

VOICES FROM EXILE

THE SAFETY NEEDS OF MYANMAR WOMEN JOURNALISTS



A REPORT BY

exile hub

“Sending in factual reporting is a form of political activism.”

Ronald Koven,

former European representative for the World Press Freedom Committee.

A Research Report by



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Note

The term “women journalists” is preferred over “female journalists” in this paper for its inclusivity and respect for individuals’ gender identity and professional achievements. It avoids potential objectification and reductionism associated with the latter term, aligning with contemporary standards of respectful and inclusive language use in recognizing diverse gender identities and expressions within the field of journalism.¹

When we refer to a “journalist,” we are describing an individual whose primary profession involves gathering, researching, reporting, and presenting news and information to the public through various mediums, including but not limited to newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and online platforms. Our definition of a “journalist” encompasses not only traditional reporters and correspondents but also media professionals like stringers and fixers.² Including these roles recognizes the collaborative nature of journalism and the vital contributions made by a diverse array of individuals who help gather and communicate news and information to the public.

Introduction

The survival of exiled Myanmar media relies on the survival of media professionals, emphasizing the importance of protecting journalists’ rights to practice their profession securely. Journalism plays a pivotal role during times of conflict and authoritarianism, serving as a vital tool for communication, activism, and the pursuit of democratic ideals. The urgency of safeguarding these rights cannot be overstated in Myanmar’s post-2021 coup landscape, especially considering the junta’s relentless efforts to suppress dissenting voices and spread disinformation

Myanmar’s historical narrative has been marred by prolonged periods of dictatorship, beginning in 1958 when General Ne Win’s caretaker government seized control. A significant turning point emerged in 2011, as the nation shifted away from full military rule, culminating in the re-election of the civilian-led National League for Democracy in 2020, signifying a decade of quasi-civilian governance. Emerging from decades of military rule, hopes were high for a more democratic and

¹ It is worth noting that some individuals and groups may also use the term “womxn” (pronounced like “women”) to be even more inclusive and gender-neutral. “Womxn” is used to encompass a broader range of gender identities and expressions beyond the traditional binary understanding of gender. However, its usage can vary and may not be universally accepted.

² In journalism, a “stringer” is a freelance or part-time correspondent who contributes stories to news organizations on a per-assignment basis. Stringers are often locals or individuals with specific expertise, offering news outlets access to unique perspectives. “Fixers” play a crucial role in assisting foreign journalists working in unfamiliar locations. Fixers, hired on a temporary basis, provide essential local knowledge, language skills, and cultural insights. They facilitate interviews, handle translation, and ensure access to relevant locations, contributing to the accuracy and cultural sensitivity of foreign correspondents’ reporting. Together, stringers and fixers contribute to well-informed and contextually accurate news stories, with stringers reporting on the ground and fixers providing essential support behind the scenes.

transparent society. Journalists were at the forefront of this transformation, pushing boundaries and providing a platform for diverse voices.

However, the optimism of this period was abruptly shattered on February 1st, 2021, when Myanmar's military (known locally as the Tatmadaw) executed a coup, plunging the nation into turmoil. The coup triggered an immediate response, as hundreds of thousands of civil servants joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)³ in defiance of the military's takeover.

Nonetheless, the aftermath of the coup has witnessed an alarming intensification of measures aimed at suppressing dissenting voices. The Tatmadaw has resorted to draconian tactics to stifle freedom of expression, media, and open communication channels. Independent media outlets have had their licenses revoked, their premises raided, and journalists found themselves among the primary targets alongside politicians, ethnic activists and political leaders, human rights advocates, and pro-democracy activists, relentlessly pursued by the junta.

In the subsequent two and a half years since the military coup, a staggering 25,463 individuals have been imprisoned, with 1,347 of these killed in detainment, according to the human rights organization Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).⁴ We have seen the tragic killing of four journalists⁵ and the incarceration of 145 others, with around 60 journalists remaining in detention.⁶ To put this into perspective, journalist and director of Visual Rebellion, Laure Siegel, noted in a report by the International Press Institute that the dire circumstances have led to Myanmar earning the disheartening distinction of having the highest journalist-to-population imprisonment rate globally.⁷

This wave of repression effectively dismantled the once-vibrant network of developing media that had flourished over the preceding decade. In 2022, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) designated Myanmar as the eighth worst country globally in terms of impunity for crimes committed against journalists.⁸ The deterioration of Myanmar's press freedom rankings serves as a poignant reflection of the gravity of the situation. According to the 2023 World Press Freedom

³ The Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar refers to the widespread protests and acts of civil disobedience that emerged in response to the military coup that took place in Myanmar on February 1st, 2021. The participants in the CDM (also known as CDMers) have faced various forms of repression and retaliation from the military junta in their efforts to protest and resist the coup.

⁴ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), "Graphs of arrest and death data as of August 31, 2023, collected and compiled by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) since the February 1, 2021, military coup." (September 1, 2023).

⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists, "4 Journalists and Media Workers Killed in Myanmar between 2021 and 2023 / Motive Confirmed or Unconfirmed." (November 28, 2023).

⁶ Laure Siegel, "In Myanmar, journalists raise media voices against the bloody coup." *International Press Institute* (February 15, 2023).

⁷ Siegel, "In Myanmar, journalists raise media voices against the bloody coup." *International Press Institute*.

⁸ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Killing with impunity: Vast majority of journalists' murderers go free." *2022 Global Impunity Index* (November 1, 2022).

Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Myanmar currently languishes at the 173rd position among the 180 nations assessed.⁹ These reports serve as a stark reminder of the contrast between the nation’s previous aspirations for media freedom and the reality faced by journalists in Myanmar today.

These conditions have forced journalists to seek sanctuary in neighboring countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh, and India, a decision driven by looming threats of violence and arrest not only for themselves, but their friends and family, leaving these media professionals with little choice but to leave their homeland behind. Despite this, Myanmar journalists in exile remain in a perpetual state of apprehension, forced to contend constantly with the looming perils posed by military surveillance and the coercive strategies employed by immigration authorities in neighboring countries. These challenges are all further exacerbated by additional hurdles that make it even more hazardous to practice journalistic work in exile. One such hurdle is that of financial constraints; available funding resources for Myanmar media outlets have shrunk dramatically in the past two years, leaving many with limited means of support.¹⁰ The inability to advertise and generate revenue stresses within their home country amplifies these difficulties. This is compounded by the fact that they cater to an audience that, in many cases, cannot afford to subscribe or contribute financially, often due to fear of persecution and the deteriorating economic situation post-coup.¹¹ These factors collectively contribute to the already precarious situation confronting exiled media, rendering their mission even more formidable and their survival more uncertain.

This research paper places a specific focus on the conditions of women journalists for several reasons. First, we acknowledge the persistent gender disparities and unique challenges that women in journalism often encounter. It is crucial to address and understand these disparities, as these challenges can impact their career opportunities, safety, and overall well-being. Furthermore, women remain underrepresented in key decision-making roles within media organizations, resulting in a lack of diversity in news reporting and content creation. This underrepresentation limits the scope of stories and perspectives covered by the media.

⁹ Reporters Without Borders, “2023 World Press Freedom Index.” (2023).

¹⁰ This trend is not unique to the situation of exiled Myanmar journalists but resonates with other emerging conflicts that have unfolded in the past two years, including those in Afghanistan, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the war in Sudan, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The concurrent strain on media funding across various conflict zones has created a challenging environment for journalists, limiting their capacity to report effectively and maintain sustainable practices in exile.

¹¹ Unfortunately, instances of individuals getting arrested for endorsing an anti-junta social media post or sharing news articles on social media from blacklisted pro-democracy media organizations are frequently reported; Radio Free Asia, “Myanmar junta arrests 50 social media users for ‘anti-regime’ posts.” (June 22, 2023); Radio Free Asia, “More than 200 arrested for social media posts supporting Myanmar opposition.” (May 5, 2022).

Women journalists often confront gender-based violence, harassment, and threats while fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Examining the scope and characteristics of these challenges is crucial not only for the safety and well-being of women in the field but also for a comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence and harassment within journalism. Our research includes diverse perspectives, contributing to the promotion of comprehensive and equitable rights for journalists. Recognizing that the challenges faced by women journalists are not confined to a specific region or context, our findings and recommendations, tailored for the community of exiled Myanmar women journalists in Thailand, also aim to contribute on a broader scale by addressing these challenges and advancing gender equality and inclusivity in the global media industry. Finally, given the media's influential role in shaping public opinion and societal norms, addressing the conditions of women journalists becomes imperative for driving positive social change and advocating for a more equitable and gender-inclusive media landscape worldwide.

Our research focus is directed towards women journalists in exile rather than those working within Myanmar. This decision is driven by several crucial factors. First and foremost, the environment for women journalists in Myanmar is fraught with danger and extreme precarity. These perilous conditions necessitate journalists working within Myanmar to do so as covertly as possible, often demanding they refrain from identifying as journalists at all.¹² Consequently, our research scope focuses on women journalists in exile, who may have greater freedom to openly engage in discussions and share their experiences, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of their unique challenges and needs.

¹² This is evident in the adoption of the term “CJ” (Citizen Journalist) to characterize the activities of Myanmar journalists operating in-country or along the Thai-Myanmar border. Through our interviews with representatives from various Myanmar media outlets, it became evident that the term CJ is now employed not only for traditional citizen journalists but also for individuals employed by media houses. Regardless of their previous employment history, the term CJ serves as a security measure, safeguarding individuals on the ground by avoiding explicit affiliation with any specific media outlet. Simultaneously, it shields media houses by redistributing responsibility in the event of unfortunate incidents involving their employees operating either in-country or along the Thai-Myanmar border.

Exile Hub

This research was spearheaded by Exile Hub, a dedicated support system for media professionals and human rights defenders both within and beyond Myanmar's borders to securely carry on their professions, strengthening the voices that make up Myanmar's critical discourse. Exile Hub supports all professionals involved in media production, including journalists, bloggers, filmmakers, photojournalists, producers, and illustrators. Our holistic framework encompasses an array of support, including psychosocial assistance, media production training, production grants and fellowships, emergency relocation, safe accommodation, as well as community spaces, workspaces, and multimedia production studios in Thailand. Exile Hub is committed to promoting a diverse range of voices, with the priority to uphold independent media and free expression to serve as fundamental pillars in building and defending the values of democracy and pluralism.

This research was conducted with the partial support of Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Austrian Embassy of Bangkok, and in cooperation and consultation with a panel of independent media workers and journalists, including the Independent Myanmar Journalist Association (IMJA), Burma News International (BNI), and the newly-formed Myanmar Women in Media (MWM).

Research Methodology

The primary objective of this research was to gather evidence on the experiences of exiled Myanmar women journalists in Thailand, with a particular focus on non-dominant perspectives about their working and living conditions in the post-2021 coup landscape. Through this, aiming to assess possible solutions for problems faced by the population in question. We made sure to gather various kinds of qualitative and quantitative data from a diverse range of sources through several mediums, including interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), surveys, and desk research on existing literature.

Our research design responded to the principles of inclusive analysis, in which we systematically integrated gender and social inclusion perspectives into the research process, centered on the insights shared in a 2021 report published by the International Peace Institute: “How to Do a Gender Analysis: Practical Guidance for the UN Community”.¹³ We ensured to take the following considerations into account: asking questions, tracing power dynamics, recognizing intersectional identities, accounting for context, and challenging existing knowledge and conventions about labor rights and gender perspectives within the Myanmar media landscape.

In late February 2022, our research team underwent comprehensive training in incorporating community based participatory action research (CBPAR) as our chosen methodology, under the guidance of Partners for Urban Knowledge, Action and Research (PUKAR). This training was instrumental in shaping our research approach and aligned with PUKAR’s vision and mission to democratize research through the incorporation of multiple epistemologies of knowledge. CBPAR, which values community empowerment, knowledge co-production, and inclusive engagement, enhances research quality, community trust, and the potential for sustainable and meaningful change. The training emphasized the importance of community participation and promoted a sense of ownership and empowerment among community members, contributing to more sustainable and effective research outcomes. CBPAR, with its emphasis on addressing systemic inequalities and challenging the profile of the knowledge producer and ownership of such knowledge produced, aligned well with our research’s principle of inclusive analysis.

By adopting CBPAR through the linking of pedagogy to practice in our training by PUKAR, Exile Hub worked in partnership with exiled Myanmar women journalists in Thailand throughout the research design, data collection, data analysis, and writing of this paper. This collaborative approach ensured that the participants were in fact genuine co-researchers and co-producers of both research evidence and the adaptive research design itself. We actively sought contributions from Myanmar women journalists representing various ethnicities, religions, and experiences, as

¹³ Phoebe Donnelly, “How to Do a Gender Analysis: Practical Guidance for the UN Community.” *International Peace Institute* (February 12, 2021).

well as engaging with a diverse array of media outlets and media development organizations. By working collaboratively with the community, we were able to gain profound insights into the community's unique challenges and develop solutions that are not only tailored to their circumstances but also enduring and beneficial to all who are involved in developing the safety and rights of exiled Myanmar women journalists in Thailand.

Furthermore, an advisory board comprising local, regional and international members all deeply involved in the rights of women journalists was consulted throughout the research. This board verified the validity of our methodology and reviewed and provided feedback on our research report prior to publication. This methodological choice ensured that our research was collaborative, reflexive, and responsive to the needs and priorities of the community, embodying the values of equity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

Throughout our research, we followed the ethical guidelines established by the Murad Research Institute, known as the Murad Code.¹⁴ This set of principles places a strong emphasis on transparency, integrity, and ethical behavior across every stage of the research, encompassing data collection, analysis, and reporting. Serving as a comprehensive framework, the Murad Code guided us in upholding the utmost standards of research ethics and integrity throughout the entire study.

In light of widespread and systematic violations by Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC),¹⁵ a pervasive atmosphere of fear has enveloped individuals both in-country and those residing in exile, rendering them susceptible to reprisal for expressing dissent against military rule. Thus, maintaining the anonymity of our participants throughout the research process was paramount. Participants received assurances regarding the confidentiality of their identities and responses. All collected data, encompassing personal information and individual experiences, was securely stored and accessible solely to the research team. Participants retained full control over the information they provided, with the option to withdraw consent at any juncture during the research process. Lastly, participant identities were substituted with unique identifiers to reinforce anonymity, and any potentially identifiable information was meticulously redacted or masked in research outputs to prevent inadvertent disclosure. These stringent measures were diligently enforced to preserve the privacy and security of our participants throughout the entire research endeavor.

Desk review of the historical context of media in Myanmar and a literature review are included in Appendix I and II.

¹⁴ Murad Code Project, "The Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information about Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence." (April 13, 2022).

¹⁵ The State Administrative Council (SAC) in Myanmar refers to the military-led administration that assumed control of the country following the February 1st, 2021 military coup. The SAC was established as the ruling body, with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services, leading the council.

Focus Group Discussions

To facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the safety challenges confronting Myanmar’s women journalists within Thailand, we organized a total of four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) across two carefully selected locations: Mae Sot and Chiang Mai, which both possess a longstanding history of housing a number of exiled Myanmar media organizations. This history is interwoven with Exile Hub’s extensive engagement along the Thai-Myanmar border and is further enriched by the firsthand experiences of our team members, many of whom have strong ties to the area.

Survey

The initial survey questions were drafted by Exile Hub’s research team, before undergoing an extensive review process actively involving Myanmar women journalists to ensure their feedback was integrated into the survey design. The review team conducted a comprehensive evaluation of each question, assessing clarity, relevance, and sensitivity. They engaged in discussions and offered feedback on each question, providing insights into potential biases, cultural considerations, and language nuances. The research team then made the appropriate revisions and modifications to the survey. This collaborative approach allowed us to obtain a more accurate representation of the experiences of exiled Myanmar women journalists in Thailand.

Once the questions were refined to the satisfaction of the review team, the final version of the survey was approved for distribution. By involving women journalists in the review process, their expertise and insights were integrated into the survey design, making it a more effective tool for understanding the unique challenges faced by women journalists in Myanmar. This collaborative approach enhanced the survey’s relevance and sensitivity, ultimately leading to a more accurate representation of their experiences.

The survey was then distributed to 79 exiled Myanmar women journalists living in Thailand. The survey findings, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interview responses were meticulously analyzed to form the paper’s conclusions. Quantitative analysis of survey data provided numerical insights into participants’ perceptions, while qualitative analysis of survey findings, FGD and interview responses identified recurring themes and nuanced perspectives. Rigorous validation measures, such as data triangulation and member checking were employed during the data analysis.

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data allowed the research team to draw comprehensive, evidence based conclusions about the safety needs of exiled Myanmar women journalists. These conclusions serve as a foundation for informed discussions, policies, and initiatives addressing these needs as well as promoting inclusivity within the media landscape.

Questions from the full survey are included in Appendix III.

Interviews

In order to gain a deeper insight into the institutional barriers faced when offering comprehensive support to women journalists, interviews were conducted with media house owners, experts, and representatives from media development organizations. These interviews (conducted both in Burmese and English) were instrumental in shedding light on the complexities of supporting women journalists within media institutions. They facilitated a holistic view of the multifaceted challenges faced by women journalists and illuminated potential strategies and best practices for comprehensive support. Some interviewees gave consent to be named, while others have opted to remain anonymous, and quotes throughout the paper reflect the permissions given. The findings from these interviews were synthesized with other research data that informed the paper’s recommendations and served as a basis for promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment for women journalists within media organizations.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from the following ten organizations:

Democratic Voice of Burma	Internews
The Irrawaddy	Deutsche Welle Akademie
Frontier Myanmar	International Media Support
Myanmar Now	Burma News International
Mizzima	Myanmar Women in Media

Findings

Our research commenced with the hypothesis that there are certain key differences in the safety and security of women journalists in Chiang Mai and Bangkok versus those along the Thai-Myanmar border, who are often undocumented or entered Thailand without the necessary legal permits. There are even greater differences in safety and wellbeing of the women journalists operating inside Myanmar. Crucial distinctions involve the access to resources and support organizations, essential infrastructure, and legal status.

For example, women journalists in Chiang Mai have greater access to emotional and psychological support, safer working conditions, and career development opportunities, benefits that those at the border would find far more difficult to enjoy due to their constrained circumstances. Therefore, our research explored whether the safety needs and support mechanisms for women journalists should be specific to each context and if there were any overall themes and challenges expressed by all three populations.

The research findings are structured into the following sections:

- Demographics
- Current Working Conditions and Impact on Women in Media
- Examining Efficacy and Use of Existing Support Mechanisms

This format was chosen to enhance the clarity and organization of the presentation, making it easier for readers to navigate and access specific insights related to various aspects of women journalists' safety. It ensures comprehensive coverage by addressing different dimensions of their experiences and needs, leaving no critical area unexplored. Moreover, this format caters to the specific concerns and interests of various stakeholders, including journalists, media organizations, policymakers, and advocacy groups. It allows each group to focus on the sections most relevant to their roles and concerns, facilitating the development of actionable conclusions and recommendations that can lead to meaningful improvements in the safety and support mechanisms for women journalists. This division provides the groundwork for further, more targeted research on each dimension, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by this specific group within the media landscape.

Demographics

Focus Group Discussions

For the focus group discussions, participants were selected to represent a diverse array of ages, ethnicities, levels of experience, and expertise within the journalism field. Particularly concerning expertise, invitations were extended to all professionals, senior editors, and senior journalists engaged in daily news coverage related to Myanmar. The process of recruiting participants, moderators, translators, and the selection of local venues was diligently overseen by Exile Hub in collaboration with Free Press Unlimited. Invitations were then dispatched to the chosen participants, resulting in a total of 25 individuals attending the focus group discussions.

These 25 participants were categorized into three distinct target groups, as follows:

- Women journalists with no prior experience in safety training
(one FGD each in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot).
- Editors-in-chief
(one FGD in Chiang Mai).
- Experts specializing in journalist safety, encompassing professionals in psychology, law, and human rights advocacy
(one FGD in Chiang Mai).

Upon reviewing the methodology employed for the focus group discussions (FGDs), it became evident from the feedback received that participants held a strong appreciation for the structure of these discussions. They particularly valued the small sizes of each group and the secure, safe environments in which the FGDs were conducted. These factors collectively fostered a sense of comfort and trust among participants, encouraging them to openly share their experiences.

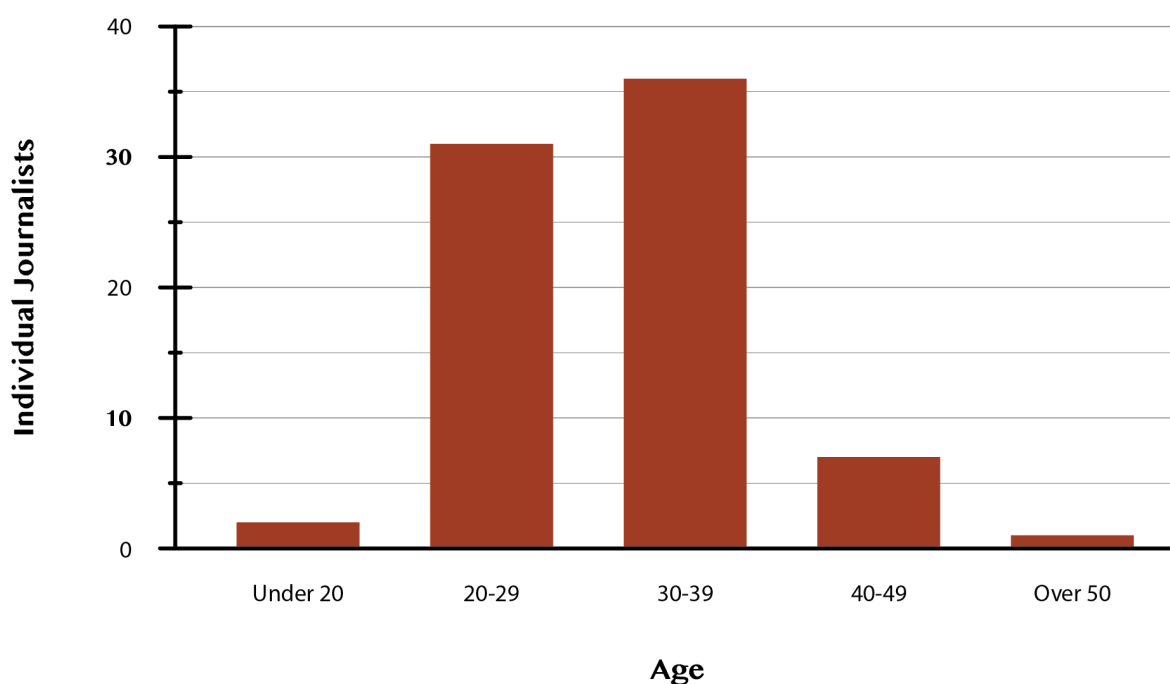
As a noteworthy outcome, the FGDs were likened to peer-to-peer support groups by participants. Several participants emphasized the significance and productivity of engaging in discussions with fellow media professionals specifically focused on journalist safety. Regrettably, such dialogues are not commonplace.

Survey

Due to the safety considerations and the need to establish trust, the “snowball” method was used for this survey due to its efficiency in reaching a specific and often hard-to-reach population, such as women journalists in a challenging and sensitive environment like Myanmar. This method involves initially contacting a small number of individuals who are well-connected within the target group and asking them to recommend other potential participants. The survey was delivered to 79 women journalists across Thailand, with a few journalists responding from Myanmar, who were employed across 32 different media organizations, with 15 declining to answer. Respondents ranged from founders and managing directors to journalists and freelancers. The responses were collected anonymously through a survey which was distributed by volunteer journalists and participants from our focus group discussions.

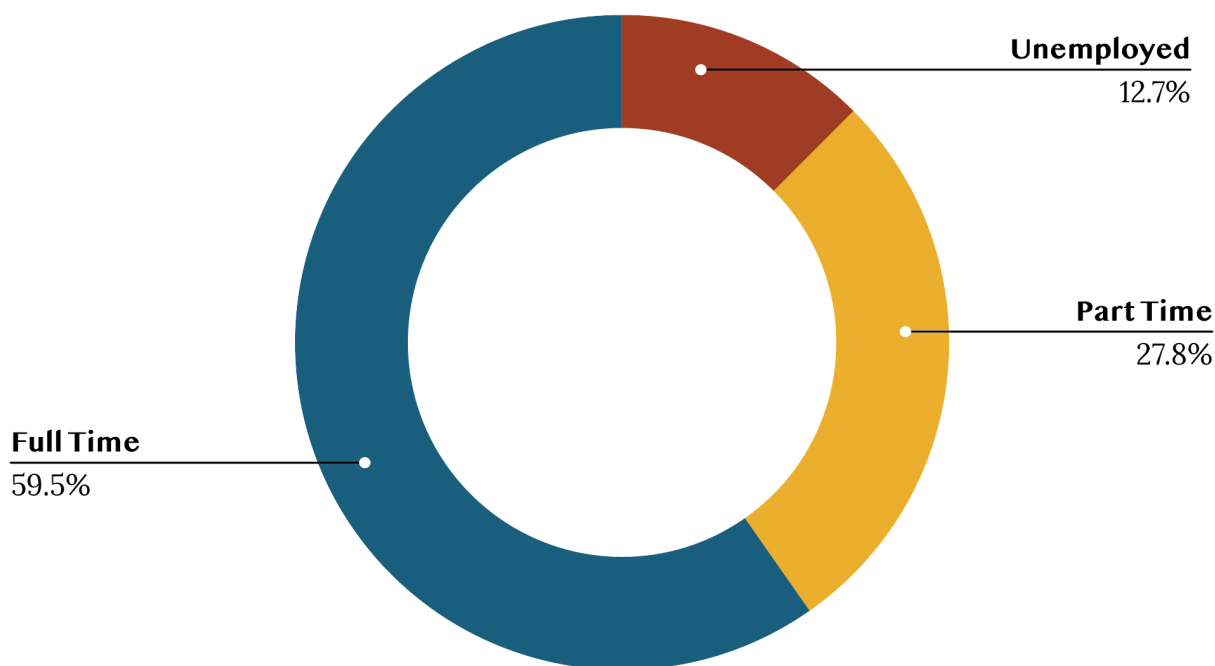
Survey respondents ranged in age, with an average age of 30 years old. 41 respondents (51.9%) said they are married, in a partnership, or relationship, and 21 respondents (26.6%) reported having children.¹⁶ 47 respondents (59.5%) were employed full time, 22 (27.8%) were employed part time, and 10 (12.7%) were unemployed at the time of responding to the survey. Geographically, 50.7% of the women journalists reported residing in Tak Province, 40% in Chiang Mai Province, and the remaining participants in Mae Hong Son and Bangkok Province, respectively.

