁰ The EMA usually demands that media houses retract their reporting or face other consequences, which is damaging to media houses in both ways. As an editor at one of the media houses based in Addis Ababa indicated, it has become common for the EMA to write them letters on behalf of complaining officials pressuring them to disclose their sources.¹²¹

Officials also directly call newsrooms and journalists, demanding that the angles they chose for their reporting be changed whenever the news gets significant attention.¹²² Such content, ranging from politics, investment, business, and the economy to international affairs, draws the attention of trolls who make anonymous phone calls and threaten journalists. Threats such as “Who do you think you are?” “We will eliminate you!” “We are watching you.” “We will kill you!” “We know where you live,” etc., are common threats that journalists face.¹²³

“I spend a lot of sleepless nights because of the sheer volume of phone calls I receive, which are intended to intimidate and threaten to kill me.”

A newspaper journalist

Regional presidents and regional heads of bureaus and departments, as well as heads of federal institutions, were identified as some of the perpetrators by the journalists, in addition to unidentified persons who make phone calls for the sake of intimidation.

¹²⁰ Interview with a media editor

¹²¹ Interview with a media editor

¹²² Interview with an editor at a newspaper

¹²³ Various interviews with journalists

The detention of EBS Television journalists following the *Addis Mieraf* episode also forced some journalists in the media house to change how they conduct their journalism as they were forced to impose heavy self-censorship. As a result, at least two media professionals have changed professions, while others are on extended leave.¹²⁴ EBS journalists were also called out of events they had been invited to cover, such as a press conference by the Ministry of Transport, in the aftermath of the *Addis Mieraf* episode. EBS was also raided, and its services were suspended for an extended hour.¹²⁵

A freelance journalist based in Jigjiga, SRS, reported receiving threatening phone calls following a post on his Facebook account. He says any post on social media, even jokes, invokes threats from security forces and the “*digital army*” that the government uses to silence journalists and critics.¹²⁶ The digital army, a group that operates under a coordinated strategy of online harassment, narrative manipulation, and the suppression of independent reporting, is funded by the government/ruling party and run through various government structures.¹²⁷ Their objective is to drown critical voices online through harassment and content flooding, which ultimately fosters a climate of fear among journalists and others. The chilling effect of the abductions and sudden house raids, as well as the detention of journalists, has also significantly affected the personal lives and routines of journalists. For instance, one newspaper journalist said they must always lock their doors, fearing they might be targeted.¹²⁸

“On weekends, I used to sit at home with my doors and windows open. I am very afraid that all these abductions of journalists and house raids would one day come to me. So, I always latch my door at all times.”

A newspaper journalist

One journalist at a community radio station reports avoiding topics of public concern, especially those critical of the government or businesspeople, due to fears of retaliation. Because of this, journalists, as well as their family members, live in a constant fear as broadcast or published audience complaints are often taken as the positions of journalists.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Interview with a broadcast journalist

¹²⁵ CIVICUS. 2025. Ethiopia: Political Bans, Media Raids as Fragile Peace faces risk.

¹²⁶ Interview with Jigjiga based freelance journalist <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/ethiopia-political-bans-media-raids-as-fragile-peace-faces-risk/>

¹²⁷ BBC Amharic. 2024. የብልፅግና ፓርቲ ‘የሚደፍ ወራዊት’ አባላት በሐሰተኛ መረጃ ሥርዓት እና አሳሳች የፈሰሱበት ዘመቻዎች ላይ መሳተፋቸውን የቢቢሲ ምርመራ አረጋገጠ.

<https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/cp6gnd206750>

¹²⁸ Interview with a newspaper journalist

¹²⁹ Interview with community radio journalists in Central Ethiopia

“The cost of heroism is your life.”

A community radio journalist

The financial predicaments of journalists, especially those freelancing without tenures at a specific media house, are also subjected to psychological pressures that sometimes tend to be suicidal, as was discovered during interviews as well as social media analysis. Journalists who were detained also tend to avoid using their phones confiscated by security forces in fear of surveillance. Most journalists interviewed for this assessment work in distressing contexts.

Authorities have frequently publicly named and denounced media houses and journalists, fostering widespread fear in newsrooms. The EMA often singles out media houses in meetings, accusing them of misquoting officials and demanding changes to their reporting. Similarly, at a 25 June 2025 meeting with media representatives, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed publicly named Amare Aregawi, founder of *Ethiopian Reporter* and *The Reporter* newspapers, suggesting he “should take a break”. Although this statement was raised concerning Amare’s role in the Ethiopian Media Council, observers feared that this could attract unwarranted attention towards the media. Nonetheless, during the meeting, the PM emphasised that harassment of journalists is not government policy and encouraged journalists to report any misconduct by officials, promising legal action against those who obstruct lawful media work. He pledged to expand training and capacity-building to include private and independent media while expressing willingness to support journalism through legal reforms and financial assistance, provided media outlets align with national interests.¹³⁰

This notion of national interest has widely been used to frame the understanding of the works of the media, and freedom of expression is associated with it, including by the leadership of the EMA. In a news segment appearance on Fana TV on 12 June 2025,¹³¹ the Director General of EMA Samson Mekonnen (PhD), suggested aligning media narratives with national interest, advocating for a journalism that is constructive and solution-oriented. The Director said that the Ethiopian media should move beyond reactive reporting and instead proactively shape public discourse around unity, peace, and national priorities.¹³²

¹³⁰ ETV. 2025. ጠቅላይ ሚኒስትሩ ከሚዲያ ባለሙያዎች ጋር ያደረጉት ውይይት ETV | EBC | EBCDOTSTREAM. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Nw9xcGHOHU>