Age



¹⁶ Alarming, of the 21 women journalist survey respondents who have children, 40.9% reported that their children were not currently receiving any schooling at the time of responding to the survey.

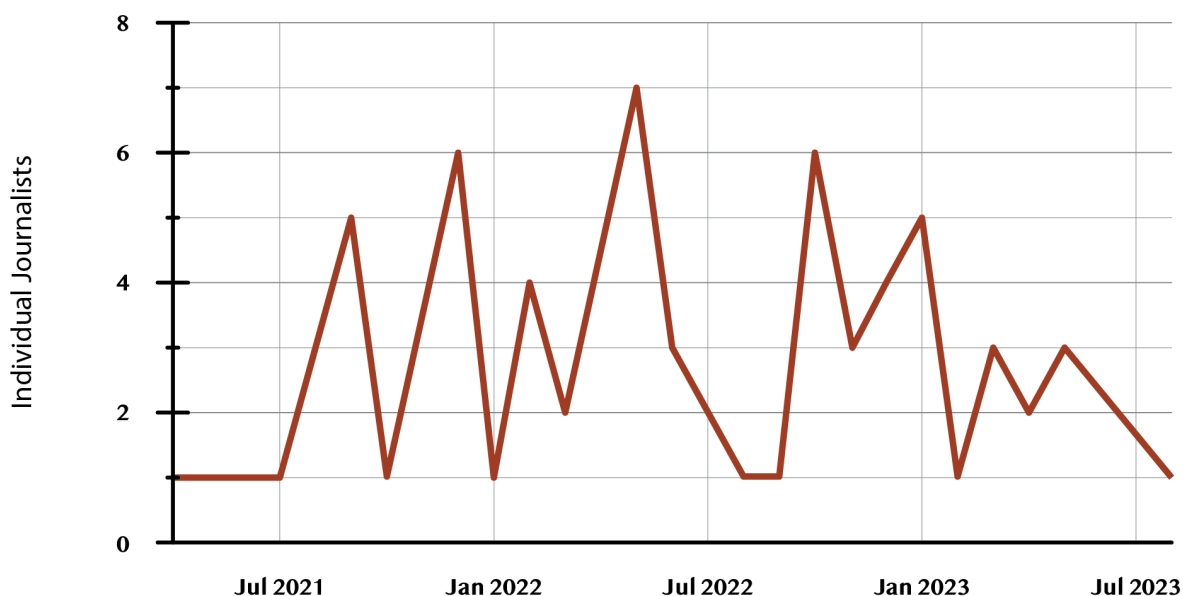
Employment



Among the 79 respondents residing in exile in Thailand, a predominant majority (84.8%) expressed that the coup in Myanmar compelled them to leave the country out of concern for their personal safety, particularly in connection to their roles as journalists. The respondents relocated from Myanmar within the period spanning from July 2021 to July 2023, with a significant spike in exodus in December 2021, and May and October 2022.¹⁷ Crackdowns on journalists and air strikes from the Tatmadaw increased throughout 2022, forcing many to flee into exile. Of the 73 women journalists who provided their year of arrival, 19 survey respondents (26%) arrived in Thailand in 2021, while over half arrived throughout 2022 (39), and 15 in 2023, all of whom finding themselves unable to return home.

¹⁷ The exodus in December 2021 was likely a result of the Tatmadaw's attack on the town of Lay Kay Kaw, where artillery and bombings from the Tatmadaw forced thousands of villagers, including women, children, and elders, to flee their homes in Karen State and cross the Moei River into Thailand. The town served as a base for many media organizations as they continued their reporting from inside Myanmar. On October 23rd, 2022, the military launched an airstrike at a music concert held in commemoration of the Kachin Independence Organization's (KIO) 62nd year of formation at the KIA Battalion 9 area in Hpakant Township, Kachin State, killing at least 62 civilians, including local celebrities and youths.

Date of Arrival in Thailand



Most recent employers of the survey respondents

NUG Radio	Than Lwin Times
Burma VJ	Delta News Agency (DNA)
Kachin News Group (KNG)	Ayeyarwaddy Times
Federal FM	Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN)
Shwe Phee Myay News Agency	People's Radio Myanmar
Mizzima	BBC
The Voice Daily	Mekong News Agency
Kantarawaddy Times	Myanmar Press Agency (MPA)
DVB	Karen Information Center (KIC)
Breaking Brainwashed Media	Myanmar Now
People's Spring	Blooming Padauk
Burma Ethnic Voice Media (BEV)	PEN47
Democratic TV	Rainbow News
Radio Free Asia (RFA)	Khit Thit Media
Gender Equality Network	Border News Agency
Than Lwin Khet	Mandalay Free Press

Current Working Conditions and Impact on Women in Media

Journalists from Myanmar have historically struggled with difficult working conditions and threats to safety. These already unstable conditions significantly deteriorated following the 2021 military coup. Many of the conditions we highlight in this paper will likely be experienced by all journalists, men and women alike. Yet, women journalists have to contend with specific gendered challenges which, unless addressed, could cause an exodus of women from the profession, leading to the loss of diverse perspectives, exacerbated gender disparities and diminished coverage of gender-related issues. This will reduce media independence, discourage young women from pursuing journalism careers, and lead to a loss of experience and perspective within the profession. The discussions with senior editors-in-chief and media house representatives identified overall issues they saw across the media space. While they noted and confirmed the vulnerability of the women journalists in exile and their specific safety concerns, they shared insights into the more structural problems that hinder the equitable allocation of resources.

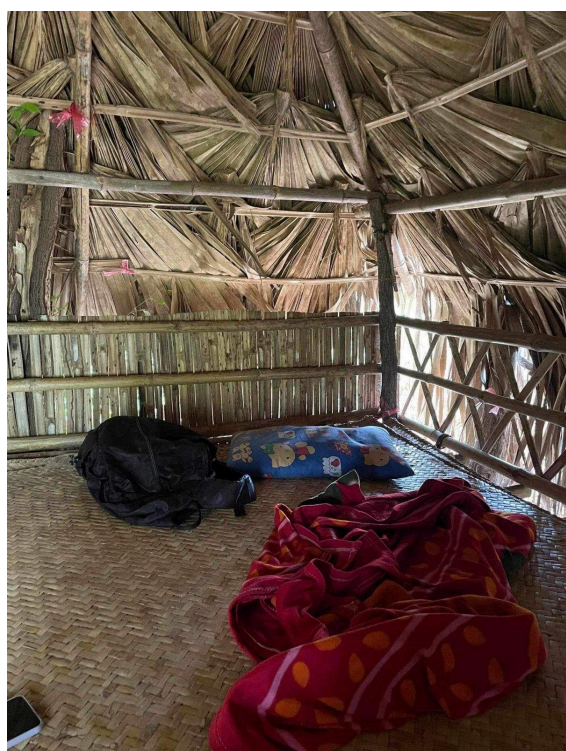
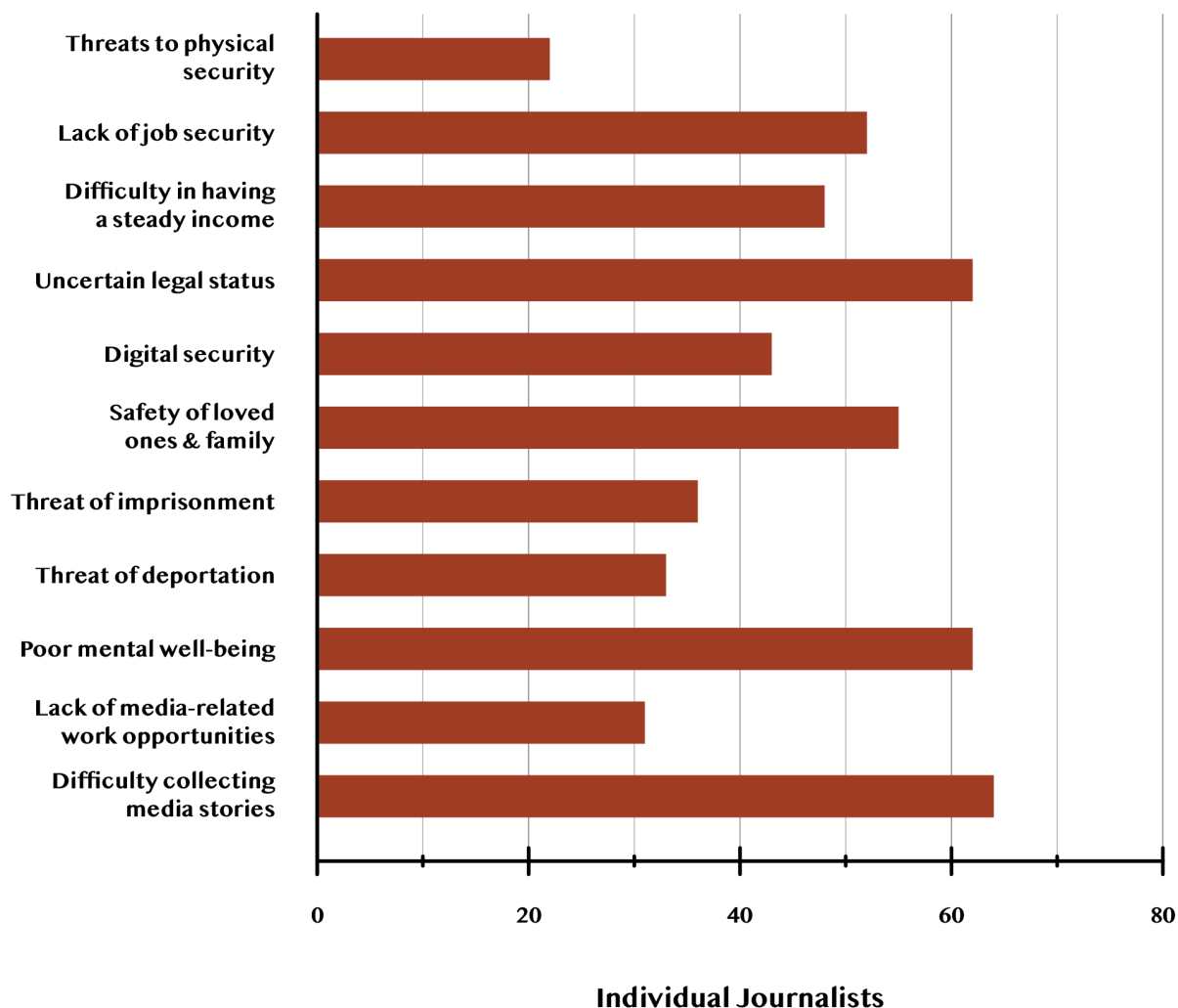


Image 1 & 2: Illustrating the current living and working conditions of a woman journalist in Sagaing.

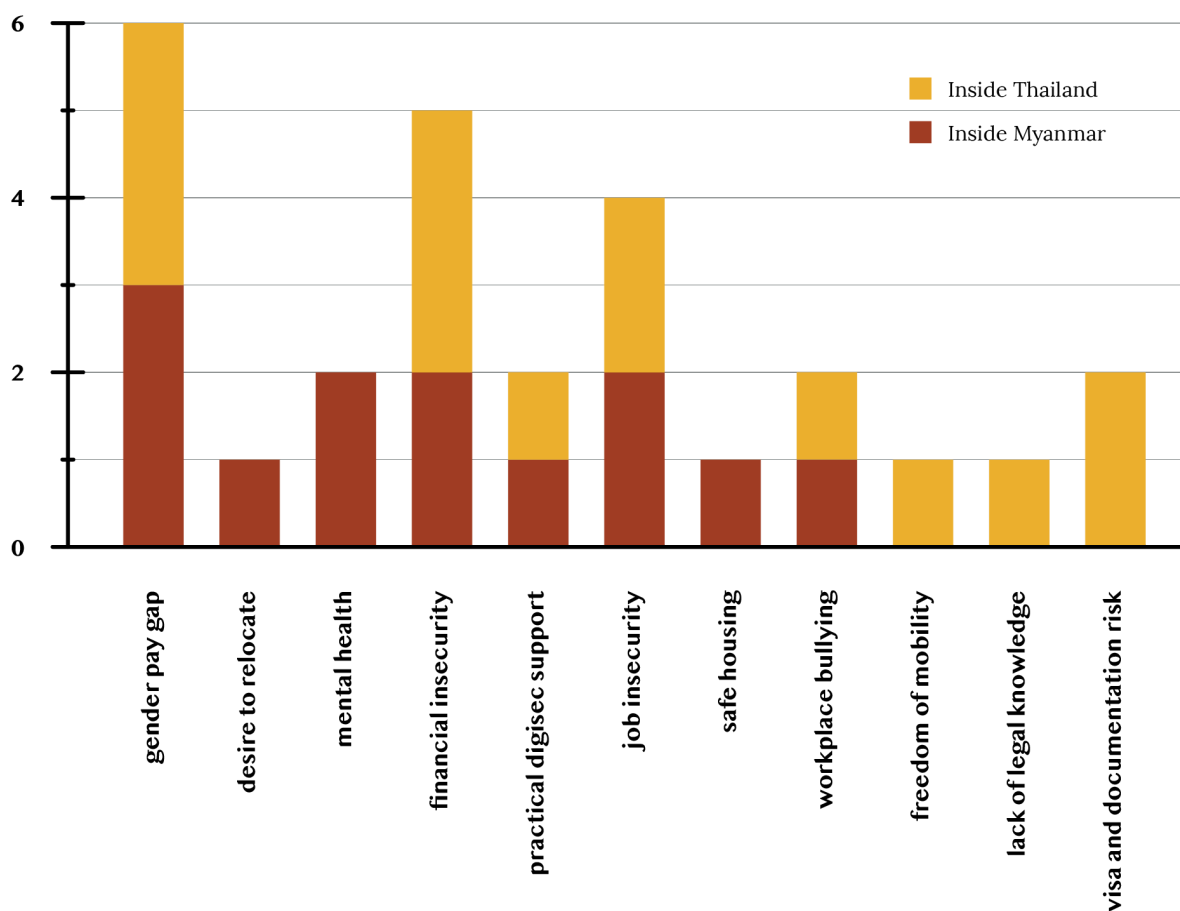
What are the safety concerns you face in your work as a Myanmar journalist living in exile in Thailand?



The survey respondents were asked what their main safety concerns were in their work as a Myanmar journalist living in Thailand. 64 out of 79 journalists mentioned difficulty collecting media stories as their main concern. 62 each mentioned poor mental wellbeing and uncertain legal status as major factors, followed by concern for the safety of their loved ones and family (55), and lack of job security (52). In this section, we will examine the different safety concerns expressed by our participants in order to gain a better understanding of the support structures needed.

In our focus group discussions, women journalists agreed overall on common safety issues facing themselves and others, but weighed the priority of each concern differently based on the contexts of differing locations (Myanmar and Thailand). Experts suggested differences in perceptions of safety, positing that journalists inside Myanmar were more concerned with mental health and safe housing while those in Thailand were distressed about freedom of mobility, lack of legal knowledge, and visa and documentation risks. Experts also perceived both populations as being concerned with the gender pay gap, financial insecurity, practical digital security, and workplace bullying.

How are the safety risks of women journalists different for those inside Myanmar compared to those in Thailand?



Difficulties with conducting journalistic work are faced not just by women but by Myanmar journalists in general, hindering their ability to build up their portfolios, advance their careers, and attain positions of leadership in their field. The 2016 Fojo Media Institute’s report titled “Gender in the Media Landscape,” showed that while the number of women media professionals increased following political changes in 2010, representation in 2016 was primarily concentrated in

lower-ranking and mid level positions.¹⁸ Geographical disparities further emphasize the challenges faced by women in the media. For example, respondents in Yangon noted that a moderate percentage of senior editorial positions were held by women, while in regions beyond Yangon representation of women in these positions dropped to less than 10%.¹⁹

Difficulty Conducting Journalistic Work

Since the coup, many journalists are operating either under a pseudonym or without any byline or accreditation at all for their work. In our survey, we found that 18 respondents (22.8%) were not credited with a byline, while 25 used a pen name in their work (31.6%). Only 16 of the women journalists surveyed (20.3%) used their real name in their work. While publishing without a byline and under pseudonyms helps ensure the safety of the journalists, such a practice has the possibility of eroding trust between individual journalists and their sources. Journalists forgoing bylines in their work face difficulties in receiving proper credit and recognition for their reporting, hindering their ability to build up their reputation and portfolio and stunting their developing career.

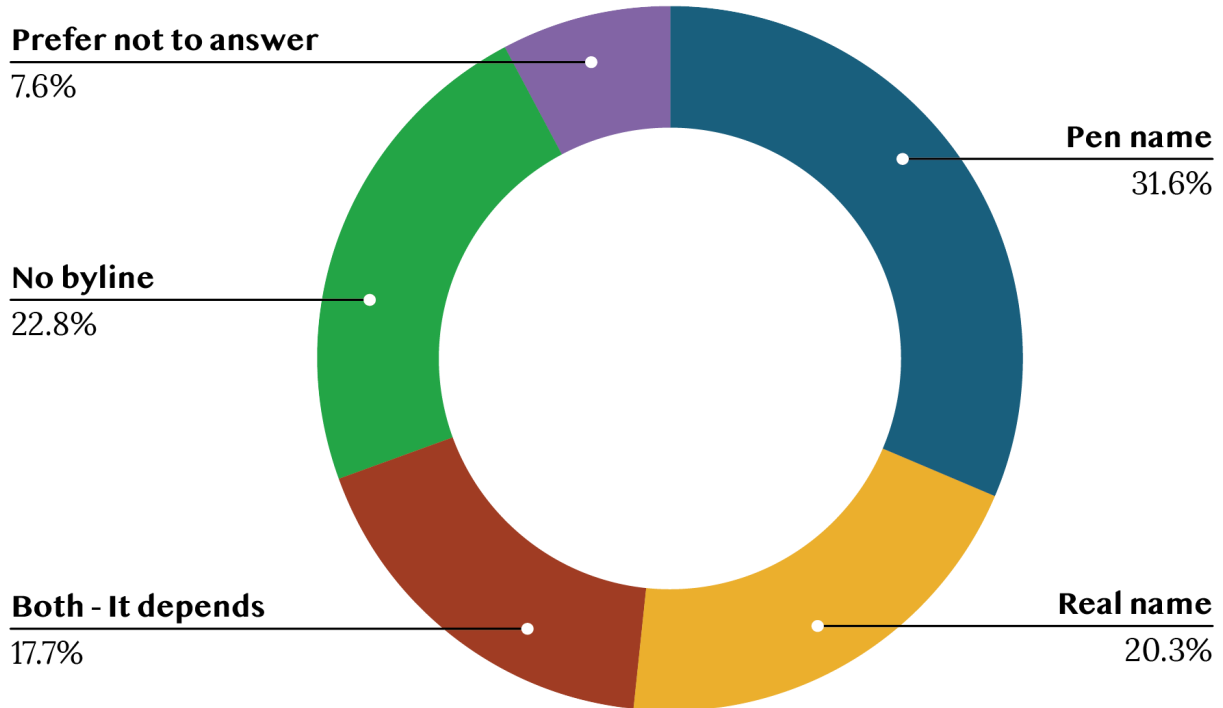
Bylines also hold journalists responsible for the accuracy and ethical standards of their reporting. When reporting anonymously or pseudonymously, it becomes more challenging for readers or viewers to hold the journalist accountable for any errors or ethical lapses. The choice of whether bylines are included or not are often not the choice of the journalist themselves; media organizations may choose to anonymize bylines to protect the safety of their journalists, despite some expressing the desire to be featured.

Besides difficulties faced in accreditation for stories, journalists reporting from exile mention additional challenges such as difficulty with contacting sources, concerns about the safety of sources, and securing safe communication methods with sources. While journalists themselves may understand some basics of digital and informational security, oftentimes the sources they must communicate with on the ground do not have such experience, and thus may have compromised communication which could endanger both the journalist and themselves. Many journalists end up compromising their digital security in order to reach their sources to report on stories on the ground. Others spend significant time and resources to equip their sources with digital safety tools, which are often not covered in their work and pay.

¹⁸ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape: Yangon, Kayin, Sagaing, Shan and across Myanmar,” (2016): p.14.

¹⁹ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.14.

Since the military coup, do you use a pen name or your real name when publishing your work?



Dozens of Myanmar Junta Forces Killed in Five Days of Clashes With Resistance

By The Irrawaddy — November 3, 2023 in War Against the Junta Reading Time: 3 mins read

AA



Image 3: An example of a news story, published in *The Irrawaddy*, without accreditation of byline to the journalist conducting the reporting.

“In secure interviews, it is difficult to build trust when you can’t introduce yourself because you can’t know the other person for sure. I have thoughts about whether my interviewee’s security will be affected by the news that I have reported.” – Survey Respondent 53.

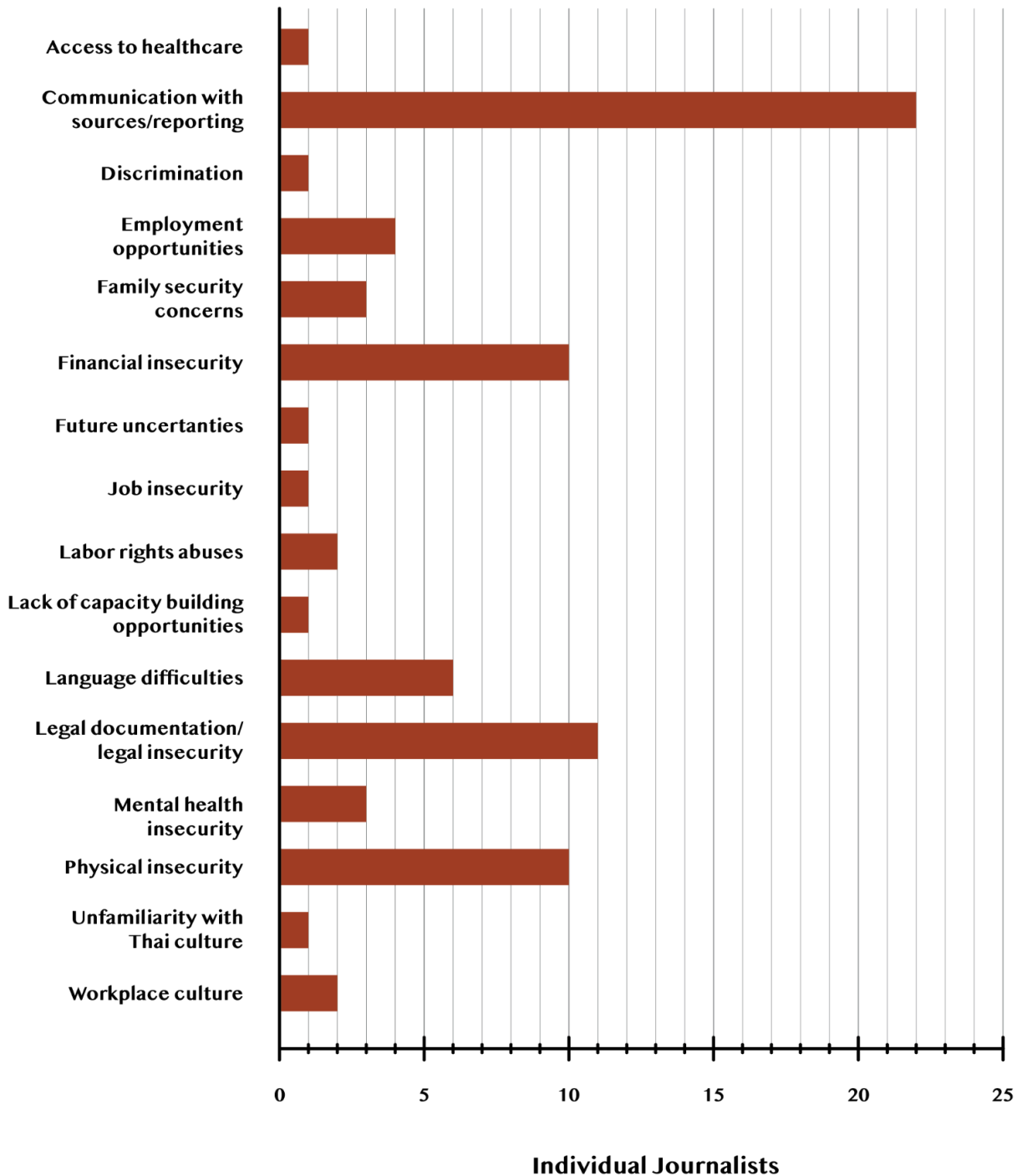
Using insecure methods of communication can compromise the safety of both the sources and the journalists, and journalists often weigh the ease of communication by phone and the availability of secure communications on the part of their interviewees.

The kinds of stories that can be collected are also limited due to the conditions on the ground. Some of our participants in the focus groups and survey mentioned a desire to craft video stories or more in-depth interviews, but failed to do so due to logistical constraints.

“Since I have to follow the news of my local people from outside the country, it is a challenge to communicate by phone. It has become a situation where the source can only be connected by phone call. I want to make a video report, but it is difficult to get a video interview.” – Survey Respondent 3.