¹³¹ Fana TV. 2025. የመገናኛ ብዙሃን ነፃነትና ብሔራዊ ጥቅም. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSO03jD4wsk>

¹³² Fana TV. 2025. ከመገናኛ ብዙሃን ባለስልጣን ዋና ዳይሬክተር ጋር የተደረገ ቆይታ. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqYgbkEok40>

Another trend in journalists' psychological safety this year has been the seizure of property and office raids. During this period, in addition to the personal properties of detained and arrested journalists, there were raids on two media houses at different times. In January 2025, the office of an online media house was raided by plainclothed security forces¹³³ who came looking for the editor, while Addis Standard was raided by six officers who identified as Federal Police members who visited the publisher's office and took electronic devices.¹³⁴

In addition, prominent corporations frequently send stalkers and unidentified people who try to force their way into media houses, forcing journalists and administrative staff to leave their offices for extended periods. An example is repeated threats to kill an online media editor, forcing them to relocate twice in a short period of time.

“They called several times, saying that they know our office and that they will hang our editor.”

Online media founder

Another aspect of such harassment is the demand by government officials to change the titles of news stories, even though the statements they made were made in public and the reports are corroborated by facts.¹³⁵ These threats also target sources of information who talk to journalists, forcing key sources to avoid the media, creating an environment of self-censorship. Some people who speak to the media prefer using secure communication lines for fear of reprisals.¹³⁶

Government officials who are requested for information also threaten journalists.¹³⁷ One journalist says she now avoids certain places as unnamed people threatened her over a report regarding the former Tigray Interim Regional Administration (TIRA).¹³⁸ Government institutions also target media houses for reporting on certain topics, and they usually issue statements that impact media houses' reputations.¹³⁹ Other online-based clickbait content aggregators that take content from registered media houses and misrepresent it also cause a reputation and credibility crisis for the media houses and journalists.

¹³³ Interview with online media founder

¹³⁴ Addis Standard. 2025. Statement. <https://web.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1086482266850342&set=pcb.1086482996850269>

¹³⁵ Interview with a journalist for an inline media

¹³⁶ Interview with journalists

¹³⁷ Interview with a journalist

¹³⁸ Interview with a print journalist

¹³⁹ Interview with newspaper editor; interview with online media founder

Media houses were also subjected to bans on reporting regular sessions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs¹⁴⁰, the House of Peoples’ Representatives,¹⁴¹ and some were removed from open sessions, such as the exit hearing of the Anti-Corruption Commission report.¹⁴² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) officers are also implicated in the harassment of journalists by calling security on journalists and asking them to hand over recorders for search.¹⁴³

Because of the multiplicity of actors, it is sometimes unclear where these safety issues emanate from, and a lack of accountability has exacerbated the situation. Journalists fear that national initiatives such as the upcoming elections or a possible spike in conflicts could exacerbate the situation.

Although none of the interviewed journalists reported having sought medical attention for the psychological impact of the work and the working environment, some media houses, such as the Amhara Media Corporation, provide mass training on mental health and safety mainly because of the conflict context in which its journalists work, although that is not a continuous endeavour.

Journalists who were released after abduction also live in constant fear that their abductors might get offended and put them at risk again. One journalist who remained for weeks in the hands of insurgents returned to work immediately after getting released without receiving any psycho-social support.

Furthermore, journalists are leaving the sector in droves due to external pressures, leaving themselves and their families financially vulnerable. Seven journalists have resigned from Tigray Broadcasting Service (TBS), including one who said they were afraid for their lives.¹⁴⁴ Journalists in the SRS have also hinted at leaving the sector.

Furthermore, the Ethiopian Media Women Association (EMWA) had launched an initiative to combat mental health issues among women journalists. EMWA announces efforts to reduce mental health problems among female journalists in collaboration with the Ethiopian Psychiatry Association.¹⁴⁵ As noted elsewhere in this assessment report, EMWA, with support from Fojo Media Institute, has signed an MoU with three media outlets to develop gender policies and foster gender equality within newsrooms. EMWA has also launched a project to capacitate women in trauma and mental health issues.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with online media journalist

¹⁴¹ Interview with newspaper editor; Borkena. 2025. Reporter Newspaper Announces Ban from Covering Parliament. <https://borkena.com/2025/05/26/ethiopia-reporter-newspaper-announces-ban-from-covering-parliament/>

¹⁴² Interview with newspaper journalist

¹⁴³ Interview with Addis Ababa based woman journalist

¹⁴⁴ Interview

¹⁴⁵ Menaheria Radio. 2025. የኢትዮጵያ ሙዚየም ሰራተኞች ለሰራተኞች ማህበር በሴት ጋዜጠኞች ላይ ሊደርስ የሚችለውን የአዕምሮ ጤና እክል ለመቀነስ እየሰራ ለመሆኑን አስታዎቀ. https://web.facebook.com/100092573198517/posts/%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A2%E1%89%B5%E1%8B%AE%E1%8C%B5%E1%8B%AB-%E1%88%98%E1%8C%88%E1%8A%93%E1%8A%9B-%E1%89%A5%E1%8B%99%E1%88%83%E1%8A%95-%E1%89%A3%E1%88%88%E1%88%99%E1%8B%AB-%E1%88%B4%E1%89%B6%E1%89%BD-%E1%88%9B%E1%88%85%E1%89%A0%E1%88%AD-%E1%89%A0%E1%88%B4%E1%89%B5-%E1%8C%8B%E1%8B%9C%E1%8C%A0%E1%8A%9E%E1%89%BD-%E1%88%8B%E1%8B%AD-%E1%88%8A%E1%8B%B0%E1%88%AD%E1%88%B5-%E1%8B%A8%E1%88%9A%E1%89%BD%E1%88%88%E1%8B%8D%E1%8A%95-%E1%8B%A8%E1%8A%A0%E1%8B%95%E1%88%9D%E1%88%AE-%E1%8C%A4%E1%8A%93-%E1%8A%A5%E1%8A%AD%E1%88%8D-%E1%88%88%E1%88%98%E1%89%80%E1%8A%90%E1%88%B5-%E1%8A%A5%E1%8B%A8%E1%88%B0%E1%88%AB-/633662756396159/?_rdc=1&_rdc#