While progress has been made over the last two decades for women representation in media, the challenges that women journalists face in their work may lead to a significant backslide in gender representation if left unaddressed.

What other conditons which have not been mentioned hinder your capacity to fully operate as a journalist living in exile in Thailand?



Financial Insecurity

Journalists in both Chiang Mai and Mae Sot grapple with financial instability, often working long hours, in dangerous conditions for meager pay. Little is done to address the elevated cost of living journalists face while living in exile. Oftentimes, media houses lack the stable funding needed to supply their staff with a livable wage, with some smaller organizations operating entirely on short-term emergency funds since the coup. Freelancers, stringers, and citizen journalists faced the additional challenge of not having any support outside of the individual stories that they can gather. Organizations that support Myanmar journalism have funds earmarked to support media outlets, but little is allocated for the needs of individual journalists. Meanwhile, in Chiang Mai, our research revealed that rising visa costs present a particular challenge for journalists, whereas those in Mae Sot placed greater emphasis on the difficulty to afford suitable accommodation.

Our survey of 79 women journalists revealed that 35.5% of respondents earned a monthly income between THB 5,000 and 10,000, and 15% reported earnings of less than THB 5,000 per month. These income levels fall well below the established minimum wage in Thailand,²⁰ which averages THB 8,160 per month in Chiang Mai and THB 7,968 per month in Mae Sot.²¹ However, it is worth noting that these calculations for the minimum wage are based on data for daily wage unskilled labor work. Salaries attributed to journalist work are expected to be far higher.

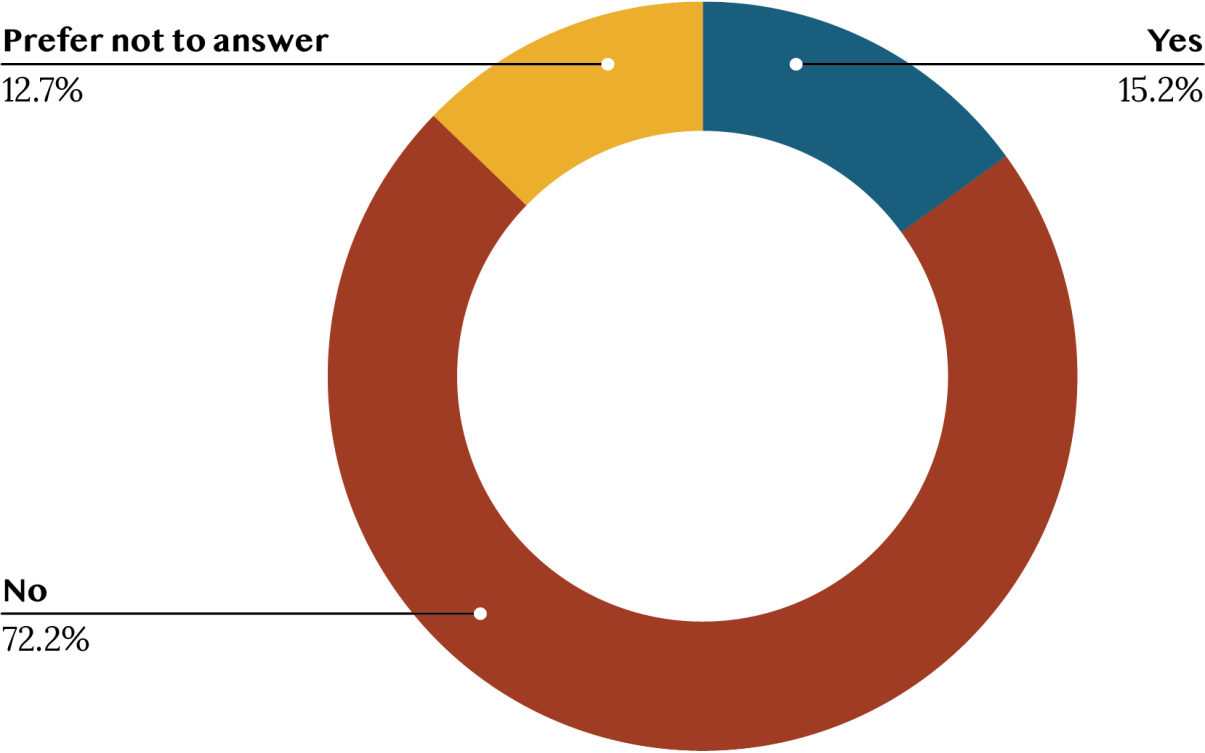
While the salary paid to journalists is not too different from the Thai minimum wage, the cost of living for those without documentation and migrants can be significantly higher. The exchange rate disparity between the falling Myanmar Kyat and the Thai Baht puts journalists who relocate with a local Myanmar salary to Thailand at a significant disadvantage in terms of purchasing power upon arrival in Thailand. Many Myanmar exiles end up making suboptimal financial decisions due to unfamiliarity with the local landscape, increasing their cost of living. The absence of a support network of family and friends in the host country may necessitate additional spending on services or support systems.

Furthermore, most of the survey respondents are the sole breadwinners of their families, with 72.2% of women journalists reporting that they do not have any other source of income besides their current employment.

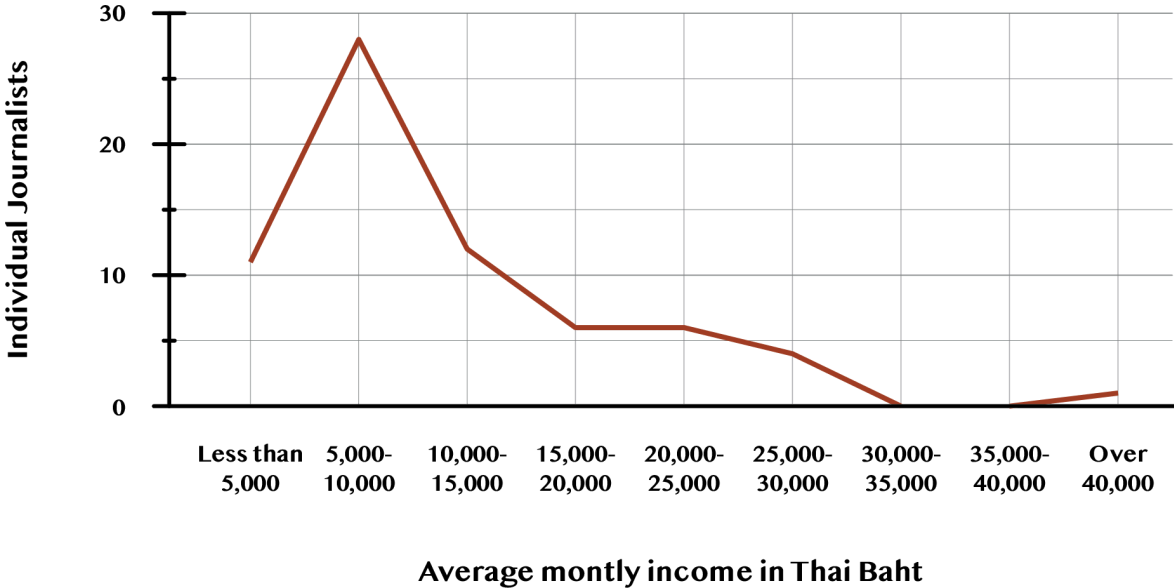
²⁰ ASEAN Briefing, “Thailand Increases Daily Minimum Wage Rates for 2022.” (October 24, 2022).

²¹ The established minimum wage in Thailand averages THB 340 per day in Chiang Mai province and THB 332 per day in Tak Province (where Mae Sot is located). According to our survey, the average number of working days per week for these journalists is six, spanning from Monday to Saturday. As a result, these journalists should reasonably be compensated with a minimum wage of at least THB 8,160 per month in Chiang Mai and THB 7,968 per month in Mae Sot.

Do you or your immediate family have any other source of income?



What is your average monthly income?



While the Thai national minimum wage may be able to support a single journalist living in shared accommodations, it is often not adequate for journalists who have spouses, parents, and children to support. Media houses attempt to accommodate the low pay with other support such as housing and food support, but the conditions for such accommodations are precarious and those in shared housing lack the ability to opt out and find a different option due to their low pay. and food support, but the conditions for such accommodations are precarious and those in shared housing lack the ability to opt out and find a different option due to their low pay

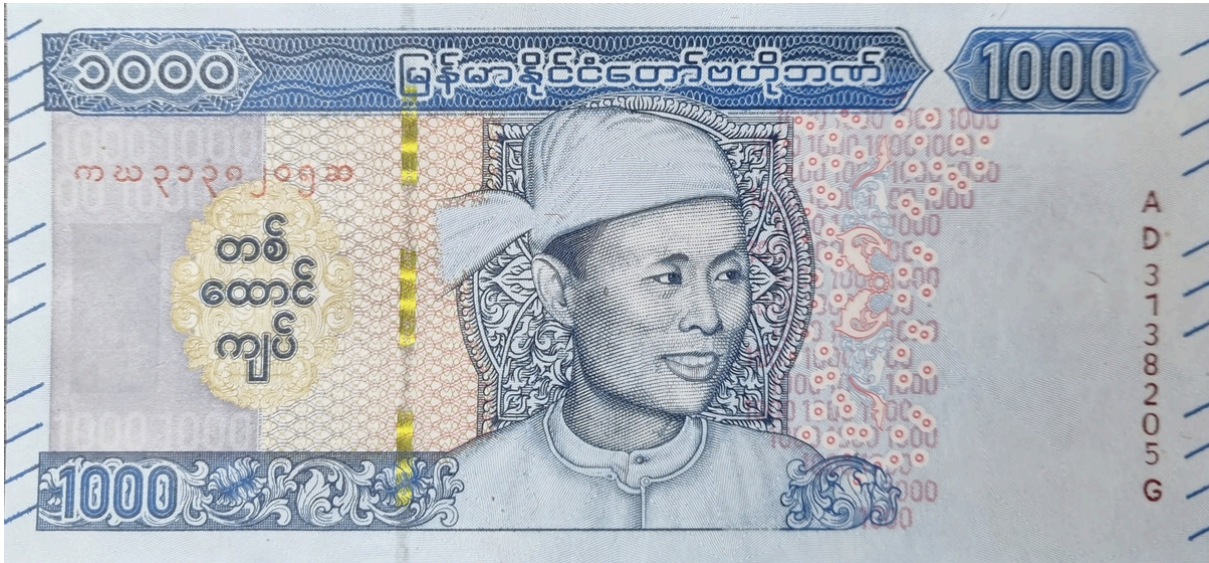


Image 4: A 1000-Kyat note redesigned in 2020 featuring General Aung San, currently in circulation. The Myanmar Kyat continues to depreciate further in the post-coup economy. Photo Credit: User EmeraldRange on Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY SA-4.0 DEED

Legal Insecurity

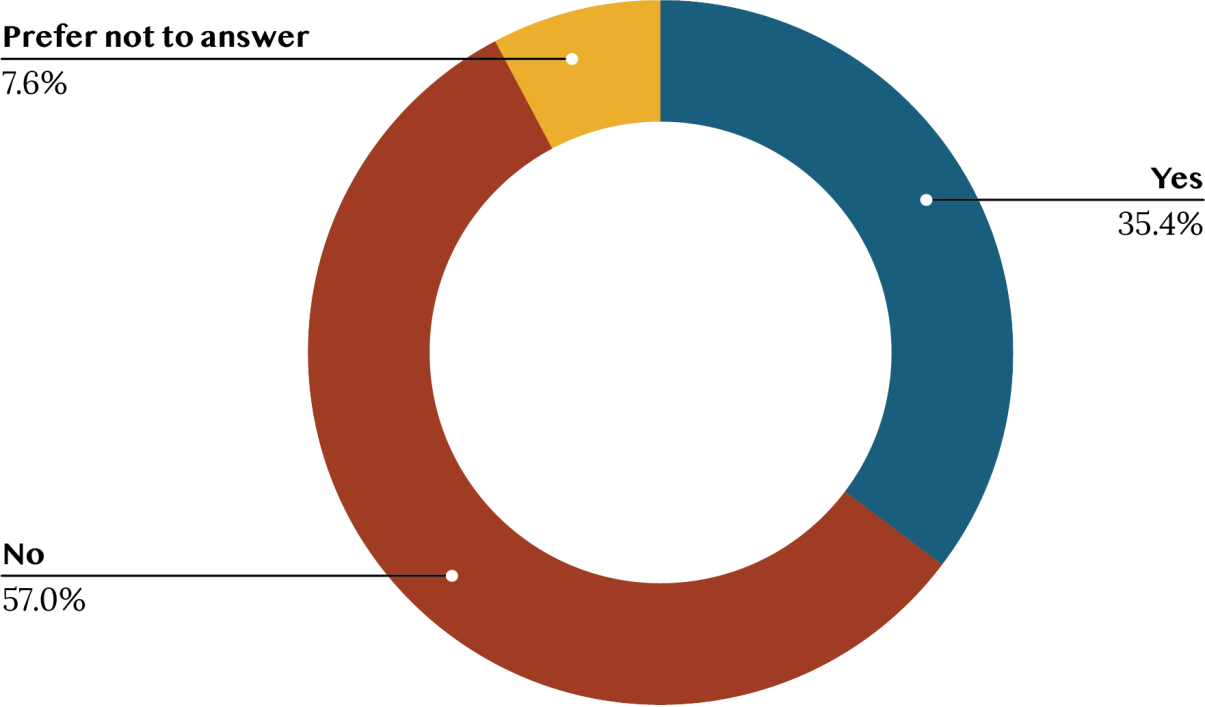
Myanmar journalists in exile, especially those in Thailand, face legal threats both back in Myanmar and in Thailand. Of the journalists who responded to our survey, 57% did not have a visa or any other necessary legal documentation required to live in Thailand. Many (8) were here on a Migrant Worker Card (colloquially known as a Pink Card), some (2) on a 10-Year Card, others (4) on a Certificate of Identity, and still some (16) on a passport with a valid visa.²² However, securing such documentation is costly and the meager salaries of exiled journalists do not cover the high costs of acquiring documentation. The Pink ID Card is essential for legal residence and work, the Certificate of Identity (CI) is necessary for identification and employment, and the Blue Book enables legal travel to other districts within Thailand. All these documents are crucial for an individual's safety, well-being, and ability to engage in normal activities in Thailand without the risk of legal repercussions, yet place another strain on the already meager salaries of exiled journalists.

Of those who had documentation and paperwork to live legally in Thailand (23), 10 of these journalists (43.5%) spent more than 30% of their annual income on visa fees and acquiring legal documentation.

Of those who did not have visas and necessary documentation (56), we found that amongst the 32 respondents, a significant number (31.3%) of them spent over 30% of their monthly income on police extortion to avoid arrest and deportation. Interestingly, all the journalists who spent over 30% of their monthly income on police extortion are located in Tak Province along the Thai-Myanmar border.

²² In the pursuit of legal documentation to secure a stable and lawful existence in Thailand, individuals, particularly migrant workers, seek specific documents to navigate their undocumented status. Central among these is the Pink ID Card, commonly referred to as a legal work permit, serving as an essential legal document that permits legal residence in Thailand but also facilitates lawful employment limited to menial daily wage work such as construction, domestic work and farming. This card is paramount in mitigating the risk of arrest and deportation by Thai authorities, providing individuals the freedom to engage in various activities, such as renting housing, obtaining a driver's license, and accessing medical treatment at Thai hospitals. A Certificate of Identity (CI) issued to migrant workers is another essential document. It serves as identification for migrant workers and is required for legal employment in Thailand. Some may also acquire a "Blue Book", which allows one to travel to other provinces outside of the province in which they registered their documentation. The Blue Book can be thought of as a residential registration document, providing legal recognition of the individual's residence in a particular province and facilitating lawful travel to other provinces in Thailand.

Do you have a visa or the necessary legal documentation required to live in Thailand?



How much of your income do you spend on the visa fees per year?

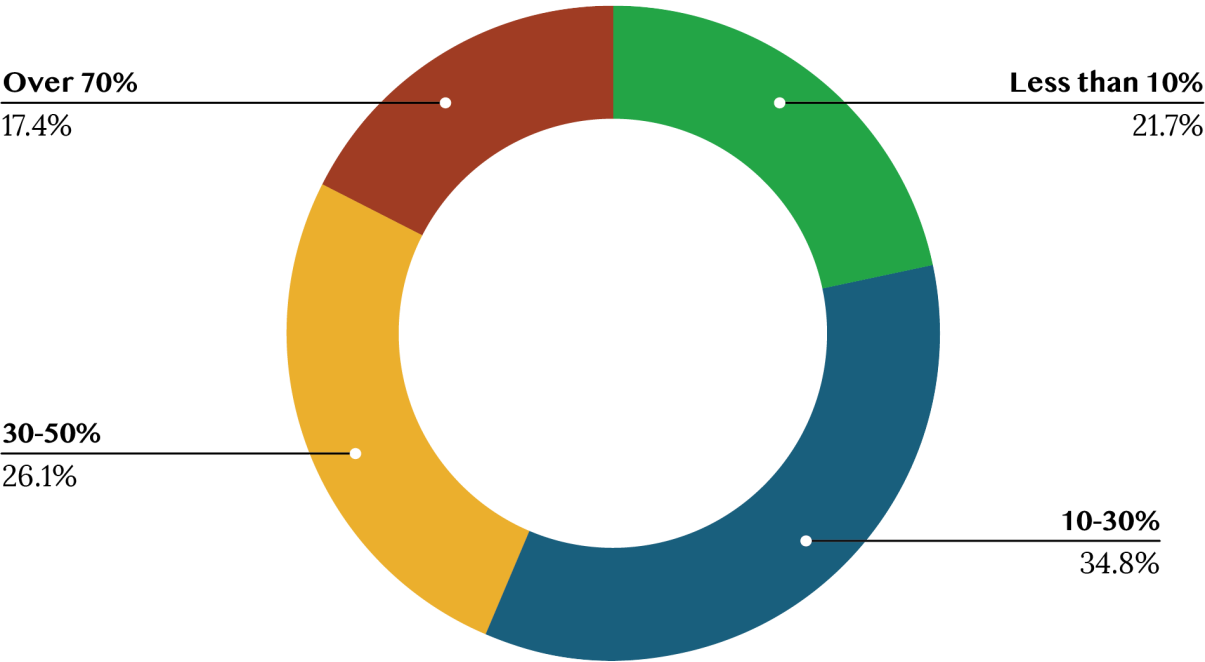


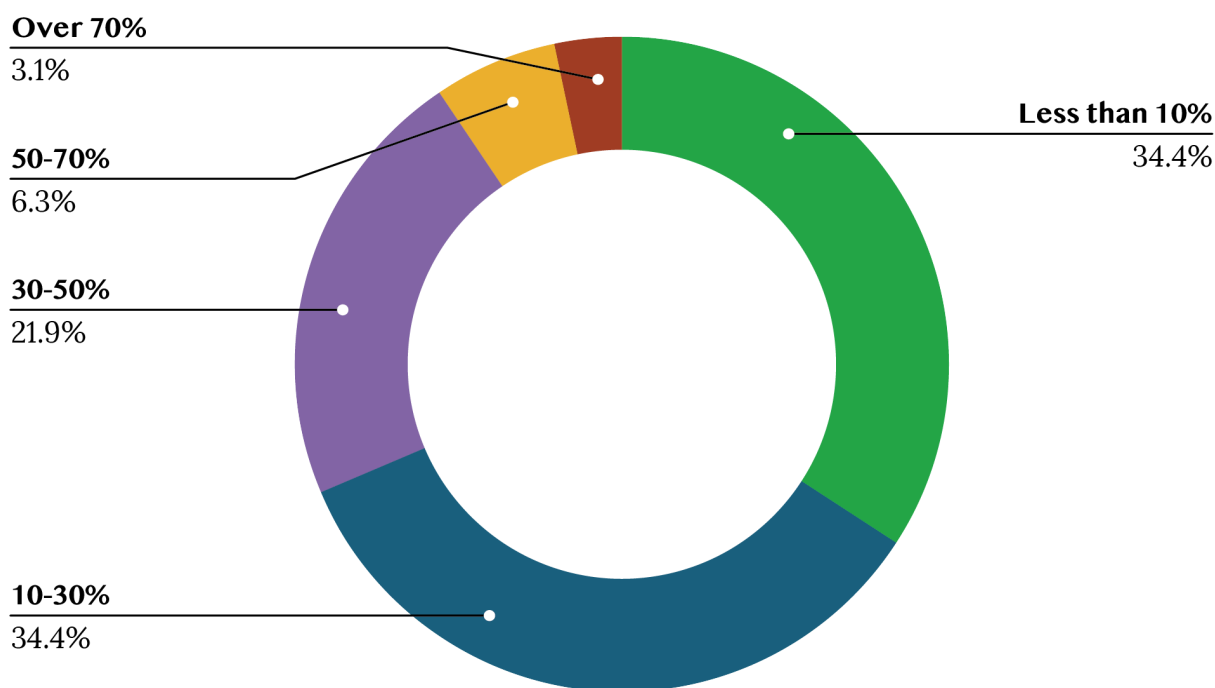


Image 5: An example of a “pink card”, or non-Thai identification card for migrant workers. Many journalists end up acquiring such documentation upon arrival in Thailand.



Image 6: An example of a Myanmar woman wearing her many forms of documentation in order to ensure her safety. The message on her t-shirt, “Power Rangers”, symbolizes the array of differently colored legal documentation necessary for lawful residency in Thailand. Photo credit: Visual Rebellion.

How much of your income do you spend on police extortion per month?



These findings were corroborated in our focus group discussions, where journalists mentioned that while there was an increase in mental health support offered to journalists, there was still a lack of support for legal documentation and visas for journalists.

“Mental health workshops are expanding here [in Chiang Mai], but I do not think that should be the priority [for media support organizations]. Instead, there should be greater practical priorities such as supporting us in obtaining financial assistance to pay for visa fees or to obtain legal documentation.” – Participant 6, FGD 2.

Media houses, in turn, struggle to legalize their employees due to lack of experience and difficulty dealing with the logistical challenges and inexperience doing so prior to the coup. A representative from The Irrawaddy mentioned in our interview, “I have no idea how to legalize these people. I never did it. I myself stayed semi-legal in the past. Now I am finally legal, but this has taken me decades.” Other media houses including Frontier, Mizzima, and DVB mentioned various ways in which they worked on securing proper documentation for their staff, but struggled with the financial burden often shouldered by these organizations without much external support.

In our focus group discussions, access to precise and reliable information concerning Thai visas and immigration-related matters was seen as critical for ensuring the safety and legal status of women journalists.

“I don’t think I have the skills or knowledge to deal with the safety concerns. First of all, I don’t understand Thai language and I don’t know Thai law. I don’t have money either. It’s difficult to get information about what’s going on in Mae Sot or in Thailand at all when it comes to Thai immigration or Thai law.” – Participant 1, FGD 1.

Physical Insecurity

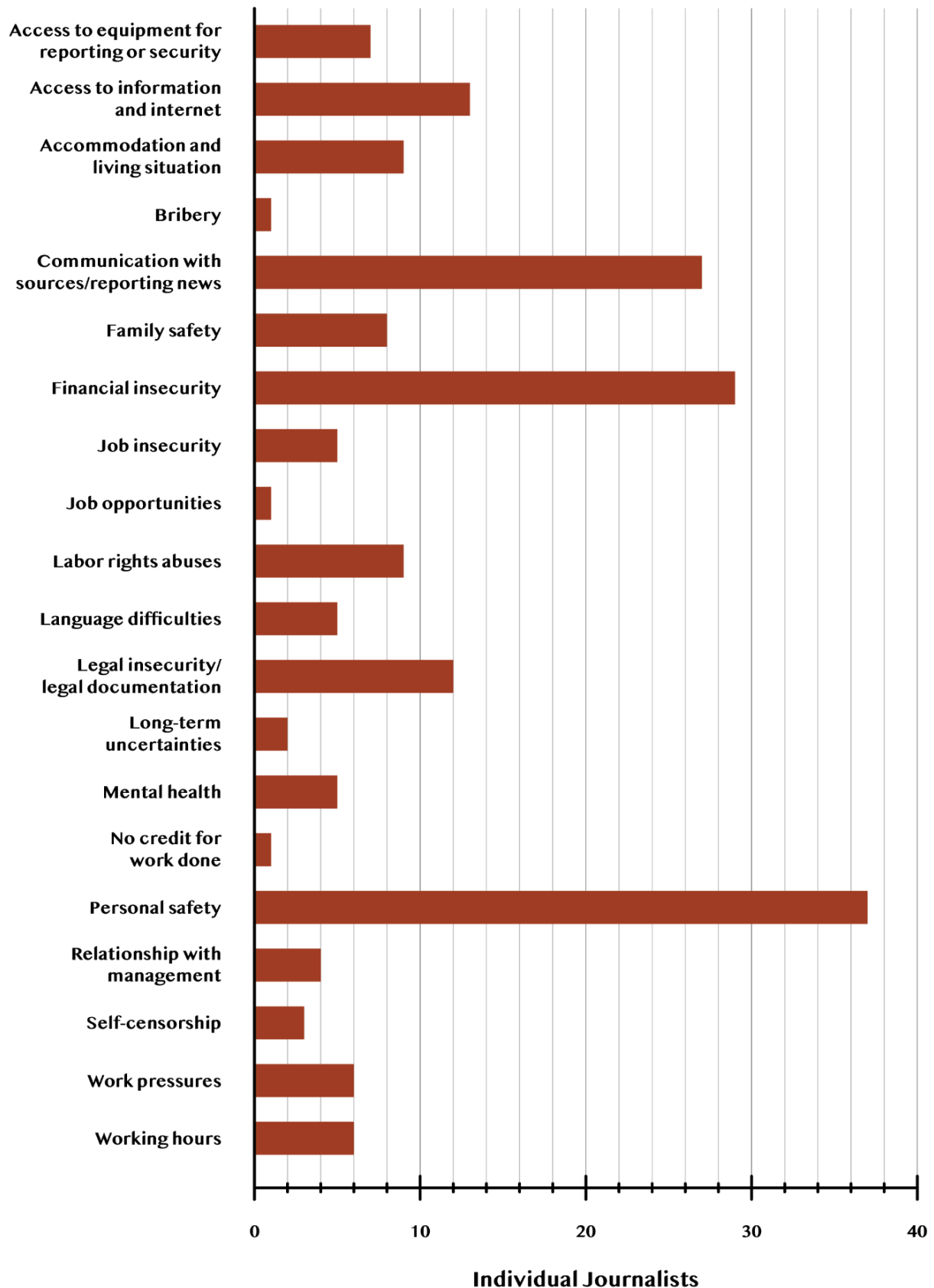
Though conditions inside Myanmar for the safety of women journalists is much worse at present, journalists still face physical safety risks while in Thailand, especially those who are working along the Thai-Myanmar border.