4.6. Infrastructural Safety

For this assessment, infrastructure safety is understood as digital and financial threats and risks to journalists' professional survival, including digital surveillance and threats to job stability. During the period this assessment covers, journalists and media houses have experienced safety issues concerning their digital and financial wellbeing ranging from online harassments, cell phone spying, hacking, denial of leaves and rest, closure of media outlets, interference from the government in content production as well as intimidation by advertisers to stop working with the media houses, as discussed in detail below.

4.6.1. Digital safety and surveillance

During this assessment period, the online platform of an entirely digital-based media outlet was hacked, although investigations did not indicate interference by the Ethiopian government.¹⁴⁶ Reports indicated that Ethiopia is the most targeted country worldwide for cyberattacks in 2024¹⁴⁷ and some attacks targeting media houses were reported in 2025. Consequently, several journalists interviewed for this assessment have indicated that they are targeted by cyber bullies who intend to silence them. Most journalists face labelling as supporters of this or that group.

Addis Standard reported that, after investigating equipment seized by the police and returned to the media house, it was found to contain malware. While phones and other electronic devices of detained journalists remain with the police, subjected to searches without consent, many avoid using their devices and phones after they have been taken by the security forces for fear of surveillance.

The Telegram account of a business and economy journalist was hacked and used to request money from several contacts, including bank and insurance executives. Similarly, phishing messages were sent to journalists via email, Facebook, or other messaging apps. Some journalists suspect that security agents could be involved in this surveillance and targeting.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Interview with an online media founder

¹⁴⁷ Capital. 2025. <https://capitalethiopia.com/2025/09/25/ethiopia-emerges-as-top-target-of-cyberattacks-amid-rapid-digital-growth/>

¹⁴⁸ Interview with a Jigjiga woman journalist; Interview with newspaper journalist

Journalists and media houses are also unduly criticised for their reports by people who associate them with certain groups and pigeonhole them, setting the stage for further attacks, intimidation, and self-censorship. One common characterisation of the media is the use of the term “Sha’abiya,” an informal, sometimes derogatory term referring to the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), Eritrea’s ruling party.

The digital and cyber space has also been widely used to target individual journalists. Meanwhile, the digital space plays a significant role in fuelling conflicts and enabling polarised discourse in conflict settings, with safety spillovers for journalists. For instance, A lawsuit in a Kenyan court accuses Meta’s Facebook of inflaming violence in Ethiopia. The lawsuit argues that Meta’s engagement-driven algorithms promoted violent and divisive content, worsening ethnic tensions. Despite warnings, Meta allegedly failed to take sufficient action to remove dangerous posts or to invest in adequate moderation for local languages (Amharic and Afaan Oromo).¹⁴⁹

The EMA has identified social media as a “hotbed” for hate speech, with Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram serving as the primary vehicles for disinformation.

Interestingly, most of this content (over 50%) originates from public figures and celebrities, overshadowing contributions from media outlets (26%) and the general public (17%). Content primarily targets political affiliations, though ethnic and religious attacks are also significant. In response, the EMA is pushing for increased accountability for influencers and stronger partnerships between government and social media platforms to curb the spread of harmful narratives.¹⁵⁰

The lack of adequate content moderation has significant implications for increased digital threats to journalists, and the lack of proper mechanisms to redress this exacerbates the digital safety issues that journalists are facing, including cyberbullying. This invites the enforcement and full implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity,¹⁵¹ which calls for internet intermediaries to take proactive steps to prevent online violence and harassment against journalists.

¹⁴⁹ The Guardian. 2025. Meta faces £1.8bn lawsuit over claims it inflamed violence in Ethiopia. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2025/apr/03/meta-faces-18bn-lawsuit-over-claims-it-inflamed-violence-in-ethiopia> Capital Ethiopia. 2025. EMA raises alarm over escalating hate speech, fake news on social media.

¹⁵⁰ [https://capitalethiopia.com/2025/08/17/ema-raises-alarm-over-escalating-hate-speech-fake-news-on-social-media/#:~:text=The%20Ethiopian%20Media%20Authority%20\(EMA,text%20makes%20up%20nearly%2012%25](https://capitalethiopia.com/2025/08/17/ema-raises-alarm-over-escalating-hate-speech-fake-news-on-social-media/#:~:text=The%20Ethiopian%20Media%20Authority%20(EMA,text%20makes%20up%20nearly%2012%25)

¹⁵¹ https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/journalists/2023-01-31/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_en.pdf

Moreover, journalists working in state-owned media are prevented from earning additional income during their off-duty time. The social media activities of these journalists are also closely monitored, and liking or commenting on anything that supervisors deem critical of the government can lead to demotion or dismissal.¹⁵⁷

Journalists, especially those working for state-affiliated and state media, are also subjected to heavy intervention by party and government officials in content production, and they are frequently discouraged from working professionally. Journalists are usually given orders to set an agenda of interest to the ruling party or government. These orders typically come from members of the board of trustees, heads of communication offices, media leaders, or party officials. One journalist bitterly explains her situation as being turned into a social media troll responding to criticism of the party on social media.¹⁵⁸ Journalists are also frequently relocated or assigned to other roles whenever they are perceived as challenging the existing way of operation.

I was assigned to a position where I would just remain invisible because I demanded we respect the words of the editorial policy,”

A state-owned media journalist

Moreover, because commercial media houses depend on advertising income, corporations such as banks and telecom operators tend to skew the way the media work to maintain their interests. Leading telecom companies and banks leverage their advertising to demand favourable media coverage.¹⁵⁹ Because of this leverage, some publishers even push their journalists to cover events sponsored by advertisers, despite their lack of newsworthiness.¹⁶⁰ This shows how the media is susceptible to manipulation, eroding professionalism. Another pressure media houses are facing, a risk easily transferable to journalists, is compliance with new tax regimes that consider any in-kind or financial assistance media houses receive as profits and taxable. Furthermore, as media houses collect advertising fees after publication, it has become challenging for them to comply with the new taxation system, which requires all businesses to pay taxes every quarter (three months) based on calculations made by tax officers. Until this is settled with the tax office, leaders of media houses are prevented from leaving the country.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Interview with a state-owned journalist

¹⁵⁸ Interview with a state-owned media journalist

¹⁵⁹ Interview with media sales representatives

¹⁶⁰ Interview with journalists

¹⁶¹ Interview with media owners

Even before the flotation of the Birr, broadcasters who pay satellite lease payments in USD while generating income in local currency have been complaining about the challenges they faced, as they were required to make satellite lease payments in USD to local a provider.¹⁶⁵

The skewed distribution of advertising in favour of state media has also continued to make it harder for private media to compete, and broadcasters have demanded policy and institutional reforms to ensure that privately owned media get a fair share of government advertising. Some also suggest establishing an advertising distribution agency to ensure fair distribution of government advertising.

Following the decisions to dismantle VOA and close overseas offices, journalists working for the media and based in Ethiopia were also exposed to unprecedented financial threats. As of 23 March 2025, VOA's Amharic and Tigrigna services remained off air. Moreover, journalists working for the Amharic service and Tigrigna broadcasts for Ethiopia and Eritrea had been sidelined.¹⁶⁶

Cognizant of these challenges that the Ethiopian media are facing, the Ethiopian Media Council has proposed the establishment of the Media Fund to “rescue both private and public media institutions at risk of closure and to safeguard journalists who are out of work,” and it aims “to provide financial support to media institutions and help ensure their continuity.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ The Reporter. 2024. Broadcasters cry fault over 'unjust' satellite lease payments. <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/39998/>

¹⁶⁶ BirrMetrics. 2025. VOA Amharic, Tigrigna, Afan Oromo Off Air After Trump's Agency Reduction Order. <https://birrmetrics.com/4306-2/>

¹⁶⁷ EMC. 2025. Ethiopian Media Council Announces Establishment of Media Fund. <https://ethiopianmediacouncil.org/media-fund-announcement/>

4.7. Gender Safety

Journalists working in both private and state-affiliated and owned media houses have been subjected to gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence, or prevented from equal opportunity because of their gender. These ranged from journalists being undermined because of their gender, being assigned to “soft topics,” getting looked down on, being subjected to sexual harassment, and unnecessary advances from informants, as well as the supervisors.

4.7.1. Gender-based violence in the media

Research into newsrooms has demonstrated that female journalists face stagnation and salary discrepancies, disparities between men and women in the distribution of job roles, sexual harassment, bullying, sexism, and racial discrimination, as well as limited opportunities to attain leadership in media outlets.¹⁶⁸ The tendency to assign women to “soft issues” as well as placing structural limitations preventing women from leadership positions in newsrooms are also deeply entrenched problems.¹⁶⁹

Findings from this assessment also show that women are still facing the challenges identified years ago, indicating that no serious measures have been taken and that the issues remain systemic.

For instance, a journalist from a regional television station was subjected to defamation posts by a team of journalists whom she leads. Because of this, she had to endure rebukes from family and friends until she explained herself to clarify some of the allegations.¹⁷⁰

Supervisors, government officers, as well as colleagues, are also implicated in sexual verbal harassment and unwarranted sexual comments directed towards female journalists.¹⁷¹ Female journalists are also automatically thought to be unfit for leading editorial and management positions, and some are insulted as inefficient because of biased conceptions.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Akinbobola, Yemisi. 2025. Barriers to women journalists in Ethiopia. Fojo Media Institute. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1985193/FULLTEXT01.pdf>;

¹⁶⁹ CRDC. 2021. “Women journalists should not cover politics.” <https://crdc.org/2021/12/27/women-journalists-should-not-cover-politics/>

¹⁷⁰ Interview

¹⁷¹ Interview with regional state-owned journalist

¹⁷² Interview with a regional state-owned journalist; Interview with Addis based state-owned media journalist

A woman journalist working in Addis Ababa, interviewed for this assessment, said that she frequently faces stereotypes from her colleagues' gossip that she was hired because of her sexual relations with people of power in the media, although she had proven time and again that she is fit for the position. ¹⁷³

In general, women journalists interviewed for this assessment indicated that women are subjected to discrimination and illegal treatment in the workplace, including during the hiring process. Some have reported a common interview question during hiring processes that focuses on their personal life – if they plan to get married any time soon, and/or give birth any time soon. ¹⁷⁴