In the focus group discussions, women journalists in both Mae Sot and Chiang Mai expressed concerns about the personal safety of the journalists in Mae Sot. They all acknowledged the need to navigate various risks to ensure the physical security of those in Mae Sot and the necessity of avoiding encounters with authorities which could lead to arrest, detention, and deportation into the hands of the State Administration Council (SAC).

From the 79 women journalist survey respondents, when asked what they saw as the three most significant challenges in carrying out their journalistic work, the most frequently mentioned response was reference to their personal safety, with 37 mentions.

While there may be an expectation that journalists are in relative safety in Thailand compared to Myanmar, there are different needs and considerations for physical safety even while living in exile. For one, journalists face the constant threat of arrest and deportation if they do not have the necessary documentation to be in Thailand.

What do you see as the 3 most significant challenges to carrying out your work now?



“I’d like to share some experiences from Mae Sot. Despite having a police card²³ I was arrested twice there. When I’m questioned about my profession as a journalist, I often have to lie, as telling the truth could worsen the situation. Both the SAC and Thai police operate in Mae Sot, and we fear both sides.” – Participant 4, FGD 2.

In the focus group discussions, journalists compared their situation in exile with those still in Myanmar. Journalists mentioned that even though the dangers and risks of being in Myanmar were different from what they faced in Thailand, there were new challenges in exile which they had to learn to contend with.

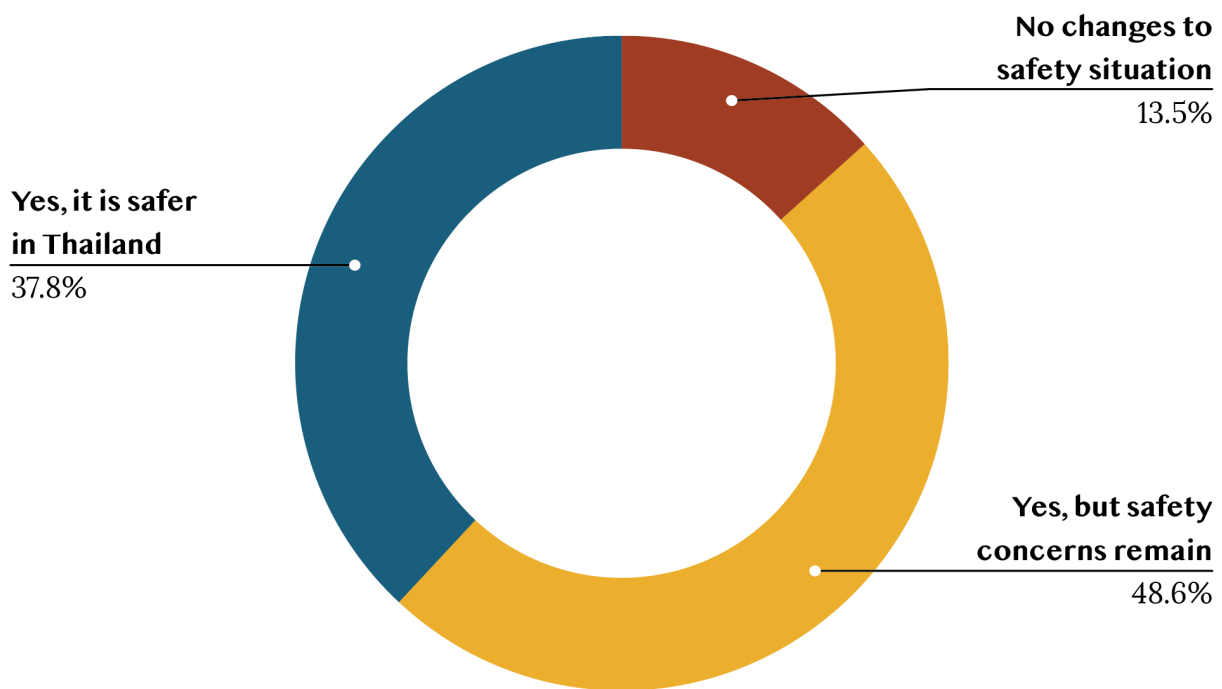
“When women journalists express their intent to resign, they face indirect threats. Unlike men, who may respond to threats with violence, women often receive threats from their media house owners and bosses when contemplating resignation. It is a one-sided decision imposed by media house owners, leading to a reduced women workforce. As some women journalists prepare to move to Thailand [from Myanmar], they are coerced into accepting contract terms that include unfair work commitments and decreased incomes. Everyday tasks such as sleeping and bathing become challenges. Women journalists encounter threats not only from the State Administration Council (SAC) but also from their own people.” – Participant 1, FGD 3.

“What I witness is that women face more challenges outside of Myanmar. Media houses are not respecting the women journalists. The women journalists have to solve their problems independently, as no one seems willing to take responsibility for them. ... Emotional abuse is one of the issues I’ve encountered, which includes a significant income disparity between men and women colleagues. Media house owners sometimes act as if they are the saviors of these women journalists, discouraging them from seeking more opportunities. These women often lack access to legal assistance. Being an undocumented woman journalist in Thailand compounds their problems, as they struggle to find help, and those who brought them there evade responsibility. [As a result,] some took the risky step of resigning from their jobs.” – Participant 1, FGD 3.

²³ The “police card” serves as an informal document acquired by undocumented Myanmar migrants on a monthly basis. This unofficial identification document is procured through intermediaries or brokers and is not legally recognized. Its primary function is to provide a semblance of protection against arbitrary arrests and deportations by Thai authorities for individuals lacking official documentation. However, the efficacy of these police cards remains uncertain, as there are frequent instances of random arrests and deportations despite possessing these cards. The acquisition and utilization of these police cards represents an informal strategy employed by undocumented migrants to navigate the complexities of immigration enforcement along the Thai-Myanmar border. Notably, the experiences of the participants in our research underscore the tenuous nature of relying on such unofficial mechanisms for safeguarding against legal vulnerabilities. This practice highlights the challenges faced by undocumented migrants, leaving them in a state of legal uncertainty and emphasizing the need for more comprehensive and formalized protection mechanisms within the immigration system.

When asked about whether their safety situation has changed after moving to Thailand, 36 of the 78 responses (48.6%) cited that while their safety situation has changed, it has not improved. This shows that living in exile comes with a set of challenges which are different but no less harrowing. Many mentioned that while it is physically dangerous to live inside Myanmar due to fear of arrest and detention, there is a level of confidence on how to stay safe as they are in familiar territory. In Thailand however, the women journalists highlighted their concerns over legal documentation, police extortion, discrimination for being from Myanmar, and a lack of awareness about how physically safe they really are. That being said, of the 78 respondents to this question, 28 (37.8%) explained that they feel safer in Thailand, particularly when considering their mental health (11 mentions) and physical security (9 mentions).

Do you feel the safety risks and your overall safety situation has changed after arriving in Thailand?



Survey respondents who believe that their safety situation has not improved since arriving in Thailand noted the necessity of discretion when disclosing their profession due to the perpetual threat of Myanmar military intelligence and surveillance in Thailand. 6 of the 36 women journalists who cited that their safety situation has changed but remain concerned mentioned the persistence of the persecution of journalists in Thailand. Participant 73 explained, “I feel safer than in Myanmar. However, I do not feel safe enough to tell others that I am a journalist, and when asked about my job, I only ... reply that I am attending school.”

Other participants shared similar sentiments:

“While it is much more convenient to work in Thailand compared to Myanmar, being in a foreign country far from home still raises psychological safety concerns. I fear that [Telegram] channels such as Han Nyein Oo, who are military council spies, could potentially trace the authors of investigative news stories.” – Survey Respondent 53.

“Given the current situation, media professionals are not safe at all in Myanmar. However, I do not feel completely secure in Thailand either. If you get detained in Mae Sot, and if they [the Thai authorities] learn that you are a media professional, you will be threatened with the possibility of deportation back to Myanmar.” – Survey Respondent 69.

Moving to Thailand comes with the challenge of adapting to new threats and dangers, which often lead to respondents feeling like the dangers have shifted but not lessened. Those without documentation still face the risk of being arrested and handed over to the SAC, with less familiarity in addressing the security concerns. Journalists noted community trust issues and a climate of suspicion within their Mae Sot community, where local residents occasionally report their Myanmar neighbors to the police, leading to home raids. For instance, Participant 2 of FGD 1 explained, “Local residents in Mae Sot report their Myanmar neighbors to the police, instructing them to come and raid our residencies. As a result, we do not know whom to trust at all.” This climate of uncertainty and suspicion presents challenges for journalists when seeking to establish communication with individuals in Mae Sot for reporting purposes, increasing the safety risks they face.

Housing Insecurity

As media houses and employers struggle to pay a livable wage to the journalists they employ, attempts are made to mitigate this by providing them with shared accommodations and, in certain instances, covering the costs of journalists’ relocations either partially or fully. Nevertheless, variations exist among media houses regarding housing policies, allocation of funds for housing provision, or the availability of stipends specifically designated for the housing needs of employed journalists.

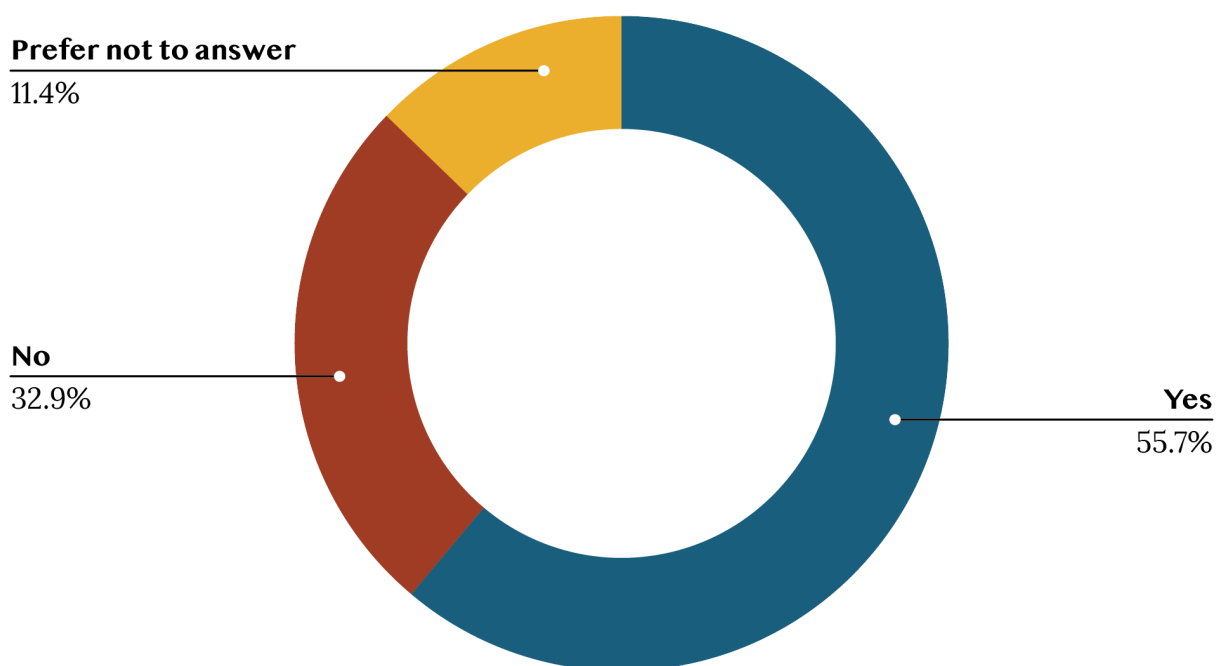
In cases where housing is provided, these shared houses are often not suitable for journalists with children or families. This highlights the gap between recognizing the importance of policies aimed at safeguarding women journalists and their actual implementation within media houses. 32.9% of survey respondents (26) reported that they did not feel safe in their current living arrangements.

“While many male journalists recognize the importance of prioritizing women journalists, such as providing separate safe houses for women, there remains a need for proper implementation at the management level.” – Participant 3, FGD 3.

Materially, media houses face difficulties providing suitable accommodations for women journalists, especially those with children. Separate rooms for women raise budget constraints, and women’s relocation with children adds complexity to the situation.

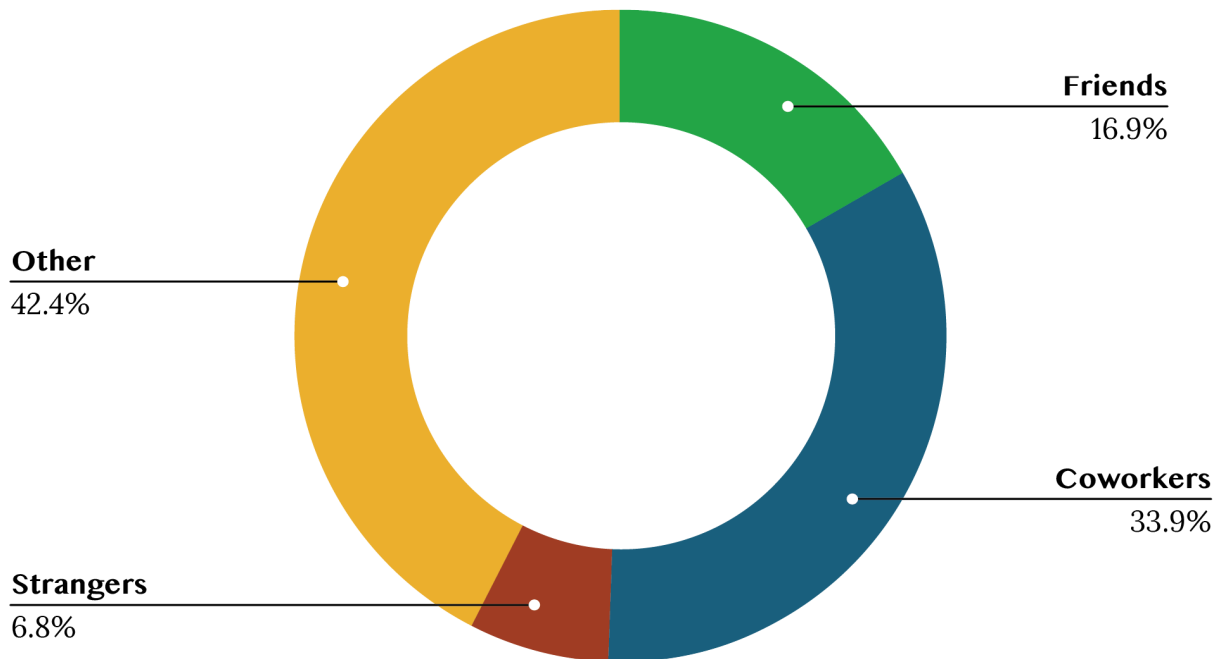
“... when media houses seek accommodations for women to live with their male colleagues, they must find separate rooms, creating budget constraints. Women also relocate with their children, which becomes challenging, especially when media houses have limited budgets.” – Participant 3, FGD 3.

Do you feel safe in your current living arrangements?



Of the surveyed women, 26.6% noted having children and families, making shared dormitory-style housing less suitable for their needs. Consequently, many find themselves compelled to secure their own accommodation at personal expense, primarily due to budgetary constraints imposed by their media houses or employers. Among the respondents, 53 women journalists (67.1%) reported sharing their residence with individuals beyond their immediate family. Within this group, 20 mentioned living with co-workers (33.9%), 10 with friends (16.9%), 4 with strangers (6.8%), and 25 residing with individuals other than co-workers, friends, or strangers (42.4%).

If you share your residence with others outside of your immediate family, who do you share the residence with?



In addition to the challenges faced by journalists with families, women journalists are also sometimes expected to perform domestic tasks in safehouses, and refusal may lead to job loss.

“At safehouses, they are treated as slaves, assigned cleaning and cooking duties simply because they are women. Women journalists also face the risk of being fired if they refuse such housework when living alongside their male colleagues.” – Participant 4, FGD 3.

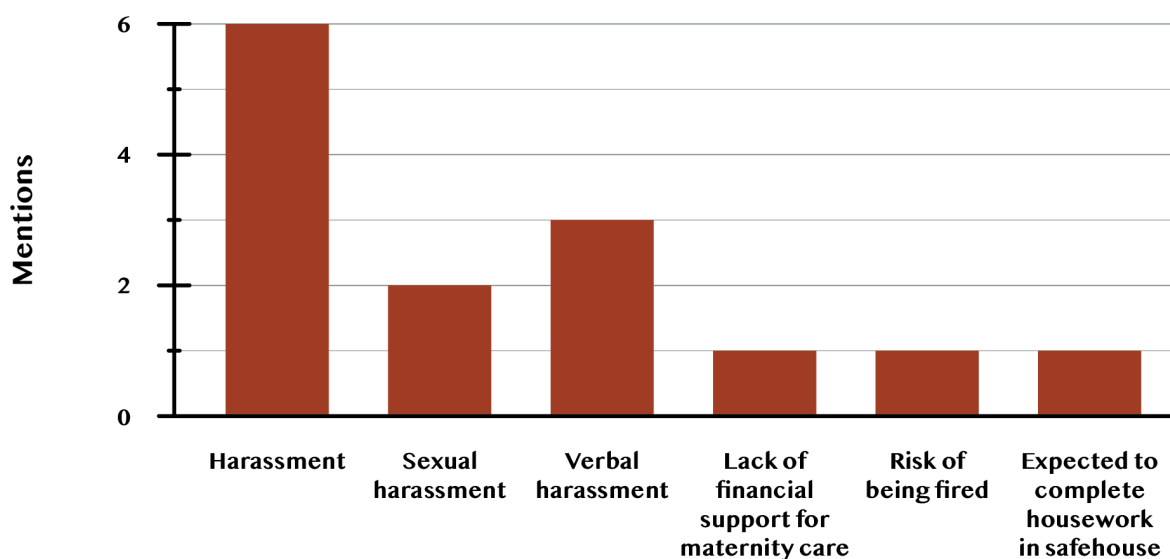
These conditions create a difficult environment for women journalists to work safely and securely, resulting in dangerous and exploitative working conditions for those in exile. Even though journalists themselves receive support from media houses and support organizations, one FGD participant mentioned that oftentimes family members, spouses, and children of journalists are equally at risk, both inside Myanmar and in exile. However, there is seldom any support for them and the burden of ensuring their security falls on the journalists themselves.

Gender-Based Discrimination and Bullying

When asked about safety concerns specific to women journalists, participants mentioned instances of harassment, bullying, and unequal treatment that they experienced as women within their organizations. Participants in the focus group discussions mentioned a culture of emotional abuse within certain media organizations and oppressive behavior by media houses towards their women staff. Women journalists can face discouragement from pursuing opportunities and limited access to legal assistance. Coercive, unfair, and uncompromising working conditions exert additional pressure on women journalists.

In the focus group discussions (FGDs), participants of FGD one, two and three (totalling 17 participants) highlighted gender-based harassment and discrimination as the predominant safety concerns confronting women journalists in comparison to their male counterparts. Specifically, six participants identified general harassment within the newsroom, with additional participants specifying sexual and verbal harassment.

What kinds of safety risks do women journalists face that are different to their male colleagues?



Furthermore, Participant 3 of FGD 1 emphasized that for women journalists, safety risks permeate both their personal and professional lives. The inherent danger of being a woman, further exacerbated by being a woman journalist in exile, exposes them to harassment beyond what their male colleagues typically encounter:

“I don’t distinguish safety risks between my personal life and professional life. It is already a danger to be a woman, and even more to be a woman journalist living in exile. Many people do not even dare to harass male colleagues, but when it comes to women journalists, we receive the brunt of it.” – Participant 3, FGD 1.

It is notable that many of these conditions and practices of maltreatment existed before the coup. The 2016 Fojo Media Institute report, titled “Gender in the Media Landscape” provided insights into this, stating that over 50% of women journalists reported experiencing verbal or sexual harassment within media organizations, with the absence of reporting mechanisms or gender committees when such incidents arose.²⁴

Two of the focus groups (editors-in-chief and representatives from support organizations) mentioned income disparity between men and women colleagues as a significant challenge. This disparity was also highlighted in “Gender in the Media Landscape”, which revealed that approximately two-thirds of women journalists reported receiving unequal compensation compared to their male colleagues.²⁵ In contrast, our survey found that only 16.7% of the women reported believing there is a gender pay disparity between them and their male colleagues. This may show an improvement on conditions since the 2016 Fojo Media Institute study, or be indicative of a general deterioration of pay scales and allocation of resources for all journalists regardless of gender.

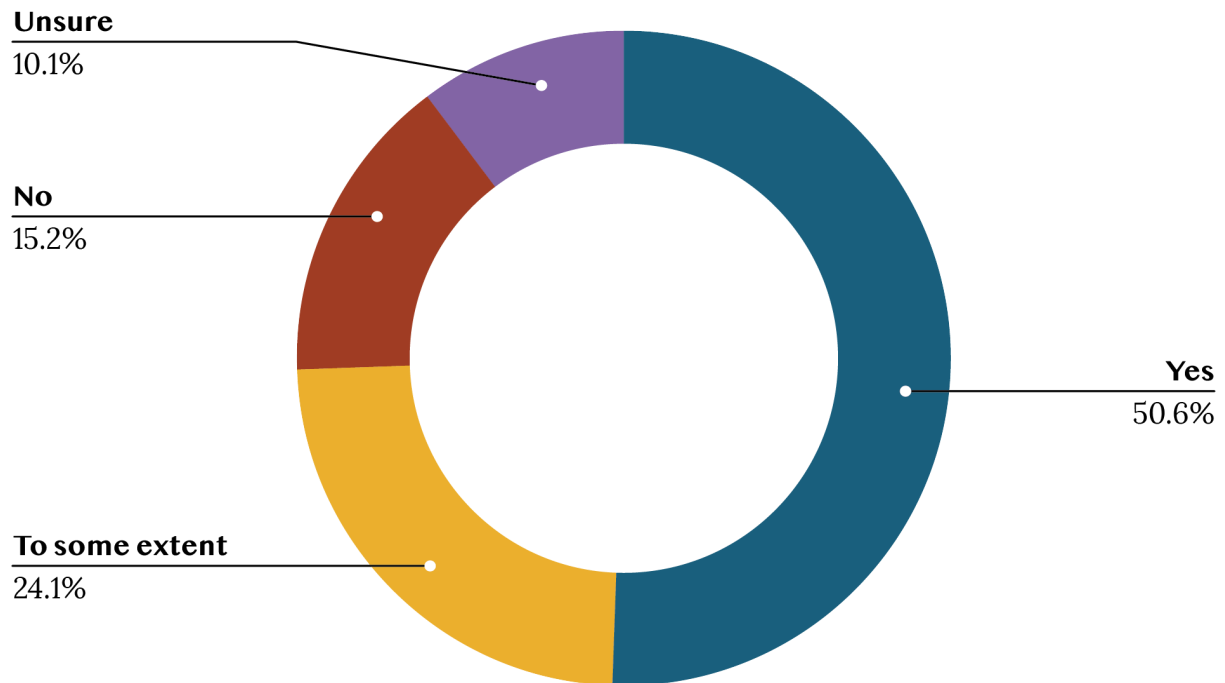
However, our focus group discussions also highlighted that women journalists were more vulnerable to job loss when raising concerns about pay or workplace issues compared to their male colleagues. Participant 6 of FGD 3 noted, “If women complain about their salaries or anything that is happening inside their media houses, their contract will be terminated.” This suggests that there might be an added risk that women journalists face when advocating for fair compensation or addressing workplace grievances, although a more detailed inquiry is required to identify the extent to which this affects.

Additionally, when asked whether their off days or leaves were treated equally compared to their male colleagues, 50% of the survey respondents reported in the affirmative, with 15% reporting “no”. There was only a 38% overlap between those who reported unequal treatment for leave and those who believed there was a gender pay disparity.

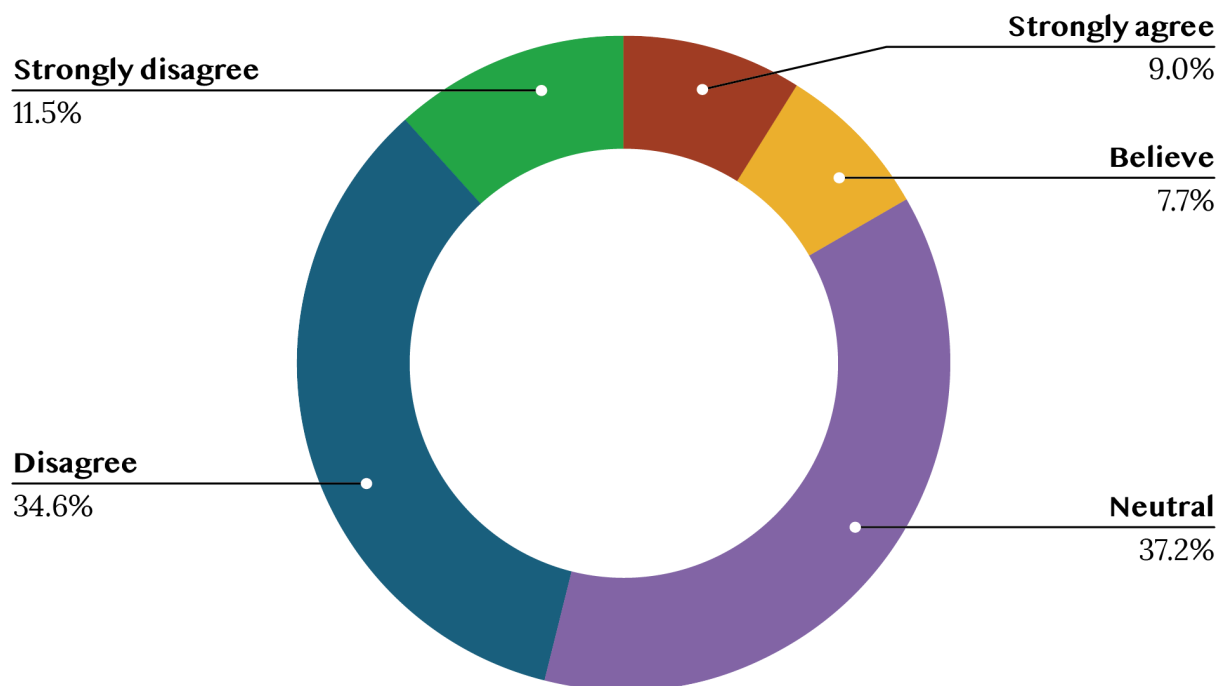
²⁴ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.19; Please refer to Appendix II of the report for detailed literature review.

²⁵ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.16.

Are your off days treated equally compared to your male colleagues?



Do you believe there is gender-based pay disparity between you and your male colleagues?



This suggests that though there may be conditions of equal pay in certain media institutions, the treatment of women journalists still requires examination. Alarming, only 16.5% of the women surveyed reported that their workplace had a workplace harassment policy, with 43% saying they are unsure about whether such a policy exists. The existence of workplace harassment policies are essential to create a safe environment for employees. They encourage reporting of harassment, deter inappropriate behavior, and safeguard individuals from further mistreatment. When asked if the women journalists' current or most recent media house has a human resources policy, 13.9% of survey respondents answered "no", with another 43% saying they are unsure about whether such a policy exists.

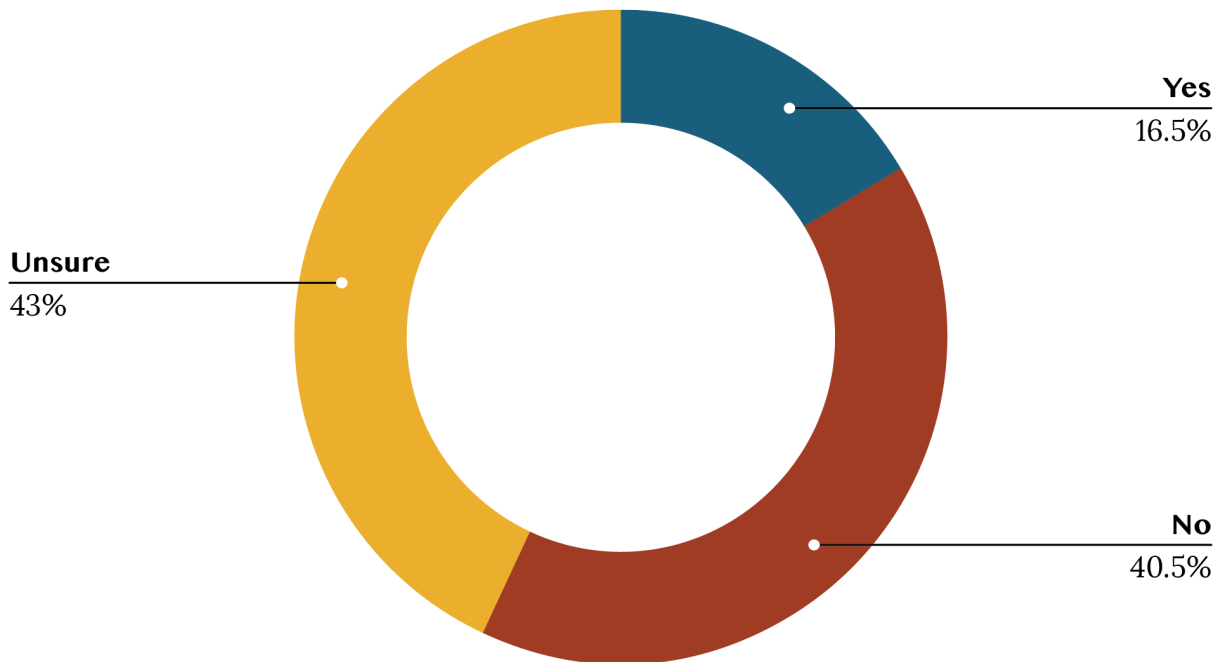
While the presence of a workplace harassment policy and HR policy is important, it is even more important that employees understand the content of these policies. First, they empower employees by informing them of their rights and the procedures for addressing harassment. Second, it encourages employees to report incidents promptly, helping to prevent harassment and create a safer workplace. Third, it sets clear expectations and consequences for inappropriate behavior, acting as a deterrent. Lastly, it ensures legal compliance and safeguards both employees and the organization by demonstrating a commitment to preventing harassment and addressing it appropriately when it occurs.

In an interview with a member of senior management at The Irrawaddy, they mentioned that they were working on a draft of a gender policy, which was prompted after a series of gender sensitivity workshops undergone by their team between 2018-2020. While they have a robust and active HR policy, they were unable to finalize the sexual harassment policy in the aftermath of the 2021 coup. Nevertheless, the management team mentioned additional support provided to their women journalists such as three months of paid maternity leave, and an informal "no means no" policy when it comes to issues of workplace harassment.

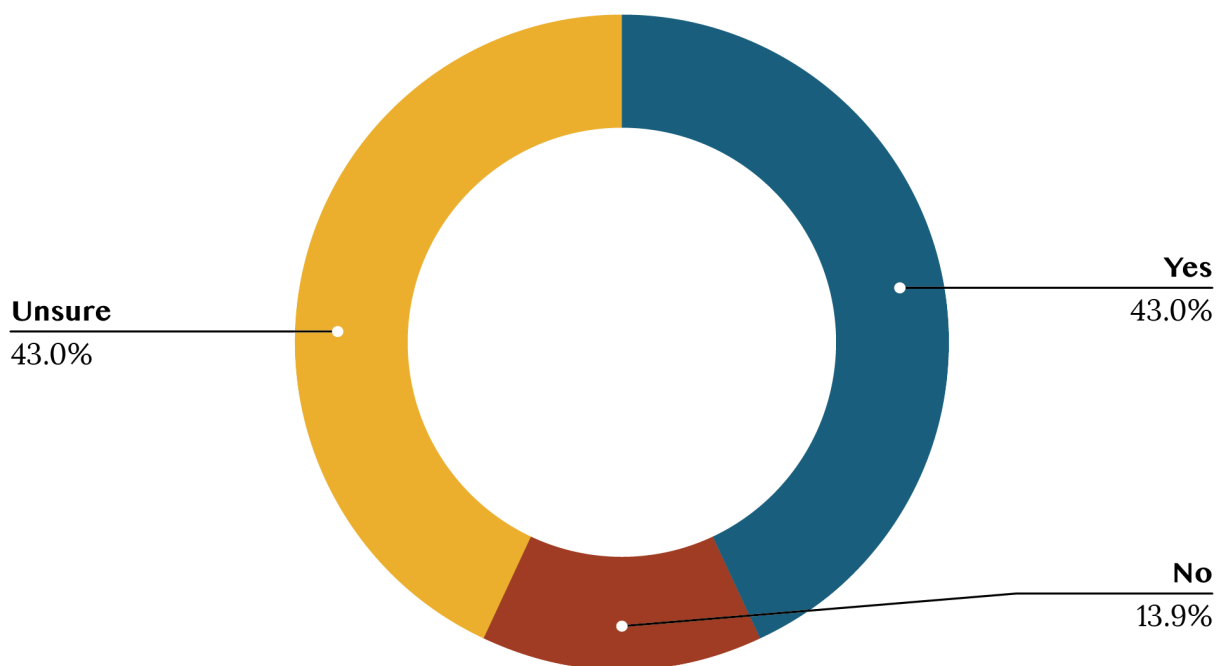
Many senior editors and media house owners that were interviewed mentioned the worry that the low pay and lack of job and housing security will lead to an exodus of women journalists from the industry. They mention media workers switching industries to work in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs) to earn more money.

These various considerations have contributed to a significant trend of women journalists resigning from their careers. Reports suggest that since the 2021 military coup, approximately 80% of Myanmar journalists have left their professions, with the majority of those still employed living in exile abroad. Our focus group discussions revealed that women journalists still face pressures and threats, both from media houses and within their circles even when contemplating resignation. These conditions may lead to a reduction in the number of women journalists in the workforce and perpetuate exploitative contract terms for those who move to Thailand, creating a hostile, unsafe work environment for women.

Does your current or most recent media house have a workplace harassment policy?



Does your current or most recent media house have a human resources (HR) policy?



Mental Health and Psychosocial Security

Tin Zar Aung, founder of Myanmar Women in Media, noted that major mental health concerns for women journalists have emerged since the onset of COVID-19 in Myanmar, well before the coup. Women carried the double burden of childcare, housework, and the mental health implications of lockdown which affected people globally, all the while juggling responsibilities from their work. The onset of the 2021 coup and its subsequent fallout pushed many women journalists to a breaking point, resulting in dramatically poor mental health outcomes for women journalists across the board.

Before they had the chance to recover a sense of normalcy after COVID-19, many were thrust into exile and found themselves fugitives and in imminent danger. The precarity of life in exile has resulted in profound emotional and psychological impacts on the women journalists we have surveyed and interviewed. This kind of prolonged and years-long stress frequently results in negative long-term mental health unless some interventions are made. Through Exile Hub’s mental health and psychosocial support program, our MHPSS coordinator has observed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder among many journalists within our community. Unfortunately, these individuals are at times unaware that these issues are manifestations of mental health challenges. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the importance of mental health within the community, bolstered by various Myanmar advocacy campaigns striving to destigmatize mental health issues.²⁶

Participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) noted a significant contrast in their mental well-being between their time in Myanmar and their time in Thailand. Many emphasized the detrimental impact of sleep deprivation on their health while in Myanmar, with these issues improving upon their relocation to Thailand. When asked about changes in their safety risks and overall security situation since arriving in Thailand, 11 survey respondents expressed feeling safer, with improved mental health being the most frequently cited reason for this perception. Among these survey respondents, five specifically highlighted experiencing enhanced sleep quality. “I have been able to enjoy peaceful, uninterrupted sleep since coming to Thailand,” a sentiment echoed by Participant 8, who stated, “I can rest well at night without the constant fear of nighttime raids, as was the case in Myanmar.”

“Previously, I couldn’t sleep at night. I was constantly on edge whenever I heard the sounds of cars and motorbikes, and I suffered from insomnia. There is a much greater sense of security after arriving in Thailand.” – Survey Respondent 39.

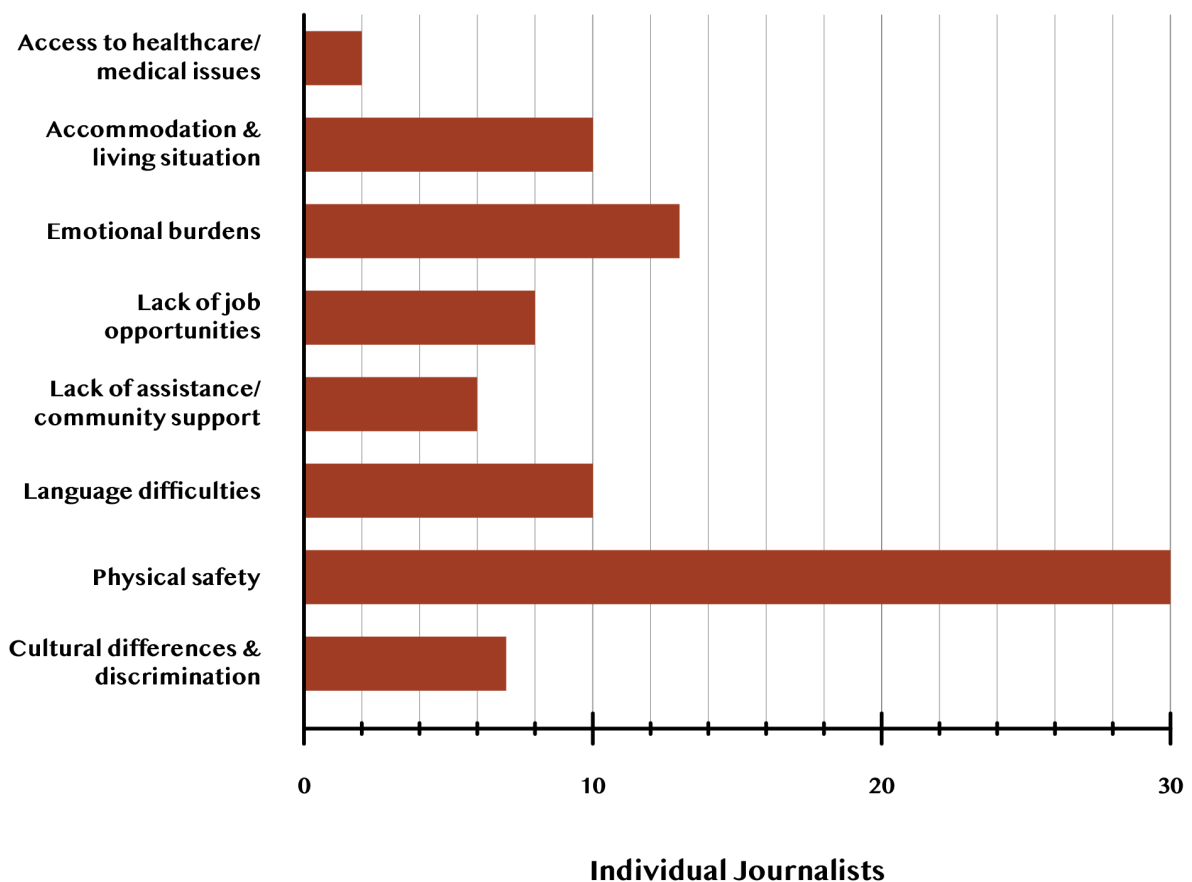
²⁶ Myanmar mental health awareness campaigns include [Resilient Voices Podcast](#), and [It’s OK not to be OK \(အဆင်မပြေလည်း ရပါတယ်\)](#).

Nevertheless, the precarious nature of their current circumstances still weighs heavily on their well-being and feelings of security. When asked the same question, six other survey respondents acknowledged changes in safety risks but expressed concerns about a persistent decline in their mental health. Their anxieties primarily revolved around the fear of arrest and stress resulting from their precarious living conditions. It is likely that these anxieties begin while they are inside Myanmar, but the symptoms only become noticeable in exile after they have reached a place of relative physical safety.

It was encouraging to observe that recognition and understanding of the significance of mental health for their own well-being were widespread among the surveyed women journalists.

62 out of 79 journalists surveyed reported poor mental wellbeing as a factor that affected their work as journalists in exile. When asked about challenges they faced during relocation, 13 out of 79 reported emotional burdens as seriously affecting them; seven reported cultural differences and discrimination as a matter of concern for them.

What were the biggest challenges in your relocation?



Other conditions mentioned when explaining the biggest challenges they faced during relocation to Thailand included: lack of job opportunities (8), fear for physical safety (30), poor accommodation

and living situation (10), lack of access to healthcare and medical issues (2), lack of assistance or community support (6), and language difficulties (10). Only by addressing the material conditions of women journalists living in exile / people who have relocated can we begin to improve their mental health.

It is important to note that mental health concerns among many women journalists stem directly from their current safety and material circumstances. The lack of material and safety support are directly contributing to heightened anxieties and poor mental health outcomes; in these instances, the mental health challenges can effectively be tackled by providing additional forms of material and safety support alongside mental health assistance. In line with this, financial assistance often takes precedence over MHPSS due to its immediate and urgent nature. Although most of our respondents were aware of a decline in their mental health, they sought to downplay their condition and turn to work as a means of healing and coping, making it even more important that workspaces for women journalists are free of harassment and exploitation.

“I no longer want to talk about how I feel, when asked if I want mental health support. ... I try to talk to myself by saying that I will fight the regime until the end. I heal that way and forget about what I’m really feeling. I think that working and focusing on [journalism] work helps me forget my problems.” – Participant 5, FGD 2.

Examining Efficacy and Use of Existing Support Mechanisms

“It is not that we are alone in this. We are not the only ones facing all these challenges. This is a struggle for all; the oppressed people. The struggle of the independent media or independent journalists is part of the various fights and struggles.” – Soe Myint, CEO of Mizzima.

Role of Media Organizations

To understand the challenges and pitfalls faced by media houses in providing necessary support for women journalists, our team interviewed representatives from five major independent media outlets to understand the barriers faced by these institutions. Representatives from Mizzima, The Irrawaddy, Frontier Myanmar, DVB, and Myanmar Now spoke to us about their institutional mechanisms for protecting journalists, and representatives from Dawei Watch, Reuters, Panglong News, Narinjara, and Khit Thit media participated in our focus group discussions to address women journalists’ safety needs.

Representatives from the five key media institutions whom we interviewed outlined the mechanisms of support offered through the media houses, which varied greatly depending on the availability of resources. All the media organizations interviewed recognized the struggle and difficulties faced by journalists and the need for further support for the safety of journalists. All interviewed reported providing some form of additional support to their journalists on top of their salaries, such as relocation support, housing, health insurance, or transportation. There was, however, a mixed level of understanding about the needs of women journalists. Some organizations acknowledged the distinct safety concerns and necessary workplace accommodations for women journalists, while others asserted that there were no tangible differences in the safety concerns between male and women journalists in their employ.

Some organizations reported that the gender balance of the newsroom had begun to skew more male since the coup. A representative of Frontier Myanmar noted:

“We always look into female journalists or reporters because I think it is very important for us to have a balance in our newsroom. But since the coup, it’s very much unbalanced again ... kind of male dominant again, because some of the female [journalists] are still in Myanmar.” – Representative, Frontier Myanmar.

Other organizations such as DVB and The Irrawaddy reported around 30-40% representation of women in the newsroom. This is consistent with IWMF’s 2011 Global Report on the Status of Women in News, which stated that globally, women represent 33.3% of the full-time journalism workforce across 522 companies surveyed globally.²⁷

²⁷ International Women’s Media Foundation, “Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media.” (2011).

In conflict or wartime, journalism has historically been male-dominated, with men often taking on more prominent roles as correspondents, reporters, and photographers. The danger of this lack of equal gender representation is that it perpetuates a skewed narrative and limits the diversity of perspectives presented in the media, while the experiences, voices, and insights of women may be underrepresented or even marginalized. While there is a general acknowledgement of the importance of journalism during conflict, our interviewees yielded mixed results when questioned about the importance of gender representation in newsrooms.

Media organizations, although able to provide basic salaries, frequently encounter challenges in meeting the additional needs of journalists residing in exile. Some organizations take on burdens for supporting their staff outside of their basic salaries, such as housing allowance, visas or alternative forms of documentation, and medical insurance. However, these come at the expense of the media organizations themselves, and are often not accounted for by donor funding received since the coup.

Because many media organizations' revenue models have collapsed since the coup, they have become wholly dependent on donor funding, which places significant limitations on how and where funding can be spent. The larger and more established media organizations have been able to provide salaries that at least match with Thai minimum wage, but smaller organizations with tighter budgets and resource constraints often end up paying their staff far below standard wages, compensating them otherwise with benefits such as shared food and housing expenses.

While all interviewed media houses reported that there are extant personnel or HR manuals used in their organization, many reported them being outdated and reflecting circumstances before the coup. Some reported that their manuals were available only in English and not in Burmese, which poses a barrier to their Burmese-speaking staff being able to understand their rights within their workplace. Only one of the media houses interviewed reported that they had a workplace harassment policy or manual, while others mentioned they had a document in draft or had not begun working on one.

“Many [policy manuals] have had to be re-written because the newsroom management and structure has completely changed since the coup. All the policies they had before the coup are not applicable anymore since the coup. Now they are just so focussed on survival that they have not had a chance to organize and build up these structures.” – Thin Lei Win, Co-founder of Myanmar Now & International Correspondent.

Because of the challenging conditions facing media houses in exile, many are unable to provide for the specific and individualized needs of many of their journalists. Despite these challenges, media organizations still strive to provide a safe and welcoming workplace for women journalists. The

Irrawaddy reported providing three months paid maternity leave for women journalists even under these circumstances. DVB reported providing a child-friendly play area in their office in Chiang Mai, allowing mothers to bring their children to work.

“We need to push on gender safety sensitivity not because the donors said we have to. This is a moral obligation which comes with having responsibility. There is no excuse to overlook it.”

– Representative, The Irrawaddy.

While media houses typically provide basic safety support for their staffers, full-time staff are not the only ones producing news. Many others involved in the creation of news stories such as fixers, stringers, and citizen journalists do not receive any institutional support. Many of the women interviewed in our survey mentioned their concern for their colleagues or sources on the ground, who often do not receive the necessary security support or resources for their work. Therefore, further measures must be taken to ensure the safety of both journalists operating in exile and their sources inside dangerous territory, either individually or through media organizations themselves.

All the media institutions interviewed for this research commented on the instability of institutional donor funding, which could be discontinued or reassigned based on external geopolitical factors out of their control. An example is that of Sida, who historically provided much needed financial support to media institutions, discontinuing funding for Myanmar in 2023 due to the Swedish government’s budget cuts to foreign aid, leaving many media institutions who relied on their support in a difficult situation.²⁸ Because media organizations from Myanmar rely so heavily on funding from international donors post-coup, journalists are highly vulnerable to drastic shifts in their employment status and physical safety when these institutions choose to enact policy changes.

Role of Support Organizations

Throughout our preliminary desk research on existing literature about Myanmar media, one of the biggest gaps we identified was the dearth of comprehensive research on the media landscape. The country’s prolonged isolation during military dictatorship severely limited the scope of research scholars could undertake. Consequently, academic analyses are scattered, piecemeal, and challenging to access. This fragmentation impedes our understanding of media ownership, the status of independent media, and the historic role of international media development organizations for Myanmar media both inside the country and in exile. These factors ultimately create a fragmented, myopic perspective that hampers any comprehensive analysis of Myanmar’s media landscape pre or post-coup, as it fails to consider the intersections between ownership, economics, and political interests that perpetually influence media content.

²⁸ Matilda Pearson, “Severe cuts in Sida funds for 2023.” *SMC Global* (January 17, 2023).

This was the case until our researchers delved into *Myanmar Media in Transition: Legacies, Challenges and Change*. Edited by Lisa Brooten, Jane Madlyn McElhone, and Gayathry Venkiteswaran, the book offers a unique perspective of Myanmar’s media landscape up until 2019. This collection of empirical and theoretical contributions, supplemented by insights from media professionals and reform advocates, bridges significant gaps in existing literature surrounding Myanmar media ownership, structural organization of media houses, and the complex interplay of media, politics, and society.

The book also sought to map the diverse landscape of key actors and media development initiatives spanning the past three decades up until 2019. The chapter titled “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” highlighted the engagement of a wide spectrum of donors, organizations, and advocates that have been involved in various aspects of media development. As noted in this chapter, early supporters and key players included International Media Support (IMS), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), and Deutsche Welle (DW), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Burma Relief Centre, and Internews. These entities have made substantial contributions to different facets of media development, including supporting exiled media outlets, empowering ethnic communities, bolstering opportunities for women and youth, conducting extensive journalism training, and promoting freedom of expression. This profiling underlines the comprehensive approach that has underpinned media development in Myanmar, offering enhanced insight into the collaborative and multifaceted nature of these concerted efforts. Hence, media development in Myanmar prior to the coup was far from a one-size-fits-all endeavor; rather, it was a collaborative process that engaged a multitude of stakeholders across various domains, encompassing diverse training, scholarships, fellowships, and support for different segments of the media ecosystem.

Many of the organizations listed in the book continue to serve as key mechanisms of support for independent media after the coup. However, there were significant challenges for support organizations and donors in shifting project priorities from before and after the coup. Our team interviewed some key supporters of independent media about the challenges of operating in a post coup landscape. After independent media resumed working inside of Myanmar in the early 2010s, support organizations focused much of their efforts on institution building for the sector, developing journalism and media through longer-term cycles of funding focused on building out different areas of the industry. Since the coup, though, many have shifted to providing core and operational support to media houses, without which they could not survive.

A representative from DWA mentioned that smaller media houses have greater needs in terms of professionalizing and creating and enforcing policies for their teams and personnel. They observed

that many managers in media houses are journalists with little management skills and ability to handle finances, staff, and dialogue with donors, possibly explaining the reasons why so few policies are in place for the protection of the working rights of journalists. While donors try to introduce conversations on minimum wage and workers rights, development organizations do not feel that they have the authority to dictate how media houses spend their funding, resulting in little action towards enforcing positive labor and workplace policies within media organizations.

Post-coup, media development organizations have worked together to provide holistic support to both exiled Myanmar media outlets and individual journalists. This includes a variety of support, such as: newsroom development, financial and technical assistance to media houses, emergency financial assistance, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), capacity building training such as gender sensitivity programs, journalist safety training, media literacy campaigns, research, and advocacy. However, due to a lack of stable institutional funding, there have been cases where emergency support funds, intended to support the livelihood of individual journalists, have been appropriated to support small to medium media outlets operating on shoestring budgets. Many media development organizations, whose multi-year budgets were drawn prior to the 2021 coup, scrambled to reassign funds to support either the pressing emergency needs of individual journalists for relocation, or providing necessary core funding for those who worked to evacuate their own suddenly compromised employees from inside Myanmar.