4.7.2. Equal opportunities for women in the media

Female journalists working in newsrooms do not have equal opportunities to work in areas of their interest, which, in turn, affects their career progression. Because of stereotypes that female journalists face, they are often assigned to report on “soft topics” such as society and health. Sometimes, even readers of newspapers assume that people writing about politics or economic issues are male. One female journalist said some people she meets for interviews tell her that they appreciate the person who wrote some stories, and they get surprised when she tells them that the person is her, as they don't expect the person to be a female journalist. ¹⁷⁵

In addition, women journalists face discrimination in the workplace when it comes to opportunities such as training, and some of them work in crowded newsrooms. ¹⁷⁶

Moreover, disabled female journalists face double challenges as they are discriminated against both during hiring and assignments. Disabled female journalists are assumed to be unable to deliver what the profession requires. Newsrooms and other workplaces that require mobility often lack the facilities needed to deliver on their assignments. There is also an assumption that journalism is not for the disabled. ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Interview with a state-owned media journalist

¹⁷⁴ Interview with an association leader; interview with a state-affiliated media journalist

¹⁷⁵ Interview with a journalist

¹⁷⁶ A Somali region-based journalist

¹⁷⁷ Interview with a female disabled journalist

4.8. Identity Safety

4.8.1. Othering

Journalists working in state media reported that, because most editors and media managers are party members, they discriminate between party members and others. Moreover, journalists who want to practice their journalism are prevented from reporting on anything that the editors and managers think would compromise their future political prospects.¹⁷⁸

Disabled journalists also face discrimination, and they are not provided with proper support equipment to help them excel in the profession. Furthermore, journalists face criticism for their reporting by audiences who sometimes assume that the identities of the people producing content affect the content and the framing of their outputs. Hence, journalists are usually labelled as *Junta* (commonly used to refer to the TPLF since the northern Ethiopia war), *Sha'abiya* (meaning the Eritrean regime/supporters of it), or *Oneg Shene* (commonly used to refer to the Oromo Liberation Army insurgents), especially on social media.

4.8.2. Forced disclosure of information sources

When journalists call institutions, they are usually asked to disclose the sources of their tips before they are given any information on the issue they are working on.¹⁷⁹ When they decline, they are denied the information.

Moreover, journalists have indicated that the EMA repeatedly asks media houses such as Ethiopian Reporter, Wazema Radio, and Ethiopia Insider to disclose sources of information whenever officials lodge complaints about certain stories.¹⁸⁰ Corporations such as leading banks and network providers also force media houses to disclose sources of information whenever information they do not want out is published. These corporations also attempt to extract such information from media houses through co-option, using their advertisement as leverage.¹⁸¹

Whenever media and journalists fail to comply with such requests, they are intimidated and harassed, including with threats to suspend advertising. Journalists are usually told that some issues are of national interest and that they should not intervene in matters of national interest. The issue of national interest defines what questions journalists should ask, what they can report on, and how they frame, according to officials, although they do not explain how some issues are of national interest or what national interest means in those contexts.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with a female state-owned media journalist

¹⁷⁹ Interview with a newspaper journalist

¹⁸⁰ Interview with a media editor

¹⁸¹ Interview with a media editor

4.9. Legal Safety/ Protection

One of the main challenges journalists faced during this assessment period, which also relates to safety issues concerning the personal, infrastructure, infrastructural, gender, and identity of journalists. While journalists are subjected to detention, harassment, damage to equipment, and office raids by police and other security forces, as well as intimidation by corporations and individuals, the law did not protect journalists and media houses, as was seen from interviews, the assessors' observations, and reports of multifaceted attacks on journalists.

Journalists have been forcefully disappeared without proper identification of their perpetrators, further hindering accountability and encouraging impunity. Journalists are prevented from covering events and are denied information that usually passes unaccounted for. Furthermore, the law and the legal system are used against journalists, subjecting them to extended trials, denial of bail rights, police disregarding court orders, and laws being used to persecute journalists.

4.9.1. Instrumentalisation of the law

While remanding journalists without charge or during trial is a persistent concern across the board, the charges brought against journalists are exaggerated by exploiting frameworks such as the anti-terrorism law, the anti-hate speech proclamation, or other criminal law provisions. Such practices, meant to intimidate journalists, have also been identified by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), which has repeatedly tried to monitor court cases of journalists and advocate against such practices.¹⁸² Although journalists are usually charged while on the job or because of what they did, they are accused of terrorism, dissemination of hate speech, or incitement to violence to enable remand.

¹⁸² Interview with EHRC

When journalists are arrested, the police do not allow them to call and inform their families, newsroom, or attorney. For instance, the whereabouts of Tesfalem Waldyes, of Ethiopia Insider, remained unknown despite citywide searches by colleagues and friends. Similarly, Yonas Amare and Abdulsemed Mohammed were detained incommunicado for 10-12 days before being released and warned not to speak about their detention. The devices, such as laptops and phones, were not given to them until this report was written. Denial of bail and police disregard for court orders have also been major issues during this assessment period, as police use their right to appeal to keep detainees in custody. Tesfalem was released on 13 June 2025 on a 15,000 ETB bail after the court dismissed three police appeals to keep him in custody. Two Sheger FM journalists, Tigist Zerihun and Mentamer Tsegaw, were released on a 50,000ETB bail after the Federal Supreme Court upheld a lower court's decisions and rejected an appeal by the Federal Police Crime Investigation Bureau, which argued that the detainees would tamper with evidence if they were released.¹⁸³ Journalists have also expressed frustration that lawyers fear representing them out of concern for repercussions, which denies their legal right to representation and could result in unfair trials.