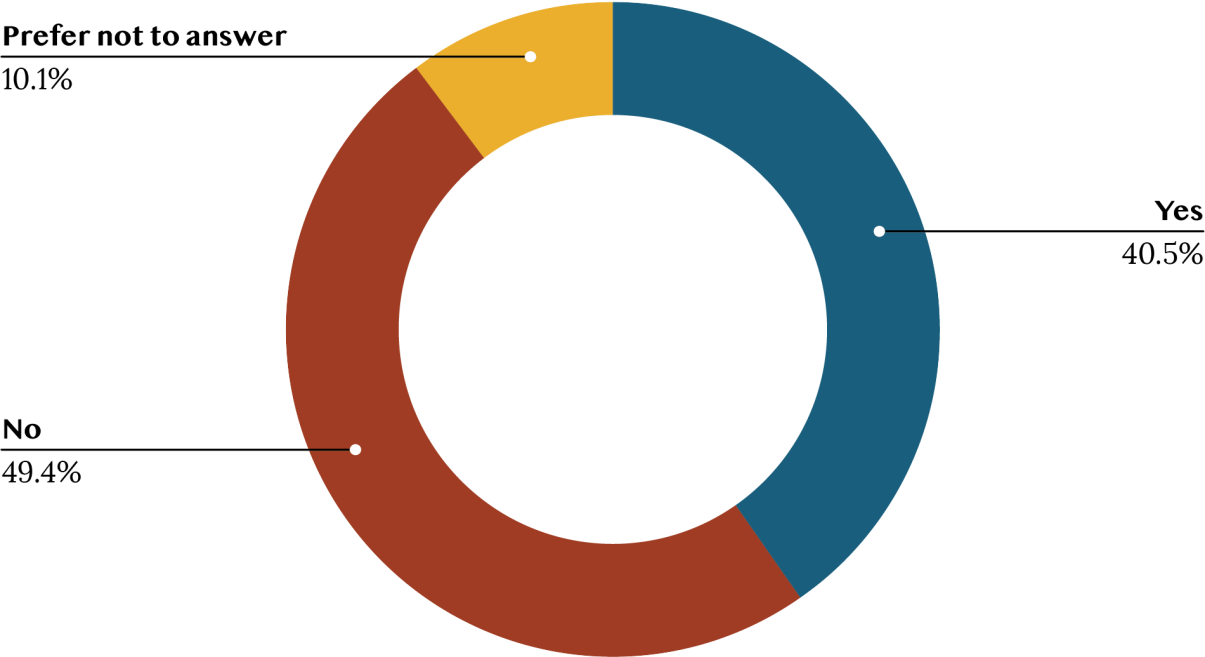
Evaluation of Existing Mechanisms

In this section, we will examine the responses from women journalists on the specific relocation support and safety training which they received from media outlets and support organizations. While media houses, support organizations, and civil society organizations have been working to promote the safety and wellbeing of women journalists, our survey and focus group discussions called the efficacy of some of the interventions into question. We sought to understand what resources were available for women journalists, which were able to access them, and how they were able to access them.

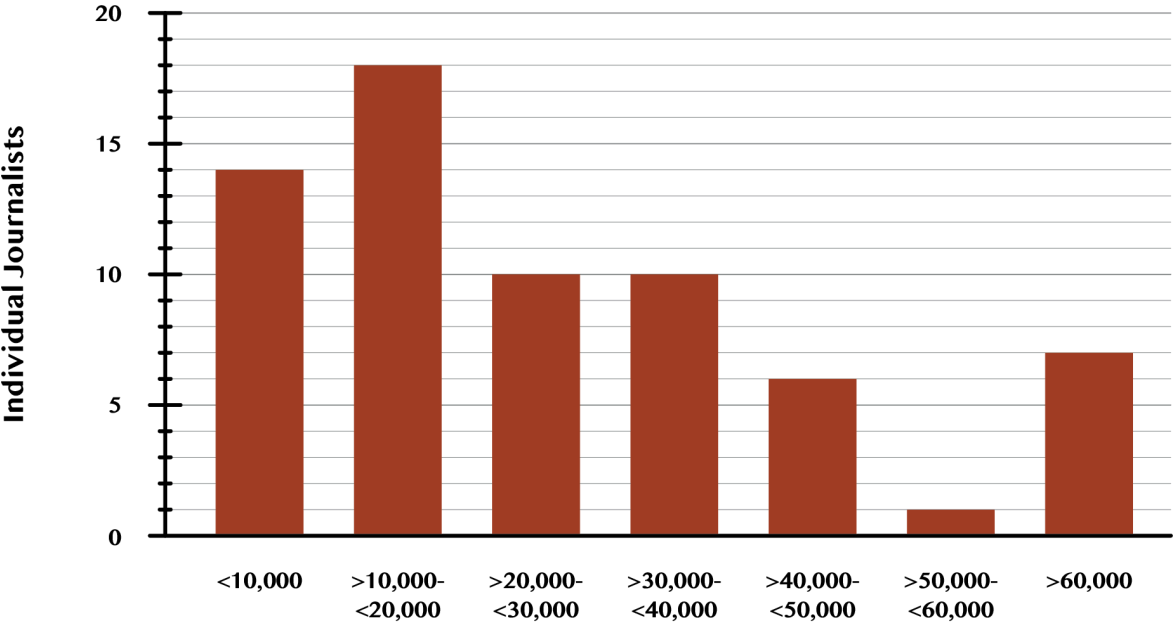
Relocation

Survey and focus group discussion (FGD) participants were asked about the assistance they received during and after their relocation to Thailand. The expenses associated with relocating for our respondents were substantial, with an average reported cost of approximately THB 25,000 for moving from Myanmar to Thailand. Despite the significant cost, nearly half of the surveyed journalists (49.4%) did not receive any aid for relocation and were forced to use their own finances to cover the cost. Notably, one participant mentioned resorting to taking out a government loan of MMK 800,000 in Myanmar to finance her relocation.

Did you receive any relocation assistance?

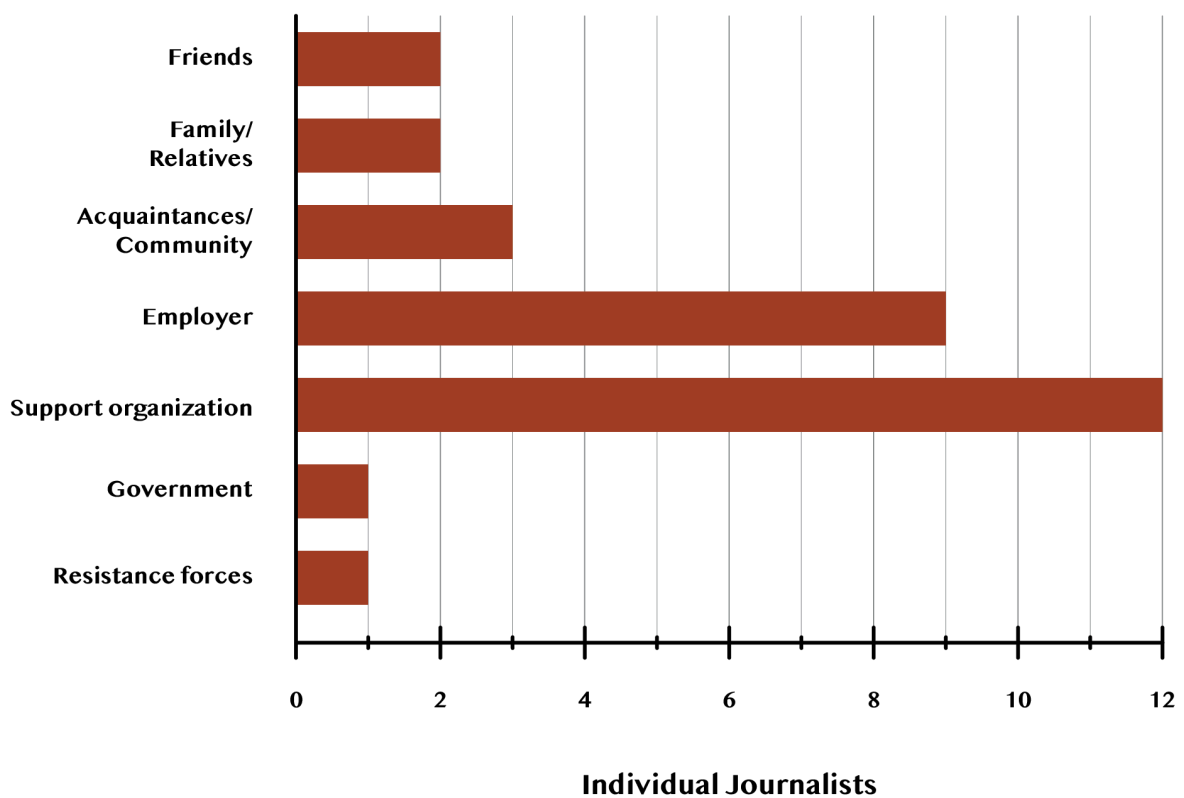


How much did your relocation to Thailand cost in Thai Baht?



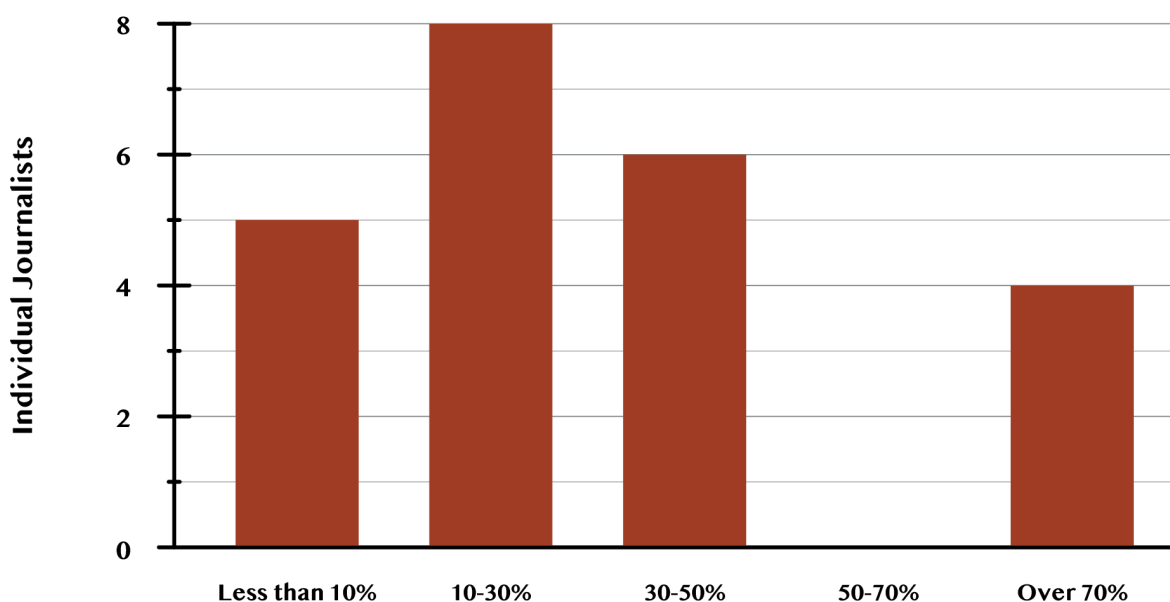
Of the journalists who did receive relocation support, only nine survey respondents received support from their employers. Those who provided support included Federal FM (2), Kachin News Group (1), Kantarawaddy Times (1), Mizzima (4), and DVB (1). Twelve journalists received relocation assistance from media support organizations, while the rest received help from friends, family, or other acquaintances.

If you received any relocation assistance, who did you receive it from?



The focus group discussions also highlighted that oftentimes the assistance provided by support organizations and media houses only accounted for a portion of the travel cost or covered solely the journalist, not the additional family members relocating with them.. 35.4% of journalists (28) surveyed reported possessing the necessary legal documentation to live in Thailand. Out of the 23 who responded when asked how much of their income is spent on visa fees per year, 10 reported that visa or proper documentation fees account for over 30% of their annual income. This presents an unsustainable financial burden on these journalists that media houses and support organizations are often unable to alleviate. While some have received financial support from their media houses and organizations, they re-emphasized the necessity of financial assistance to obtain legal documentation, such as visas, as a top priority.

If you have a visa or the necessary legal documentation to live in Thailand, how much of your income do you spend on the visa fees per year?



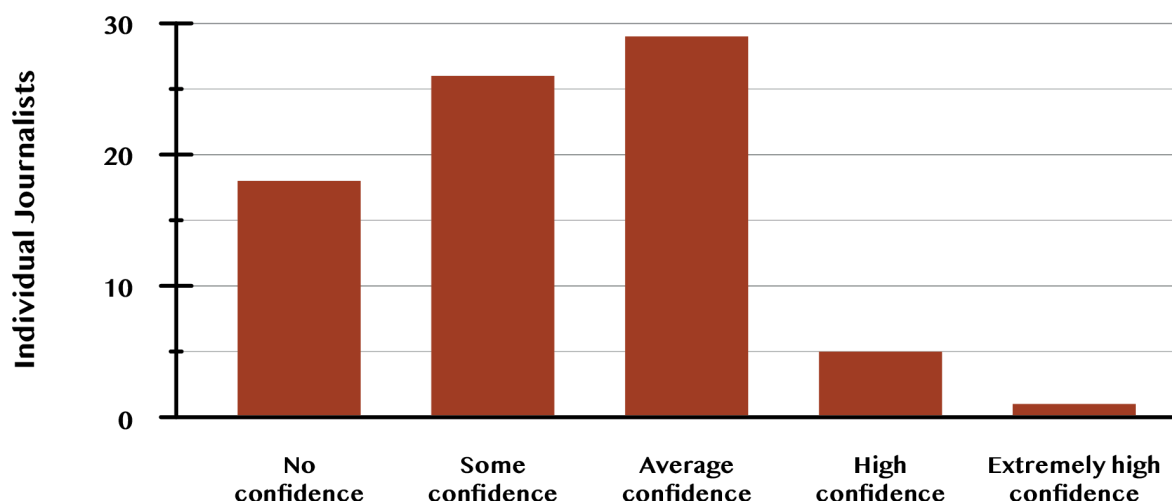
Security Training

Participants of the focus group discussions highlighted the importance of digital security, such as the use of secure communication methods. They expressed the need for more tangible and actionable guidance, as well as continued support after digital security training sessions. Participants emphasized the need for comprehensive safety training that included practical implementation, equipment provisioning (such as laptops and electronic devices), secure cloud storage, and licensed software applications. Practical information for direct communication methods was also highlighted as a critical requirement in the evolving landscape of data security. Participants called for cultural and systemic shifts to create a safer and more equitable environment for women journalists, both inside Myanmar and in exile.

While 69.6% of respondents in our survey acknowledged experiencing security breaches during their work in Myanmar, the majority indicated that their security concerns persisted upon relocating to Thailand. Rather than diminishing, their apprehensions shifted; the threat of arrest in Myanmar transformed into a threat of deportation in Thailand. This underscores the notion that, despite the different perils faced by journalists in exile, the threat level remains consistent. Additionally, our research revealed that journalists exhibited a low to average level of confidence in their knowledge and skills to address the safety risks associated with being a journalist in exile. Specifically, a paltry 7.6% of survey participants expressed high or extremely high confidence in

managing these risks, making it imperative that targeted efforts to enhance the security knowledge of journalists in exile are made.

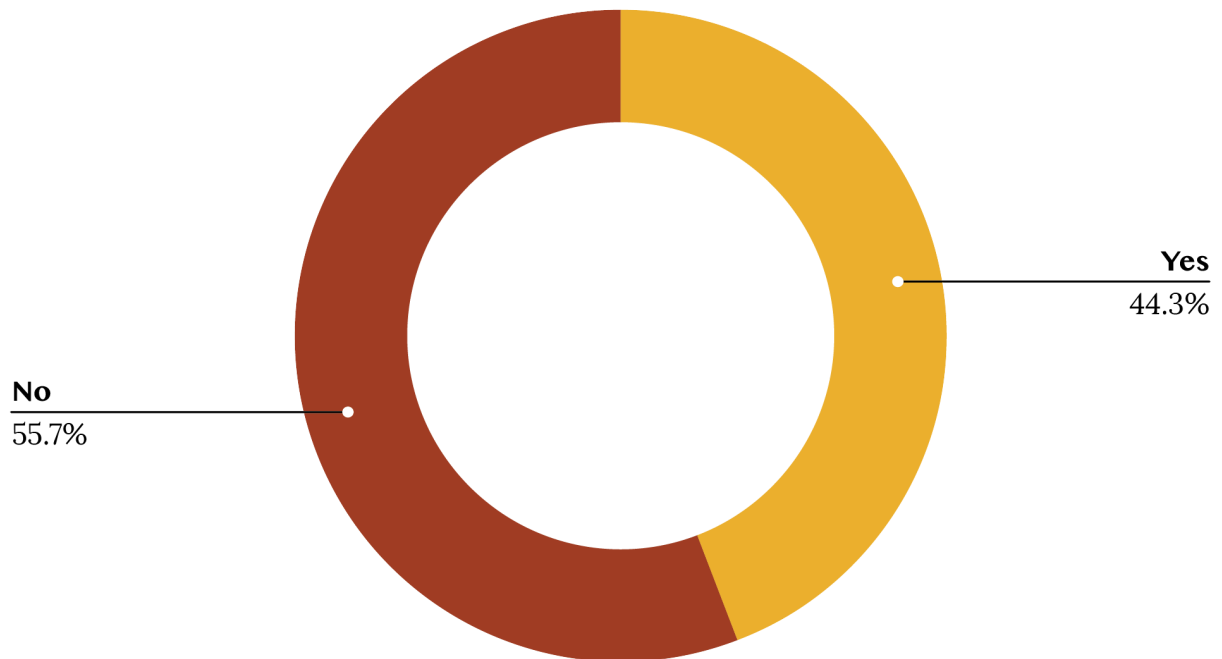
Select your level of confidence in your knowledge/skills to deal with the safety risks that come with being a journalist in exile.



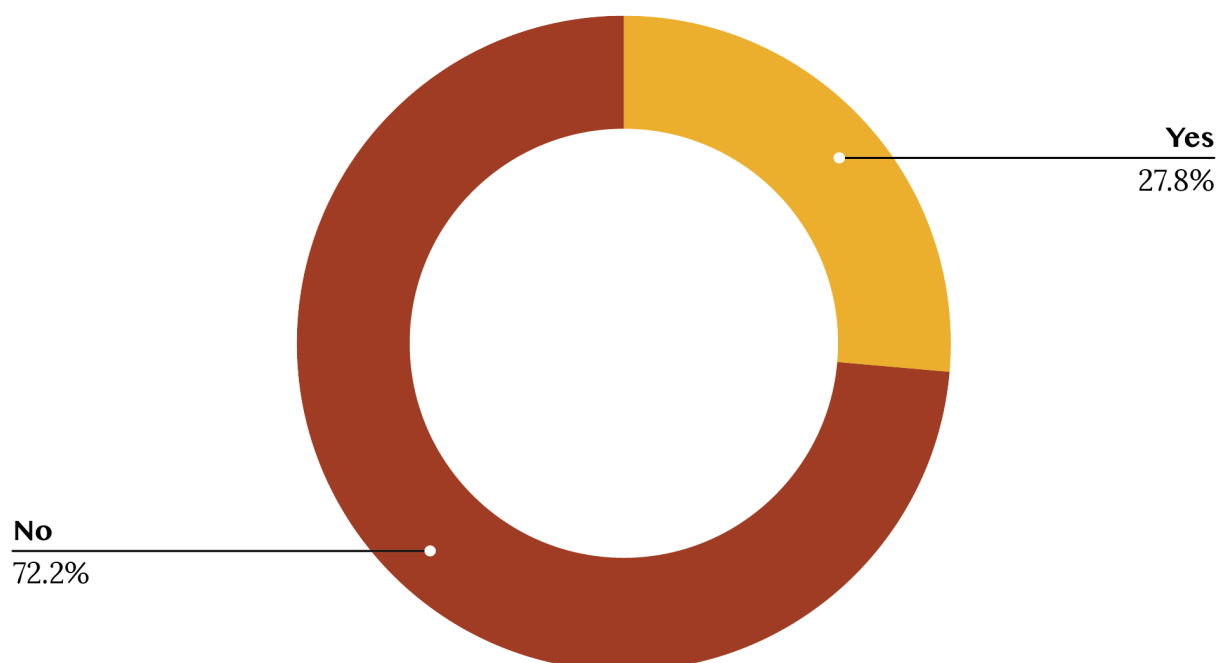
A significant finding from our survey indicated that 55.7% of respondents had not participated in any safety training tailored for journalists. Moreover, of those who did undergo safety training, a substantial 80% received it post-coup rather than prior to political upheaval. This suggests a noteworthy gap in pre-crisis preparedness, as the majority lacked exposure to safety training aimed at mitigating the risks associated with journalistic work. The disproportionate distribution of safety training after the coup underscores the need for proactive measures to ensure journalists receive comprehensive training before being exposed to heightened security threats.

A significant majority, 72.2%, of the women journalists participating in our survey indicated that their current or most recent media organization did not provide any safety training. This poses a serious concern, as it exposes journalists to heightened risks related to their work without the necessary training to mitigate these safety challenges. Furthermore, it emphasizes the crucial role that media support organizations must play in ensuring that Myanmar journalists, both in-country and in exile, have access to vital safety training and information. This responsibility becomes paramount for enhancing the safety and well-being of journalists in the face of increasing risks.

Have you undergone any form of journalist safety training?

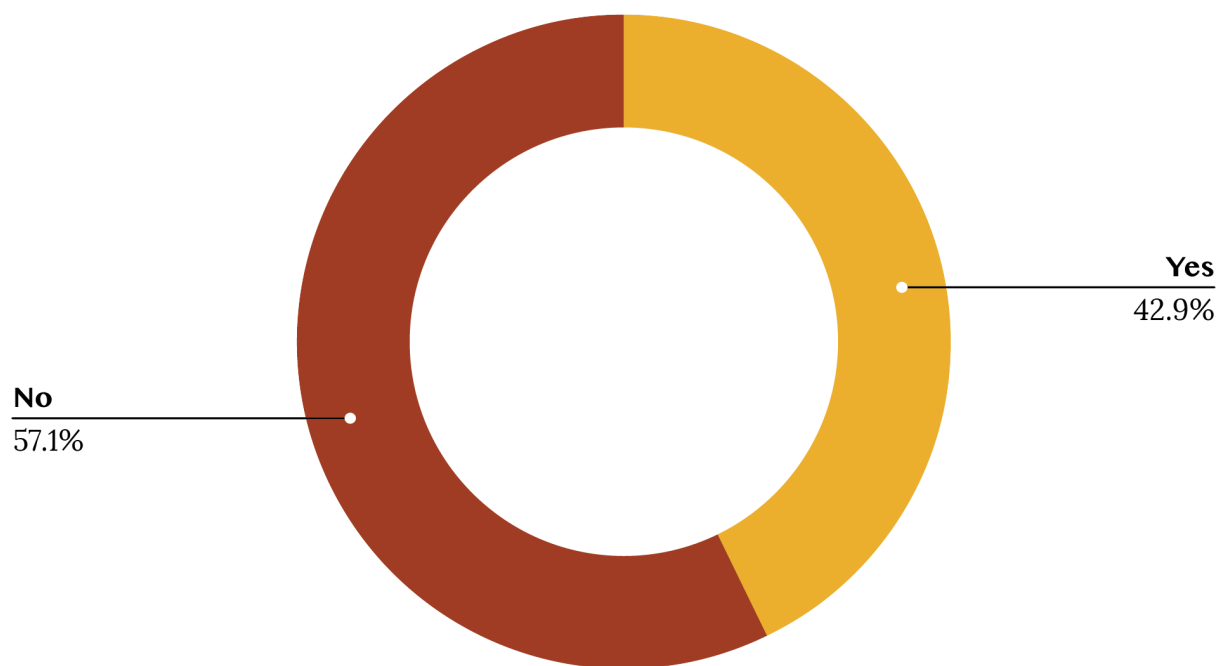


Does your current or most recent media house offer any safety training to journalists?