Media professionals in conflict-affected areas are also kept in constant fear of persecution under extended command posts and other vague emergency decrees, the reach of which is not usually clearly known.¹⁸⁴

Moreover, the recent changes to Media Proclamation 1238/2021 have sent shockwaves through the sector, as calls from professional associations and civil society organisations to preserve the law were ignored. While the EMA's justification for pushing for the amendment was to strengthen its regulatory power, as they understood the law had reduced their role to mere licensing, the amendments have reduced the representation of independent voices within the board and allowed political party members to serve as administrative board members.

¹⁸³ Shegger FM. 2025. የሸገር ኤፍ ኤም ጋዜጠኞች ትዕግስት ዘረዘሩ ምንጋምር ፀጋው የፈደራል ጠቅላይ ፍርድ ቤት በወሰነው መሰረት ዛሬ ከእስር ተለቀዋል። <https://web.facebook.com/Sheger102.1/posts/pfbid033SQaEUjwTmP9U8kEKmvoyCuVnUpueKzkLRDY6jsVSgJ1xicoUhSW1jfSMGqz4H8l>

¹⁸⁴ Interview with a journalist from the Amhara region

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Safety of Journalists in Conflict- Prone Areas

The proliferation of armed insurgency groups in the country ¹⁸⁵ has a multifaceted impact on the various groups of society, resulting in kidnapping, limitations to freedom of movement, attacks targeting civilians, and extortion.

Journalists in conflict-affected regions have experienced travel restrictions, kidnapping, the prevention of reporting, and killing. Journalists lack protection, and they are often targeted by both sides in conflicts.

While regional and state-owned media must be escorted to report in conflict-affected areas, the escorts and protection they receive can be easily revoked, as observed in the Oromia and Amhara regions. Furthermore, the trips and travel are planned for the journalists by the organisers, and they are usually told to get up and leave. This is common with the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Peace, and regional administrations. Journalists who travel with escorts are not allowed to even plan their content, in addition to the events they are taken to. No critical questions are allowed.

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¹⁸⁵ Atrsaw Necho. 2023. Conflict Trends Report: Amhara Region. Rift Valley Institute. https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PRF-Conflict-Trend-Report_-Amhara-Region_FINAL-reduced-3.pdf

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Amhara region journalist; interview with state-owned journalist

¹⁸⁷ Interviews with state-owned media journalists

Most journalists who requested travel to the Amhara and Tigray regions were denied permission by their newsrooms because their newsrooms were unable to ensure the duty of care for the journalists. Journalists who were allowed to travel¹⁸⁸ to conflict-affected areas are also subjected to interrogation by the security forces or armed insurgent groups, who usually do not allow them to conduct their job.¹⁸⁹ Journalists who travelled to the Tigray region to report on illegal gold mining were forced to delete photos from their cameras in Shire.¹⁹⁰

Similarly, a group of journalists from a state-owned Ethiopian Television were kidnapped for 13 days in June by armed groups in the Amhara region. The kidnapped journalists and professionals were later fired by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation/Ethiopian Television, although some were returned to their posts.

Journalists working in conflict areas also heavily censor themselves in fear of offending one group or being seen as favouring one group over the other, which, in turn, lays the ground for attacks.

Conflicts have also significantly affected access to information. For instance, as the majority of the Amhara and Oromia regions remained under command post for a long period of time, only a few people are mandated to provide information, and these people speak to the media of their choice. The society is also afraid to provide information to journalists, fearing persecution by either party in the conflict.

In conflict areas, journalists are often caught in the political crossfire as rival groups vie for authority. A clear example occurred mid-year in 2025: as tensions escalated between the two TPLF factions led by Getachew Reda and Debretsion Gebremichael, both groups simultaneously appointed their own leaders to key government positions, sparking conflict. The media experienced this instability firsthand when a Debretsion-affiliated mayor, appointed head of Mekelle FM radio, Zemenfeskidus Fisseha, attempted a takeover by bringing in five armed men to challenge the authority of the person already in charge of the station.¹⁹¹

This reflects the broader perilous situation journalists in Tigray are operating in, especially in the post-Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) period that ended the 2020-2022 war in northern Ethiopia.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Amhara region journalist

¹⁸⁹ Interview with online media founder

¹⁹⁰ Interview with a newspaper journalist

¹⁹¹ BBC. 2025. የወቀለ ኤፍኤም ሬዲዮ ጣቢያን ለወቆጣጠር የተደረገው ውክራ እና የተፈጠረው ውዝግብ. <https://www.bbc.com/amharic/articles/clyek3759d1o>

As fictionalisation within the TPLF continues, creating alignments and counter-alignments along lines of political loyalty, journalists are considered supporters of either faction. Hence, perceived support for or alignment with one group or the other means a threat.