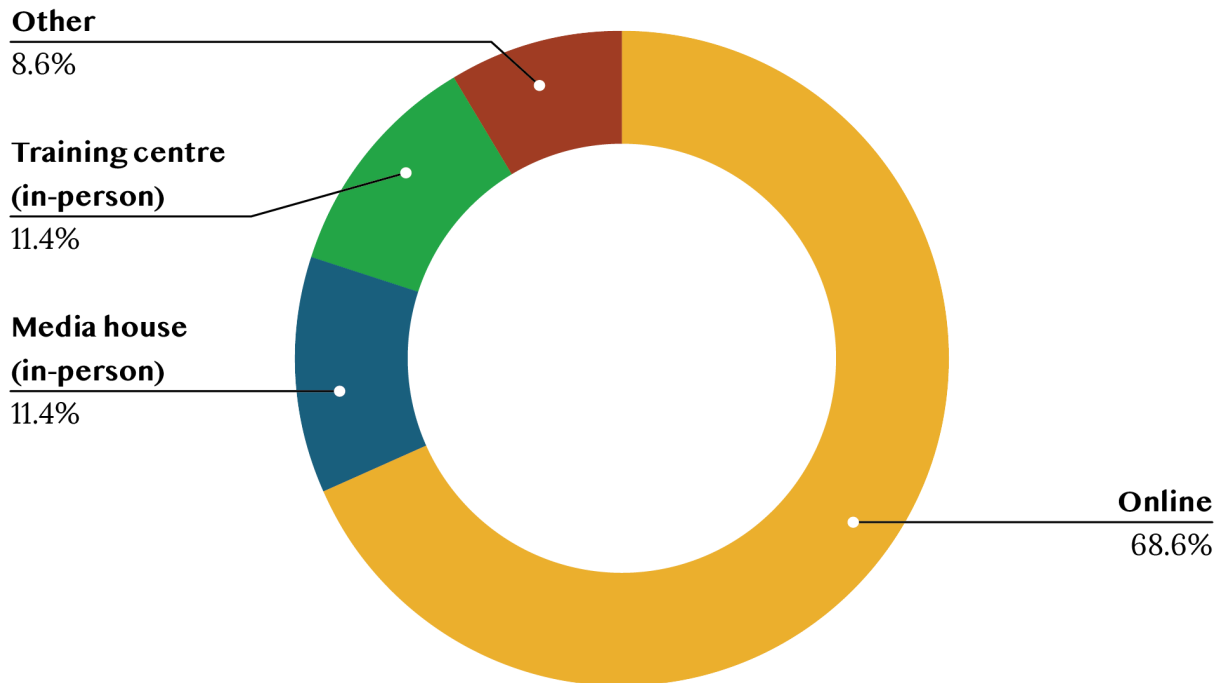
Most (57.3%) of the journalists who had undergone some form of safety training reported that their training did not specifically focus on the gendered risk and safety of women journalists. As noted in the prior sections of this research paper, women journalists face unique challenges and risks, which may include gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Given the nuanced safety concerns that women journalists may encounter in-country and in exile, it is imperative to implement gender-specific training that recognizes the intersectionality of gender with other identity aspects. Such tailored training could establish a more comprehensive and effective framework to ensure the safety, well-being, and professional development of women journalists.

If you have undergone any form of journalist safety training, did any of these trainings specifically focus on the safety of women journalists?



A majority (68.6%) of individuals who received safety training participated in online workshops. Although online training is efficient at delivering theoretical content, sharing resources, and raising awareness, it lacks the benefits of direct interaction, engagement, and hands-on simulations or physical skill development. In-person training offers opportunities for immediate clarification of doubts and fosters a more interactive and engaging learning environment. The observed low level of confidence in applying safety skills among the surveyed journalists may be correlated with the absence of hands-on training and support associated with online workshops.

If you have undergone some form of journalist safety training, where was the last training you attended?

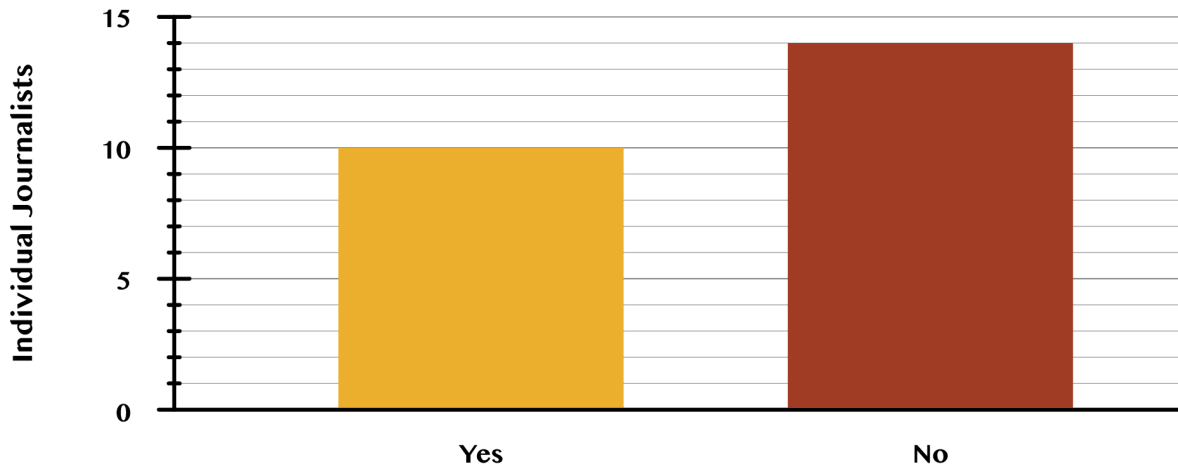


Among the survey participants who had received in-person safety training, either recently or in the past, 14 individuals reported that the organizers did not cover their expenses for transportation, logistics, and/or legal fees associated with attending the training sessions.²⁹ This finding highlights a potential barrier that may limit the accessibility of safety training opportunities for journalists, particularly when additional costs and risks are taken on by the participants themselves.

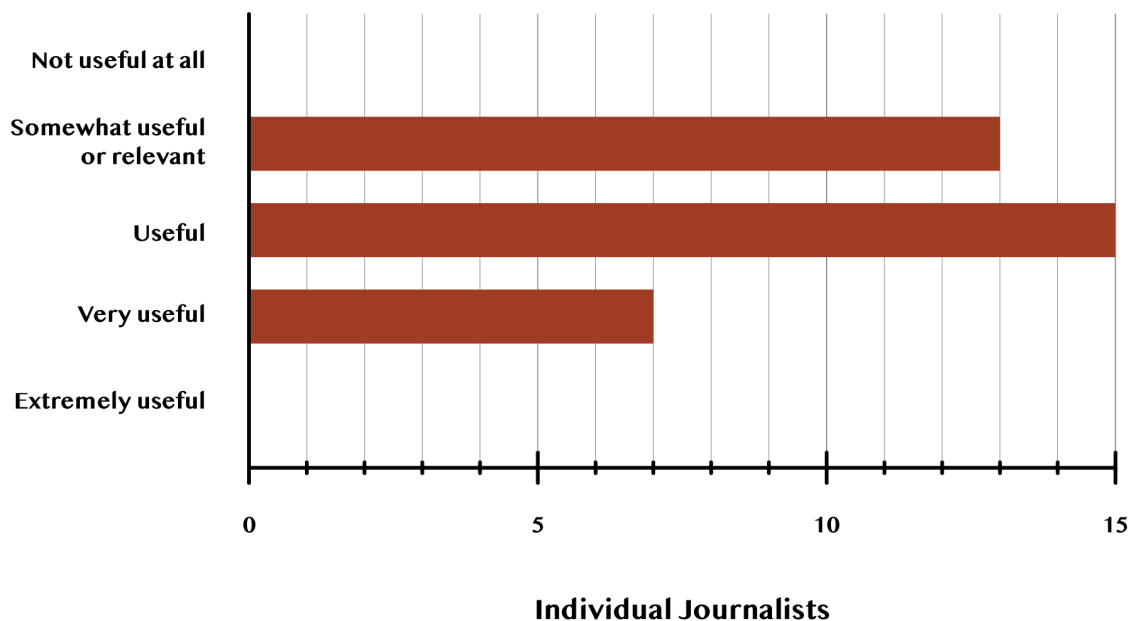
Only seven respondents among the 35 who underwent safety training described the courses as “very useful.” In contrast, 15 rated the training as “useful,” and 13 considered it “somewhat useful or relevant.” This pattern indicates the necessity for a thorough review and potential enhancement in the content and materials presented during safety training sessions. It highlights the importance of refining safety training programs to better meet the diverse needs and expectations of Myanmar journalists in order to ensure that the training is not only comprehensive, but highly effective in preparing individuals for the challenges they may encounter.

²⁹ Legal fees may include paying for any documentation necessary for ensuring their safety during the training, including acquiring police cards and/or migrant worker cards.

If you have undergone in-person journalist safety training, do the organisers pay for your transportation, the logistics, and/or legal fees?

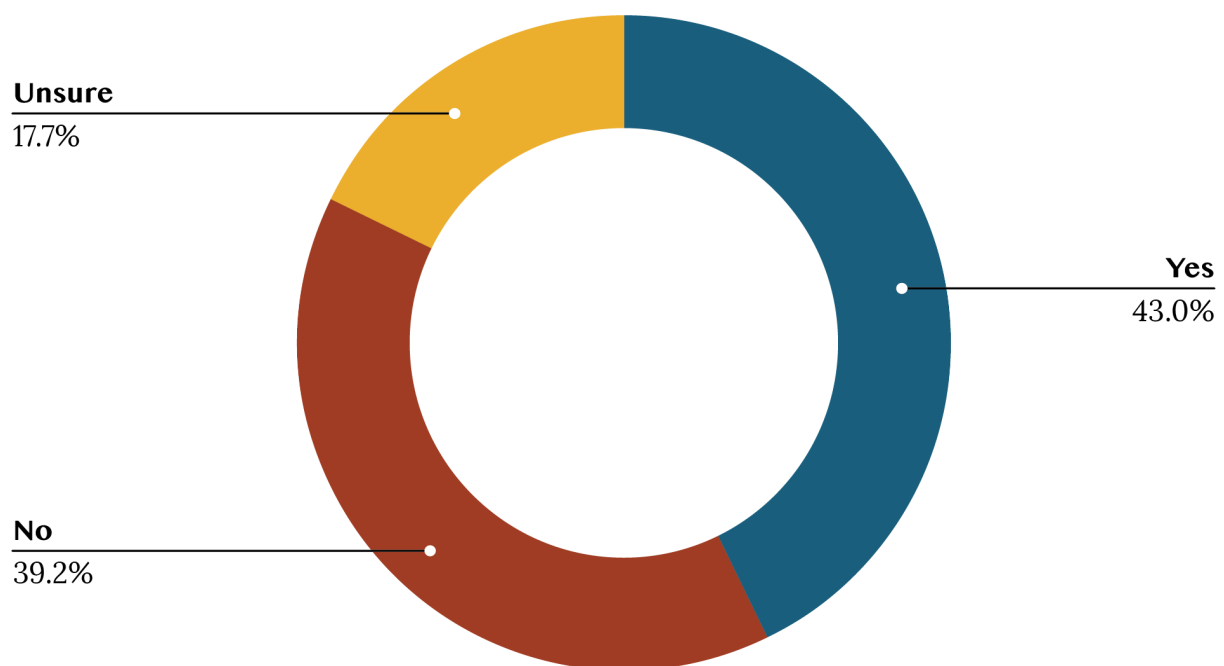


If you have undergone some form of journalist safety training, how useful was it?



Participants in the focus group discussions mentioned that while journalists did receive some form of safety training, equipment provisions should accompany the workshops. For example, safety training recommends that journalists have separate devices for work and personal communications and yet many individual journalists and media houses cannot afford to provide separate devices to cover this simple safety precaution. Indeed, our survey found that less than half (43%) of media houses were providing separate devices for their employees for work.

Does your current or most recent media house provide separate devices for work?



Our research found that comprehensive and holistic safety and wellbeing support is still needed for women journalists (and journalists in general) in exile. Holistic support refers to a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing various aspects of an individual's well-being. In the context of support for individuals, especially in challenging situations such as those faced by journalists, holistic support goes beyond addressing one specific issue and aims to consider the person's overall needs – physical, emotional, social, and professional. This approach emphasizes a more thorough and inclusive way of supporting individuals to ensure their overall health, resilience, and success. The programs that exist so far, unfortunately, fall short of the standards for holistic support for journalists.

Recommendations & Conclusions

When discussing the role of media in Myanmar, it is best to think of it as "revolutionary creative labor." This phrase evokes the ongoing efforts of journalists to report events within Myanmar truthfully and emphasizes the responsibilities shouldered by these individual journalists and their media organizations alike in conflict ridden regions. When considering the critical importance of this work, the need for sustained support is obvious. Our paper acknowledges that the role of media, and particularly gender representation in media, is paramount in fostering a free and open society. A diverse and inclusive media landscape ensures that a range of perspectives and voices are heard, contributing to a more robust civic discourse. By promoting gender equality in the media, we not only enhance the quality and accuracy of information but also reinforce the principles of freedom of expression, empowering all citizens to actively engage in the public sphere.

Without the tenacity, grit, and commitment of individual journalists making the choice to turn up and continue to report on the situation on the ground in Myanmar, there would be no media industry. Despite the tremendous challenges they face, women journalists continue to work, report, and persist in their mission for a free Myanmar.

“One thing I have noticed since the coup is that a lot of the media outlets from Myanmar are extremely resilient people and have done an amazing job under the most difficult circumstances. Even when they are calling up their sources or having to identify who they are or where they are calling from, they are putting themselves at risk every single day just by doing their jobs, but they are still producing and reporting, and trying to do it in as objective a way as possible.” – Thin Lei Win, Co-founder of Myanmar Now & International Correspondent.

It is critical that funders, support organizations, and media houses ensure the survival of journalists and journalism by eliminating or minimizing the obstacles that face them as often as possible.

Recommendations for Funders

It is evident that the existing level of support falls short of meeting the material requirements of Myanmar media in exile. As the geopolitical landscape further deteriorates, international funding is being redirected to other regions, spreading support organizations thinner than ever before. Independent media houses, forever dependent on donor funding, are struggling to survive. If this issue is not addressed, serious problems will arise concerning the long-term viability of these media houses and, consequently, the ability of individual journalists to effectively inform the public.

Funders play a crucial role in supporting journalism and must continue to support Myanmar media in order to sustain public discourse and civil society, especially in the face of the extreme conditions we are confronting now. It is recommended that funders recognize the significance of

providing **benefits and livelihood support** to journalists, through both their media organizations and independent mechanisms for freelancers. **Making concessions for media organizations in their overheads**, particularly for services that ensure the well-being of journalists, is fundamental. **Flexibility in funding** is crucial to adapting to the changing situations on the ground.

Funders should direct attention on the policies implemented by the media organizations they support, ensuring not only the sustainability of journalism but also equitable and gender-sensitive working conditions for the journalists they employ. By actively engaging with the organizations they fund, donors can play a pivotal role in promoting fair and inclusive workplaces. This involves **scrutinizing personnel handbooks and policies, advocating for updates** to reflect changing circumstances, and ensuring that manuals are available in both Burmese and English. Emphasizing gender sensitivity in the workplace is crucial, and funders should **incentivize media organizations to implement policies** that foster equality, address harassment concerns, and provide support tailored to the specific needs of women journalists. In doing so, funders contribute not only to the sustainability of journalism but also to the creation of safe, diverse, and empowering environments for media professionals in Myanmar.

Furthermore, funders should consider **integrating gender-specific budgeting and programming** into the allocation of funds to local partners. A gender budget is an approach to budgeting that analyzes the allocation of resources through a gender lens, aiming to understand and address gender inequalities in financial distribution. In the context of media organizations, implementing a gender budget involves assessing how financial resources are allocated to ensure equitable opportunities and conditions for all genders within the organization. Funders can play a crucial role in supporting media organizations by encouraging or requiring the implementation of gender budgets. This includes providing financial support specifically earmarked for initiatives that promote gender equality, such as programs aimed at addressing gender-based harassment, ensuring fair representation, and offering support services tailored to the needs of women journalists. By integrating gender budgeting principles, funders contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive environment within media organizations, fostering diversity, and addressing gender disparities.

Lastly, funders should consider **supporting organizations that provide holistic support** not only to institutions but also to individual journalists. Independent journalists frequently face greater challenges in accessing safety training, resources, and legal assistance, making external support critical for their well-being. Moreover, **backing initiatives that support freelancers** promotes freedom of the press and the proliferation of diverse narratives. These journalists play a crucial role in uncovering stories and perspectives that might otherwise remain untold, enriching the media ecosystem with a plurality of voices. Therefore, funders can foster a more vibrant and resilient media environment by prioritizing initiatives that specifically cater to the unique needs and challenges faced by freelancers and journalists operating independently.

Recommendations for Media Organizations

Media organizations should take proactive measures to address the safety of journalists and focus particularly on the distinct challenges faced by women journalists. **Unfair gendered expectations** in the workplace, including gender-related biases that hinder professional growth or lead to discriminatory treatment, must be clearly defined and recognized to prevent inadvertent abuses and ensure equitable working conditions for women journalists.³⁰ Committing to an inclusive workplace, where any gender-based harassment or discrimination is actively acknowledged and challenged, is crucial. Media entities must strive to create an environment that fosters equal opportunities for all journalists, irrespective of gender.

In order to establish a safer and more equitable working environment, media organizations should **regularly update personnel handbooks and policies** to align with both local and international standards. Essential employment documents, such as personnel manuals, contracts, and workplace etiquette guidelines, should be **available in both Burmese and English**. Ensuring that **all staff members read, comprehend, and sign** these documents is essential and will foster more complete understanding and compliance.

Additionally, media organizations must provide ongoing support to media professionals beyond the category of journalists, particularly those working as stringers, citizen journalists (CJs), and sources on the ground, placing special emphasis on **digital and informational security**.

Recommendations for Media Support Groups

The trend historically has been to support the professional development of journalists and the institutional development of the media sector in Myanmar. However, the situation now requires detailed and comprehensive support for the livelihoods and wellbeing of journalists, as the factors that impact their professional outputs (ie, displacement, precarity, lack of material resources) are often humanitarian in nature and require more concerted support than current media development institutions are ready to deliver. However, to preserve the wellbeing of the journalists and to support the future of the industry, **expansion of what work is considered “media development”** must be considered.

³⁰ In terms of safety, women journalists encounter increased vulnerability during border crossings, with concerns about accommodation and safety during rural stays. Financial disparities and limited access to aid further amplify the challenges, especially for undocumented women journalists. In the professional realm, women confront disparities in income, limited opportunities for career advancement, and discouragement from media house owners. Societal expectations add another layer, with traditional gender roles influencing the perception of women journalists who balance family responsibilities with their professional roles. These expectations can contribute to emotional abuse, disparities in treatment within safehouses, and even impact decisions to resign from their jobs.

Further protections are needed to safeguard sources and CJs, with increased resources directed to journalists in exile to **ensure the safety of both sources and journalists on the ground**. Support groups should be **attentive to the articulated needs of journalists** operating in exile.

Focus group discussion participants in Mae Sot expressed concerns about their limited understanding of the **Thai language**. While some groups, including Exile Hub, are providing Thai language classes and support, the need is much greater than the supply. The discussion also touched on the necessity of **understanding Thai law** and the policing system in Thailand. Participants suggested that understanding the law and documenting interactions with authorities could be essential for their safety.

Women journalists in both Chiang Mai and Mae Sot identified key training and further support needs in the focus group discussions. Many of the support needs were provided partially by one or more media development organizations, but to varying degrees of efficacy and scale. Participants highlighted the need for **safety training that is practical and time-sensitive**. They expressed the challenge of balancing full-time work with lengthy safety training sessions and emphasized the importance of addressing this practical concern. Participants highlighted the need for **gender sensitive tailored safety training** to account for the unique experiences of exiled women journalists. They encouraged more frequent and specialized training sessions for exiled women journalists.

Participants emphasized the importance of women's organizations providing **protection and support during safety crises**, as well as readily available contact information in Mae Sot for emergencies. Participants requested more comprehensive information on support systems tailored to assisting women journalists in Mae Sot, including **contact details for assistance in cases of sexual harassment** and other safety issues. Editors from the focus group discussion mentioned that women journalists in Myanmar often silently endure harassment without reporting it and expressed the need for concrete actions to be taken to support their safety.

“We want you to include whom to contact in case of sexual harassment. We want to have numbers that we can contact in Mae Sot. Right now I only know [Exile Hub], and I think it's not enough sources. We need more sources that we can use when we are in trouble.” – Participant 3, FGD 1.

Speaking out about harassment is challenging due to the lack of concrete evidence and potential consequences. While some media organizations have taken steps to protect women journalists, budgetary constraints and financial challenges post-coup limit their ability to provide comprehensive support.

Participants called for a more inclusive approach, advocating for the **involvement of male colleagues in sexual harassment training**. They stressed the importance of ensuring that all

colleagues, regardless of gender, are educated about and sensitive to issues of sexual harassment. This broader approach can address the root causes of harassment in the workplace.

Supporting the establishment of **independent mechanisms for supporting women journalists** outside of media organizations and providing contact details for **assistance in cases of sexual harassment** are crucial steps in enhancing the safety and well-being of individual women journalists. Further **audits of employers and media organizations** are needed to ensure that no gendered abuses are occurring within these groups.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this research has provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by women journalists in Myanmar, further study is essential to extrapolate these findings to the broader context of all journalists in the country. The experiences of women journalists, as highlighted in this research, intersect with and influence the overall working conditions, safety concerns, and professional challenges encountered by journalists regardless of gender. A comprehensive understanding of the media landscape in Myanmar necessitates an exploration of the commonalities and distinctions between the experiences of male and female journalists. Additionally, considering the evolving political and social dynamics in Myanmar, ongoing research is needed to capture the fluid nature of these challenges and to inform targeted interventions that can benefit the entire journalistic community. This broader perspective is integral to developing holistic strategies that address the diverse needs of journalists in Myanmar.

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Appendix I : Context

Media Landscape Pre-Coup

Early Days

Myanmar's media landscape has undergone significant transformations marked by decades of strict censorship and government control and punctuated by fluctuations in media freedom during different periods of military authoritarianism and quasi-democratic reform.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Myanmar's media grappled with severe suppression under General Ne Win's regime. The government imposed stringent censorship across all media forms, leading to the imprisonment of newspaper editors who sought to counter the military junta's narratives and the establishment of state-run newspapers,³¹ designed to stifle independent voices.³² Moreover, the formation of the Burma Press Council in 1962 enforced a state-imposed code of ethics, further curtailing press freedom. By 1966, private newspapers were banned altogether, leading to the decline of privately-owned independent press outlets in the country. This period was characterized by a harsh crackdown on political dissent and the transformation of media outlets into tools for propagating the ideologies of Ne Win's Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP), which culminated in the ratification of the "Burmese Way to Socialism" constitution in 1974.

A turning point came in 1988 when the country's media landscape underwent a dramatic shift. It was a year characterized by widespread pro-democracy uprisings and protests against the junta that had ruled the country with an iron grip since 1962. On the 8th of August, 1988, university students, catalyzed by deteriorating economic conditions and political repression, took to the streets, demanding the reestablishment of democracy and the institution of basic human rights. The protests quickly spread across the country, with millions of people participating in what became known as the 8888 Uprising. However, on the 18th September, 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) assumed power through a military coup, which squashed the pro-democracy movement by deploying soldiers to major cities, including the then-capital Rangoon and Mandalay, who then opened fire on peaceful demonstrators.. The military's ruthless crackdown resulted in an estimated 3,000 people killed and another 3,000 imprisoned.³³ In the aftermath of the coup, General Saw Maung emerged as the leader of the SLORC, the new ruling junta. The SLORC suspended the constitution, dissolved the government, and imposed martial law. This violent turn of events prompted thousands of students (mostly of Bamar descent), to flee

³¹ Such as the Working People's Daily and Forward Weekly.

³² Lisa Brooten, Jane Madlyn McElhone & Gayathry Venkiteswaran, "Introduction: Myanmar Media Historically and the Challenges of Transition," *Myanmar Media in Transition*, (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019): p.18.

³³ Lisa Brooten & Jane Madlyn McElhone, "Navigating the Post-Coup Media World: The Creative and Precarious Labor of Myanmar's New Generation of Media Workers," *Independent Journal of Burmese Scholarship* 2, no. 1 (March 2023): p.116.

the junta's stronghold regions, seeking refuge in exile or aligning themselves with well-established ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in the borderlands. These EAOs had long been engaged in resistance against the authoritarian rule of the Myanmar junta.

As demonstrated, 1988 marked a significant turning point in the country's media landscape. When the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) assumed power, media repression intensified. The state-owned Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) became the primary source of information, disseminating government-approved content while censoring news and opinions critical of the regime. Independent journalism was virtually non-existent, and journalists faced censorship, harassment, and imprisonment if they attempted to report on sensitive political issues such as stories featuring opposition figures like Aung San Suu Kyi. Despite these challenges, a small underground network of journalists and activists managed to disseminate alternative information through clandestine means. The post-1988 period was marked by a lack of press freedom, with the government maintaining strict control over information and stifling dissenting voices.

Journalist and media consultant Lyndal Min, reflecting on this period, observed that "at the time, their [the 1988 pro-democracy movement] discourse of democracy and human rights coincided with U.S. foreign policy interests, in particular U.S. president Ronald Reagan's ostensible mission to promote freedom and democracy around the world."³⁴ This instigated a significant wave of Western media development support to exiled Myanmar media (specifically along the Thai-Myanmar border), giving rise to the establishment of professional and credible exiled media outlets that covered Myanmar affairs. Prominent examples include *The Irrawaddy*, established in 1990 by Myanmar exiles in Thailand, and *Mizzima*, founded in 1998 by Myanmar exiles in New Delhi, India.

While media already operating in ethnic-controlled areas along the borderlands remained relatively unchanged, exiled media underwent profound transformations. The 1988 pro-democracy movement gave rise to Myanmar's first generation of exiled media, serving as a crucial counter to the junta's propaganda. Together with media outlets in ethnic-controlled regions inside Myanmar, this dissemination of information played a vital role in countering the junta's narrative and providing the public with alternative sources of news.

In the early 2000s, exiled Myanmar media gained significant international attention, with their profile soaring in the aftermath of two pivotal events: the 2007 Saffron Revolution and the catastrophic Cyclone Nargis in 2008. These critical junctures played an instrumental role in thrusting exiled media outlets into the global spotlight. During the Saffron Revolution, a period marked by widespread protests led by monks and civilians against the repressive military junta, exiled media emerged as a vital source of uncensored coverage that was otherwise stifled within the

³⁴ Jane Madlyn McElhone & Lisa Brooten, "Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression," *Myanmar Media in Transition*, (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019): p.104.

country. Similarly, in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, which wreaked havoc in Myanmar in 2008, exiled media outlets assumed a critical role as indispensable sources of information for both domestic and global audiences. Because these outlets operated from bases outside the country, they could report news more freely and safely and offer invaluable insights into the extent of the disaster and the junta's response. Their coverage bridged significant information gaps created by the constrained domestic media landscape under the oppressive rule of the SLORC.