Tigray Broadcasting Service and Tigray Public Media Journalists and camera people Merhawi Birhane, Meaza Wubete, Sirak Assefa, and Eyerusalem Birhanu were held at gunpoint and intimidated to stop filming in Tigray as they attempted to report on a June protest that ensued in the region.¹⁹²

Similarly, because of the continued harassment and abduction of journalists by armed groups for ransom as a result of the conflict in the Amhara region, the Amhara Media Corporation (Amico) had decided that its journalists should not conduct fieldwork for reports. Only escorted visits are allowed, and flights are used only for very important events. Regional journalists who travelled for personal reasons have been abducted (both for political and ransom purposes) by insurgent groups. Colleagues have repeatedly pooled resources from their salaries to pay for the ransoms of their abducted colleagues, while families covered portions, and at least three journalists were subjected to abductions in the region in 2025.¹⁹³

Meanwhile, the impact of the conflict in the Oromia region on media houses takes a different form, stifling the environment and heightening sensitivity to critical media reporting. Media houses and journalists do not plan trips to the region for reporting purposes.¹⁹⁴

Escalating conflicts and political tensions have contributed to a decline in press freedom in Ethiopia. In response to this concerning trend, the European Union, alongside 14 diplomatic missions based in Addis Ababa, has issued a formal statement expressing alarm over the deteriorating state of media freedom in the country.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² CPJ. 2025. 'Stop filming, or I will shoot': Ethiopian journalists targeted in Tigray turmoil. <https://cpj.org/2025/10/stop-filming-or-i-will-shoot-ethiopian-journalists-targeted-in-tigray-turmoil/>

¹⁹³ Interviews with an abducted journalist; Interviews with regional journalists' association

¹⁹⁴ Interview with an online media owner; interview with an online magazine leader

¹⁹⁵ Addis Standard. 2025. News: EU, 14 diplomatic missions in Addis raise alarm over shrinking press freedom as Ethiopia slides into 145th globally. <https://addisstandard.com/eu-14-diplomatic-missions-in-addis-raise-alarm-over-shrinking-press-freedom-as-ethiopia-slides-into-145th-globally/>



Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

This journalist's safety assessment report for 2025 is intended to document, analyse, and raise awareness on various safety issues journalists face while conducting their work in Ethiopia. The report presents the findings of the assessment for which multiple secondary sources were consulted, and 76 journalists and media professionals were interviewed.

In the context of changing political, legal, and security contexts, journalists' vulnerability to risks and safety concerns increases. Political developments such as the government's quest for access to the sea and related developments, political tensions in Tigray, as well as conflicts in the Amhara and Oromia regions, have been instrumentalised to create safety risks for journalists in the name of national interest. Development projects such as the corridor beautification in Addis Ababa and others are not scrutinised because of harassment and intimidation whenever journalists attempt to cover them. The recent amendments to Media Proclamation No. 1238/2021 have introduced notable changes to the governance structure of the Ethiopian Media Authority (EMA), including a shift in decision-making processes. These adjustments, which involve modifications to the composition and size of the board of directors, may influence the balance between institutional oversight and operational efficiency. Such changes may influence institutional oversight and the diversity of perspectives within the media regulatory framework.

In terms of personal safety, one journalist died on the job, while others faced detention, kidnapping, and enforced disappearance, as well as damage and confiscation of equipment. Media houses as well as residences of journalists have been raided by the police, who detained media professionals and other staff in addition to confiscating electronic equipment. The equipment is sometimes illegally taken and kept by security forces, and returning it takes a very long time. In addition, returned electronic devices were found to carry malware.

Commonly, journalists face restrictions on gathering information through pictures and videos, as police demand letters from journalists, even though this is not required by law. Journalists have also been detained and harassed as a result. While this is one tactic for limiting access to information for journalists, others include information gatekeeping, such as authorising people who are not journalists to control the flow of information within government institutions, and not inviting journalists to major public events. Journalists are also prevented from exploring various news angles whenever they travel with government officials for government-organised events. Regular citizens have also become wary of speaking to the media, as they fear speaking the truth might have negative consequences. This reflects the space of fear in which journalists operate.

Media houses were also subjected to bans from reporting regular sessions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for not being registered in the dataset ¹⁹⁶, the House of Peoples’ Representatives ¹⁹⁷, and were removed from open sessions, such as the exit hearing of the Anti-Corruption Commission report at the Ethiopian Investment Commission. ¹⁹⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs officers are also implicated in the harassment of journalists by calling security on journalists and asking them to hand over recorders for search. ¹⁹⁹

In regions such as Oromia, Somali, Benishangul, South-Western, Southern, and other regional states, journalists are subjected to harassment for perceived offences against authorities. Community radios in Southern Ethiopia and private media in the Somali regional state frequently face harassment when authorities believe journalists have produced content implicating them or their constituencies in wrongdoing. News reports from Dire Dawa regarding corruption at a local mosque have resulted in the detention of a journalist.

Moreover, journalists face harassment, mischaracterisation, and labelling from online platforms in addition to being targeted with phone surveillance and hacking. Journalists usually had to change their phone lines and devices after they were confiscated by the police because they suspected the security might have tampered with the devices. Examples of these have been seen in the equipment the police seized from Addis Standard and later returned. While there is direct, heavy interference from the ruling party and government officials in state-owned and state-affiliated media, content production is also affected by government framing that doesn’t allow exploration of other angles in stories. Financial threats to media houses from corporations and heavy taxation have also significantly impacted the media in Ethiopia. Some journalists were suspended from their roles, and others were relieved of their duties during this reporting period. Corporations also tend to manipulate content using their leverage as advertisers.

Women journalists face unique challenges in newsrooms. In addition to being looked down on compared to their peers, women face a significant challenge, including sexual harassment and verbal abuse, both from within newsrooms and sources of information. Women are also assigned to do “soft topics” and are discouraged from taking up other issues, such as politics and economics. In addition, disabled women journalists face a double burden as the work environment is not accommodating to their needs.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with online media journalist

¹⁹⁷ Interview with newspaper editor; Borkena. 2025. Reporter Newspaper Announces Ban from Covering Parliament. <https://borkena.com/2025/05/26/ethiopia-reporter-newspaper-announces-ban-from-covering-parliament/>

¹⁹⁸ Interview with newspaper journalist

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Addis Ababa based woman journalist

Legal instruments are also (mis)used by authorities and security forces that exploit loopholes to impose pretrial remand on journalists and use provisions such as the terrorism prevention proclamation and the anti-hate speech proclamation to allow remand. Available accounts indicate that police have not been observed complying with court orders to release journalists whose bail had been granted, even after multiple appeals; however, evidence would be required to confirm whether this represents a consistent nationwide pattern. Journalists were also exposed to illegal kidnapping, enforced disappearance, and abduction for ransom, but accountability was not ensured. The whereabouts of detained journalists are not disclosed to families and friends, as well as newsrooms, leading to stress and making the families of journalists in detention spend a lot of time searching for their relatives and friends.

Overall, this year's assessment report shows that the positive gains from the early days of the reform have receded, and the country is becoming increasingly unsuitable for journalists. Security forces, authorities, and businesspeople always seek to impose their interests on the media, often by force. Any escalation in conflicts and national initiatives, such as elections, is always feared to exacerbate the situation.

Authorities and media institutions should take concrete steps to safeguard press freedom and foster inclusive public discourse. This means implementing strong protections for journalists' safety and independence, actively facilitating open dialogue between the press, officials, and communities, and investing in public education and media literacy programs. Regular training sessions and public forums on issues of national importance can encourage collaboration and mutual understanding, helping to build a shared sense of purpose and trust between citizens and the media. In essence, a coordinated policy approach that prioritises journalist protection, open communication, and public awareness will create a more resilient and inclusive media environment.



Launch of the Consortium for the Safety of Journalists in Ethiopia (CSoJ), bringing together key media and civil society actors to strengthen collective action for journalist protection. 22 January 2026.



A national dialogue convened by the Editors Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) on 21 August 2025 to address arbitrary detentions and silencing tactics against journalists underscored the need for institutional accountability and coordinated national responses to ensure journalists' safety.



A national consultative dialogue facilitated by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in Addis Ababa on 25 July 2025 convened judicial bodies, law enforcement agencies, media institutions, and civil society to identify cross sector measures that better protect journalists and uphold freedom of expression.

6.2. Recommendations

6.2.1. Government

- The government should acknowledge that journalism is beneficial to the state and work with the media and media development organisations to that end
- It should also create awareness among officials to enable the free flow of information
- The government should institutionalise the protection of the safety of journalists, and safety issues should not be left to the personal goodwill of certain officials
- The government should allow for a dedicated desk comprised of security institutions, media associations, and a joint committee of the international community to deal with issues concerning journalists and the media
- Treat media houses and journalism as a nascent and growing sector that needs multifaceted support, including taxation
- Protecting the safety of journalists should be mainstreamed across the various echelons of the government to overcome the disjointed understanding of safety issues and protection for journalists
- The government should acknowledge that no one is less loyal to the national interest and security of the state
- Ensure that national initiatives, such as elections and other projects, do not pose safety risks for journalists
- The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) should have a public record of disaggregated data on human rights abuses in the country that clearly shows the type of safety issues journalists faced and the identities of their perpetrators

6.2.2. The CSoJ and its member organisations

- Plan and execute a multi-scalar level awareness campaign and advocacy work that covers and connects national, regional, and local levels
- Provide continued safety training to journalists and build capacity in the country to be able to investigate digital surveillance and hacking
- Engage the government and security forces continuously so that there is an awareness regarding the state of journalists' safety in Ethiopia and how to address it
- Promote the online safety issues reporting platform so that people know where to report when they face safety issues, and create incentive mechanisms for journalists and others to report whenever safety issues arise. Incentives could include support during difficult situations, like a delayed salary, covered through a pool of funds
- Clearly define positions and frame partnership with the government based on what you want to achieve, and know that any support to the government enables their coercive capacity; hence, capacity building and any other support to the government need to be well thought out
- Design a specialised support system for women journalists by understanding their unique challenges and positions so that they stay safe in the workplace and in the field
- Collaborate with media institutions, human rights defenders, and the international community to assign a dedicated campaign week where awareness creation on the safety of journalists is done

6.2.3. Media Outlets

Understand and acknowledge the safety issues journalists face both in-house and outside

Have regular safety training and staff safety meetings to learn about new developments and strategise on overcoming them

Devise mechanisms to enable female and disabled journalists to overcome the challenges they face

Follow due processes in hiring journalists, promotions, and assignments

Establish a mechanism where journalists can anonymously access mental health support

6.2.4. Human Rights Defenders

Work with the CSoJ on creating awareness on the safety of journalists and human rights issues

Continuously advocate for the improvement of the space by showing its benefits to the perpetrators

Bring international and regional experience and share it with the Ethiopians

Provide continuous support for journalists and media houses that are victims of violence

6.2.5. International Organisations and Donors

- Fund continuous monitoring and capacity building
- Sustain support for evidence-based advocacy, coalition building, and protective programs that follow on preventive and holistic approaches
- Support joint government, media, associations, CSOs, and IC platform for the protection of media space and the safety of journalists
- Support CSoJ to strengthen its monitoring, documentation, and reporting of safety issues
- Support capacity building for journalists in the form of basic and advanced safety training
- Create platforms for experience sharing and learning within the country and abroad.

7. Annexes

7.1. Regional distribution of Interviewees

Region	No of interviewees
Addis Ababa	30
BSG Benishangul Gumuz	3
Tigray	11
Oromia	5
Amhara	6
Afar	1
Somali	9
Central Ethiopia	5
Sidama	2
Harari	2
Dire Dawa	1
Gambella	1
Total	76



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