Amid these tumultuous events, the ratification of the 2008 Constitution raised hopes for greater media freedom in Myanmar. This constitution introduced provisions ostensibly safeguarding freedom of expression under Article 354(a) "to express and publish freely their convictions and opinions." However, these high hopes were tempered by substantial challenges. Government resistance, problematic laws, and limited access to information posed formidable obstacles to the realization of genuine media freedom and independence within the country. The complex interplay of these factors shaped the evolving landscape of media in Myanmar up until 2011.

Thein Sein Era

When the Thein Sein administration under the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) assumed power in 2011 following Myanmar's transition from military rule to a quasi-civilian government, the media landscape experienced significant shifts and key developments. The opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), contested the 2012 by-elections by winning 43 of the 45 available parliamentary seats despite the military's proxy party, the USDP, holding significant power. Notably, in 2012, pre-publication censorship was abolished, marking a pivotal moment in the country's media history. Alongside this change, the censorship body was disbanded, as well as "sixteen loosely worded guidelines for content that had held editors accountable for 'sensitive' content deemed harmful to national security or 'the dignity of the state'."³⁵ Legislative changes also occurred, allowing private owners to publish daily newspapers for the first time in five decades, albeit facing substantial financial and resource related challenges. Additionally, media outlets that had previously operated in exile or in the country's borderlands were granted official recognition and the ability to establish offices within Myanmar.

Despite initial optimism surrounding press freedom and media liberalization, the years from 2012 to 2015 witnessed a paradox of progress and setback. Many media actors and free expression advocates welcomed the media reform agenda initiated by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) in early 2012. The abolition of pre-publication censorship, along with the liberalization of the telecommunications sector, facilitated greater access to digital technologies and the establishment of international news agencies' offices within the country. This period also saw

³⁵ Brooten, McElhone & Venkiteswaran, "Introduction: Myanmar Media Historically and the Challenges of Transition," p.37.

the return of the majority of exiled media outlets and the emergence of new independent media outlets in various languages. However, this period of relative media freedom proved transient, as the Thein Sein administration began to curtail media freedom in 2014. This regression ultimately led to Myanmar's inclusion in the Committee to Protect Journalists' list of the world's ten most censored countries in 2015.³⁶

Central to this dynamic media landscape was the controversial Telecommunications Law, drafted during Thein Sein's administration. While intended to liberalize the telecommunications sector and enhance connectivity and competition, it raised concerns regarding potential infringements on freedom of expression. Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law, in particular, became a source of apprehension as it stated that "anyone found guilty of extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening any person by using any telecommunications network shall be punished with a maximum three years in prison, a fine or both."³⁷ Upon its initial introduction in 2013, Section 66(d) allowed anyone to submit a complaint. Interestingly, the majority of defamation complaints did not originate from the individuals purportedly defamed. Instead, they were often filed by others who asserted being offended by the statement.³⁸ Hence, the law's aggressive application during the transition period raised concerns about its impact on journalists, activists, and individuals expressing themselves through digital platforms. These intricate developments unfolded within the broader context of Myanmar's evolving political landscape which is characterized by both progress and challenges.

NLD Era

The 2015 general elections in Myanmar marked yet another significant political shift as the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, secured a resounding victory and an absolute majority in both houses of the Myanmar parliament. While Aung San Suu Kyi was constitutionally barred from the presidency, she assumed the role of State Counsellor, a newly established position similar to that of a prime minister. This election outcome was seen as a positive step towards achieving greater democratic governance. However, it also initiated a period of delicate power-sharing between the military and the civilian government, introducing constraints on implementing substantial democratic reforms.³⁹

This era witnessed disheartening assessments of the NLD's commitment to preserving free expression and press freedom. Despite approximately two hundred journals and magazines operating in the private media sector, media freedom remained significantly restricted. In May

³⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, "10 Most Censored Countries." (2015).

³⁷ Burma Campaign UK, "Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law" (2017).

³⁸ Burma Campaign UK, "Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law" (2017).

³⁹ Thomas Fuller, "Myanmar Military Still Big Power Despite Opposition Victory." *New York Times* (November 10, 2015).

2018, a report by PEN Myanmar and its 18 expert partners painted a bleak picture, assigning the government a mere two points out of a possible sixty.⁴⁰ This assessment underlined “a significant lack of progress in instituting key reforms to secure free expression in Myanmar, as well as significant backsliding.”⁴¹ While the challenges of overturning decades of military repression were acknowledged, observers pointed to multiple areas where little to no improvement had occurred, and in some cases, regression had taken place. As media scholars Lisa Brooten, Jane Madlyn McElhone, and Gayathry Venkiteswaran cited, “the overall environment for media and expression, however, has not improved since the election of the National League for Democracy. By most accounts, it has worsened when compared with the initial changes made under the Thein Sein administration.”⁴²

Despite the emergence of new opportunities, such as international media development support, substantial obstacles hampered the development of Myanmar’s media as agents of uncensored, independent, and free information. The NLD administration perpetuated practices that curtailed press freedom and encouraged the media to act as agents of stability rather than as a check on power, employing outdated and problematic laws and other forms of subversion. For instance, colonial-era laws, including the Penal Code of 1860, the Unlawful Association Act of 1908, and the Official Secrets Act of 1923 persisted during the NLD administration, as well as the junta-era Printers and Publishers Registration Law of 1962. Despite the passage of new media reform laws, these antiquated restrictions continued to affect the media landscape by silencing journalists and writers, further deteriorating press freedom.⁴³

One significant tool used by the NLD administration to suppress free expression and media freedom was the 2013 Telecommunications Law, particularly Section 66(d). Free Expression Myanmar documented 106 cases filed under Section 66(d) of this law between November 2015 and November 2017, in which “11 complaints were made when the USDP government was in power and 95 complaints were made under the current NLD government.”⁴⁴ Particularly concerning was the fact that “most complainants using 66(d) were in positions of power, and that the majority of complainants were related to the state.”⁴⁵ Moreover, Free Expression Myanmar found that 67% of defendants were political party members, human rights defenders, journalists

⁴⁰ PEN Myanmar, “Scorecard Accessing Freedom of Expression in Myanmar.” (May 2, 2018).

⁴¹ PEN Myanmar, “Scorecard Accessing Freedom of Expression in Myanmar.”

⁴² Brooten, McElhone & Venkiteswaran, “Introduction: Myanmar Media Historically and the Challenges of Transition,” p.37.

⁴³ Gayathry Venkiteswaran, Yin Yadanar Thein & Myint Kyaw, “Legal Changes for Media and Expression: New Reforms, Old Controls,” *Myanmar Media in Transition*, (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019): p.65.

⁴⁴ Free Expression Myanmar, “66(d) No Real Change: An Analysis of Complaints Made before and after the 2017 Legal Amendment,” (December 2017): p.16.

⁴⁵ Free Expression Myanmar, “66(d) No Real Change,” p.17.

and others actively engaged in criticizing or monitoring those in power.⁴⁶ This perpetuated a climate of self-censorship and limited the media's ability to serve as a watchdog for society.

In 2017, the Rohingya genocide exposed the profound absence of human rights and media freedom in Myanmar, becoming a litmus test for the media's commitment to free expression, journalistic ethics, and professionalism. During the genocide, many local media outlets adjusted their reporting tone in accordance with government directives, labeling the attackers as terrorists and refraining from using the term "Rohingya" in favour of the racially charged term "Bengali". The government's threats to take action against media seen as "supportive" of the so-called terrorists further pressured these outlets to align with the government's stance. Only a handful of media organizations remained steadfast in their reporting, opting for more neutral terminology such as "attackers" instead of the politically charged term "terrorists".⁴⁷ This situation exposed the intricate dilemma confronting Myanmar's media – the struggle to strike a balance between adhering to ethical standards with the demand for sensationalized news, resulting in media outlets aligning with government directives even when confronting severe human rights transgressions.

As the Rohingya genocide persisted, journalists and media establishments traversed an increasingly precarious landscape where government influence continued to mold media discourse. This period witnessed a heightened vulnerability for journalists, with many navigating a delicate balance between reporting ethically and meeting the public's demand for sensationalized news. The arrests of journalists, such as the widely publicized case of Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo imprisoned for seven years under the Official Secrets Act, had a chilling effect on local journalism.⁴⁸ In this tense atmosphere, safety issues in the field became a growing concern, as many journalists lacked proper experience and support. In 2019, Ye Naing Moe, Director of the Yangon and Mandalay Journalism Schools, provided a poignant analogy when he likened the risks and hazards faced by journalists to "canaries in a coal mine".⁴⁹ This metaphor encapsulates the notion that journalists operate on the front lines, and serve as early indicators of the threats and challenges within Myanmar's media landscape. Just as the canaries' survival was a signal of persisting dangers for miners in coal mines, so were the journalists' continued efforts amidst adversity.

The evolution of Myanmar's media landscape from the 2015 general elections to the aftermath of the Rohingya genocide reflects a complex journey marked by both hope and persistent challenges. The NLD's initial electoral victory appeared to hold the promise of greater democratic governance. However, assessments of media freedom under the NLD's leadership indicated a lack of substantial

⁴⁶ Free Expression Myanmar, "66(d) No Real Change," p.18.

⁴⁷ Lawi Weng, "Media in Myanmar: Laws, Military and the Public," *Myanmar Media in Transition*, (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019): pp.240-241.

⁴⁸ Frontline Defenders, "Ko Wa Lone Arrested Under Official Secrets Act." (May 8, 2019).

⁴⁹ Nai Nai & Jane Madlyn McElhone, "Educating a new generation of Watchdogs: Interview with Ye Naing Moe, Director of the Yangon and Mandalay Journalism Schools," *Myanmar Media in Transition*, (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019): p.209.

progress, a regression even from prior reforms. The government's reliance on outdated laws and the enforcement of restrictions like the 2013 Telecommunications Law's Section 66(d) placed immense pressure on the media. The Rohingya genocide further exposed the media's struggle to balance ethics with the public's demand for sensational news, and the years that followed remained marked by a media landscape characterized by moments of hope intertwined with persistent challenges as the nation grappled with issues of media freedom, ethical dilemmas, and government-imposed censorship.

The February 1st, 2021 Military Coup

Before the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the nation's independent media landscape was experiencing a period of optimism and growing opportunities for change. This period was characterized by an increasingly free press environment despite the numerous ethical dilemmas and challenges faced, including but not limited to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Independent media outlets were emerging as powerful agents of change, promoting transparency and accountability in a country where such values had long been suppressed.

However, the 2021 coup marked a pivotal and dark moment in Myanmar's history, characterized by the unlawful seizure of power and the formation of the State Administration Council (SAC), which had profound and far-reaching implications for the country's media landscape. The coup triggered an immediate response, as hundreds of thousands of civil servants joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in defiance of the military's takeover. This courageous act set off widespread labor strikes across various sectors. The streets reverberated with the collective voice of diverse groups, who employed traditional practices like the clanging of pots and pans to repel negativity. The entire nation united against the oppressive regime, marking an impactful manifestation of resistance. In response, the military, known locally as the Tatmadaw, adopted a range of tactics to exert control, stifle dissent, and severely restrict press freedom. The consequences of the coup were dire and resulted in a dramatic transformation of the media environment in the country.

One of the most significant impacts of the coup was the surge in violence and warfare throughout Myanmar. The airstrikes conducted as part of this surge in violence were particularly troubling, as they involved the use of high explosives. This raised serious concerns about potential violations of the principles of distinction and proportionality in armed conflict. Additionally, it suggested a degree of coordination in these attacks, as well as the prevention of life-saving services and humanitarian aid reaching affected populations. Furthermore, the airstrikes led to the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including monasteries, health and medical clinics, schools, and other essential facilities protected under international humanitarian law. These attacks not only resulted in the loss of innocent lives but also inflicted severe damage to critical elements of Myanmar's

societal and civic structure. Journalists found themselves on the front lines, bearing witness to military artillery attacks and airstrikes that often led to indiscriminate casualties. Tragically, some journalists lost their lives in these attacks, as seen in Lay Kay Kaw in December 2021, after artillery and bombings from the Tatmadaw forced thousands of villagers, including women, children, and elders, to flee their homes in Karen State and cross the Moei River into Thailand.⁵⁰

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) initiated a series of aggressive measures with the explicit aim of suppressing the independent media outlets that had thrived during the brief period of relative press freedom. This crackdown on media was part of the military's broader strategy to assert control over the media landscape. On February 2nd, 2021, just one day after the coup, "the Ministry of Information (MoI), now controlled by the SAC, released Order 1/2021, which warned: "Do not post rumors on social media or make statements encouraging rioting and instability" and announced that "media organizations should cooperate with the government in accordance with existing laws."⁵¹ This marked the initial step in the military's systematic campaign to suppress independent media, a campaign that encompassed the revocation of media licenses, the shutdown of broadcasting channels, the application of criminal procedures and laws, and the introduction of amendments specifically aimed at further constraining press freedom.

In an orchestrated effort to suppress independent voices and press freedom, the SAC executed a sweeping campaign of raids and arrests on media outlets and their offices. This broader initiative to silence independent voices began on March 8th, 2021, when the office of Myanmar Now was subjected to a military raid. Subsequently, on the following day, offices belonging to Mizzima, the Hakha Post, and Kamayut Media faced similar incursions.⁵² During these events, Nathan Maung and Han Thar Nyein, the editor-in-chief and co-founder of Kamayut Media, were arrested.⁵³ Further incidents transpired, with raids on the Monywa Gazette and the Tachileik News Agency on April 21st, 2021, Myaylatt Athan on March 5th, 2021, and a subsequent raid on August 26th, 2021, Shwe Phee May on May 5th, 2021, Thanlwin Times on June 25th, 2021, and The Irrawaddy on October 14th and 15th, 2021. The suppressive tactics extended beyond the raids; media organizations, including renowned outlets such as Myanmar Now, Mizzima, the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), 7 Day, and Khit Thit Media, had their licenses arbitrarily revoked. As of the time

⁵⁰ Karen News, "The Symbolic Peace Town – Lay Kay Kaw – Now a Battle Ground, as Burma Army Bombs and Loots." (January 24, 2022).

⁵¹ Myo Thawdar, "Thrust Back into the Dark Age: Challenges Facing the News Media After the Coup," *Independent Journal of Burmese Scholarship* 2, no. 1 (March 2023): p.42.

⁵² Myanmar Now, "Police raid office of ethnic Chin media outlet." (April 5, 2021).

⁵³ Myanmar Now, "Security forces raid Kamayut Media office in Yangon." (March 9, 2021).

of writing, two and a half years after the 2021 coup, the total number of media organization licenses revoked by the military stands at 14.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the SAC implemented a series of legal amendments to existing laws, including revisions to the Penal Code, aimed at consolidating authority and suppressing opposition. For instance, Section 505(a) of the Penal Code previously made it a crime to publish or circulate anything “with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, any officer, soldier, sailor or airman, in the Army, Navy or Air Force to mutiny or otherwise disregard or fail in his duty.”⁵⁵ However, on February 14th, 2021, the SAC inserted three additional sub-clauses into a Section 505(a) “that could be used to punish comments regarding the illegitimacy of the coup or the military government, among others.”⁵⁶ These revisions intentionally employed broader language with the explicit aim of prosecuting individuals who raised doubts about the legitimacy of the Myanmar junta, with violations of the section punishable by up to three years in prison. This legal modification holds great significance for the media sector, as more than one-third of detained journalists following the coup have faced charges under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code.⁵⁷

The actions taken by the SAC to suppress the media were part of a deliberate strategy aimed at controlling the flow of information and concealing its own activities. This deliberate suppression of the media has led to an alarming decline in press freedom. Furthermore, the impact of these measures extends beyond just journalists, as their family members are also at risk in post-coup Myanmar. Often, the military resorts to arresting family members of wanted journalists when the journalist manages to evade capture. The scope of this crackdown is so broad that the SAC has even begun targeting former journalists who are no longer active in the media industry.⁵⁸ As a result, the once-thriving network of democratic media that had developed over the past decade has been systematically dismantled. These attacks have created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, significantly hampering the practice of journalism. The suppression of a free press infringes upon the fundamental right of citizens to access information and undermines the principles of transparency and accountability.

Media Landscape Post-Coup

In the post-2021 coup landscape, the military junta’s escalating restrictions and targeted media suppression prompted numerous media agencies to make a critical decision: relocate to territories controlled by ethnic armed groups, known as ‘liberated areas’, or seek refuge in neighboring

⁵⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, “Myanmar military revokes media license of Ayeyarwaddy Times.” (June 16, 2023).

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Myanmar: Post-Coup Legal Changes Erode Human Rights.” (March 2, 2021).

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch, “Myanmar: Post-Coup Legal Changes Erode Human Rights.”

⁵⁷ Thawdar, “Thrust Back into the Dark Age: Challenges Facing the News Media After the Coup,” p.53.

⁵⁸ Thawdar, “Thrust Back into the Dark Age: Challenges Facing the News Media After the Coup,” p.42.

countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh, and India. This mass exodus has resulted in significant challenges, with many journalists finding themselves in precarious situations, lacking essential protections, valid visas, legal documentation, and access to essential services such as healthcare. While the exact number of Myanmar journalists living in exile since the coup remains uncertain, the International Press Institute suggests at least 1,000,⁵⁹ although many experts believe this is a conservative estimate. Interviews with media experts conducted during our research indicate that nearly 1,000 journalists, including 300 women, reside in Thailand alone. Exiled media outlets have adopted a hybrid model, with some employees operating from Thailand while others remain inside Myanmar. This ‘one foot in, one foot out’ approach presents substantial obstacles. Nevertheless, their unwavering commitment to their journalistic responsibilities in oppressive conditions remains unshaken.

In the two and a half years since the coup, exiled media outlets have had to adapt, shifting from conventional staff meetings to more secure communication platforms like Signal and Telegram, especially when collaborating with in-country staff. Emphasis on digital safety training has grown and financial transactions have become a sensitive matter, given the junta’s scrutiny of foreign funding sources. In response, some exiled media outlets such as The Irrawaddy have turned to hundi, an ancient money transfer system that minimizes paper trails.⁶⁰

Despite their physical distance from Myanmar, exiled media outlets operating along the Thai-Myanmar border continue to find measures of access and freedom. Their proximity allows them to maintain connections with diverse sources, including Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), People’s Defense Forces (PDFs), members of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and the Myanmar migrant worker population residing in Thailand. While fully operating within Myanmar remains unfeasible, their close proximity to the country ensures they maintain critical access to information and ongoing coverage.

Myanmar journalists living in exile in Thailand are confronted with a challenging and precarious existence, subject to the whim of political considerations and Thai policies. As Fortify Rights representative Patrick Phongsathorn astutely points out:

“Thailand has hosted pretty sizable refugee populations for forty years, and they really want to avoid having that situation again with the recent refugees. Thailand’s laws and policies criminalize seeking refugee status. That pushes people to lead a life in the shadows, under constant fear of extortion, arbitrary arrest and detention and forced return. That, in turn,

⁵⁹ Laure Siegel, “In Myanmar, journalists raise media voices against the bloody coup.”

⁶⁰ Celeste Katz Marston, “Forced to Flee: How Exiled Journalists Hold the Powerful to Account,” *Nieman Reports* (March 20, 2023).

*drives people into modern slavery. The Thai government's relations with the Burmese junta also play a part in how refugees are treated.*⁶¹

The challenges faced by Myanmar journalists in Thailand are exacerbated by the absence of adequate support. While certain exiled news agencies secured prompt funding immediately after the coup, primarily utilized for evacuating their personnel to Thailand, numerous journalists were not as fortunate. This left them grappling with precarious living conditions, all the while facing persistent threats from both the Myanmar junta and Thai authorities. These individuals faced various problems, including “not understanding the laws in Thailand, language difficulties, inadequate temporary accommodation, and the financial demands associated with arriving in Thailand illegally.”⁶² Moreover, exiled Myanmar journalists regularly encounter security difficulties such as “insufficient accommodation and safehouses for targeted journalists, lack of equipment and training on how to reduce the risk of arrest when recording videos and photos, and lack of protection mechanisms in place for journalist arrests.”⁶³ This links to the financial difficulties faced by exiled media outlets as they grapple with unsustainable revenue models, or lack thereof, which pose a significant challenge when trying to cover the costs of obtaining legal documentation in Thailand or even simply paying their staff an adequate salary. These challenges highlight the uphill battle exiled journalists endure as they strive to maintain their journalistic integrity amidst high-risk environments.

⁶¹ Researchers' Republic, “Voices of Women Displaced by the War in Myanmar,” (January 2023): p.10.

⁶² Kyaw Swar, “How Independent News Media Struggles to Survive,” *Independent Journal of Burmese Scholarship* 2, no. 1 (March 2023): p.210.

⁶³ Swar, “How Independent News Media Struggles to Survive,” p.211.

Appendix II: Literature Review

Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape: Yangon, Kayin, Sagaing, Shan and across Myanmar.”

In our preliminary exploration, we conducted an extensive review of existing literature concerning Myanmar’s media landscape, revealing the persistence of recurring patterns from the era of General Ne Win to the more recent NLD administration which continue to manifest in the media landscape following the 2021 military coup, albeit with some exacerbations. In 2016, the Fojo Media Institute unveiled a significant report entitled “Gender in the Media Landscape,” which brought to light the intricate and multifaceted challenges confronting women journalists in Myanmar. This comprehensive report offers a detailed overview of the experiences of these journalists and the prevailing gender dynamics within the media sector, drawing insights from a substantial dataset, including 223 survey respondents, 22 in-person interviews, and an extensive series of ten focus group discussions.

The report serves as a valuable resource for our research, as it takes an intersectional view, considering both structural and cultural barriers that women in journalism confront. By exploring the complex interplay of these factors, it offers a more nuanced perspective on the gender disparities, safety concerns, unequal pay, and limited institutional support experienced by women journalists in Myanmar. This intersectional analysis is a notable advantage, as it emphasizes that these challenges are not isolated but deeply intertwined. Consequently, it presents a holistic view that is critical for understanding the multi-layered nature of these obstacles.

An additional merit of this report is its investigation into the evolving roles of women within Myanmar’s media industry. It shows the remarkable increase in the number of women media professionals following the political changes in 2010. While the study reveals a substantial presence of women in the industry, it is crucial to recognize that their representation is primarily concentrated in lower-ranking and mid level positions, often as lifestyle reporters, feature writers, television anchors, announcers, and desk editors.⁶⁴ Geographical disparities further emphasize the challenges faced by women in the media. For example, respondents in Yangon noted that a moderate percentage of senior editorial positions were held by women while in regions beyond Yangon the representation dropped significantly, with half of our respondents stating that less than 10% of such positions are held by women.⁶⁵ Only 8% indicated that a higher percentage of senior positions were occupied by women.⁶⁶ This disparity highlights the uneven distribution of women’s progress in media leadership roles across the country and underscores the obstacles that women

⁶⁴ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.14.

⁶⁵ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.14.

⁶⁶ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.14.

media professionals encounter in advancing to leadership roles. We will keep this trend in mind when investigating the presence of women in leadership positions within exiled media environments in the post-coup landscape.

Furthermore, the Fojo Media Institute paper effectively utilizes case studies of media organizations where advancements have been made in addressing gender-related challenges and offers examples of best practices drawn from in-depth interviews. These case studies and interviews provide valuable insights into potential solutions and opportunities for improvement. Our own research endeavors will strive to incorporate similar insights and solutions in our findings, presenting a comprehensive perspective on gender issues within media and potential avenues for progress.

The report also shed light on a significant gender pay gap prevalent in the media industry. Research findings revealed that approximately two-thirds of women journalists reported receiving unequal compensation compared to their male colleagues.⁶⁷ These wage disparities contribute to workplace gender inequality and compromise the fundamental principle of equal pay for equal work. The report also notes that “the majority of journalists earn less than \$100 USD a month, ... [which] indicates an especially poor pay structure for women journalists.”⁶⁸ How present the gender pay gap remains in the post 2021 coup landscape is an important issue we wish to explore in future research.

The Fojo Media Institute report also brought to light the critical issue of workplace sexual harassment. 94% of survey respondents from Yangon claimed no experience with sexual harassment, but senior women journalists raised concerns about the validity of this statistic during the focus group discussions.⁶⁹ They argued that young women might not fully grasp the concept of sexual harassment, which extends beyond physical acts. A validation workshop with local partners reinforced the finding that sexual harassment’s general understanding in Myanmar is limited, with many equating it only with rape.⁷⁰ This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive education and training on sexual harassment, targeting both media professionals and the general public, to promote awareness and understanding of what constitutes harassment.

Conversely, 50% of women regional respondents reported experiencing verbal sexual harassment from news sources, with the absence of complaint mechanisms or gender committees within their respective media organizations hindering their ability to report such incidents.⁷¹ Additionally, the fear of shame and blame further discouraged victims from reporting harassment. The survey underscored women’s hesitancy to report harassment due to concerns about stigma and

⁶⁷ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.16.

⁶⁸ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.16.

⁶⁹ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.19.

⁷⁰ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.19.

⁷¹ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.19.

victim-blaming. Many male colleagues also failed to recognize their verbal harassment as a form of violence. These findings stress the necessity of comprehensive awareness programs covering the various dimensions of harassment and the establishment of safe reporting mechanisms.

Moreover, the report revealed the lack of robust sexual harassment policies within media organizations. Although some media houses have codes of conduct that address these issues partially, comprehensive policies targeting sexual harassment are often missing.⁷² This absence of policy displays the importance of media organizations establishing mechanisms that foster safe and inclusive workplaces and protect women journalists from harassment and discrimination. While “some of the media owners during individual interviews expressed their keenness to introduce in-house mechanisms that would create a better working environment for women”,⁷³ the overall lack of supportive measures highlights the need to promote gender-sensitive workplaces. These findings inform our research by collectively underscoring the immediate need for gender-sensitive policies, enhanced gender diversity, and secure reporting mechanisms, while emphasizing the importance of awareness and education programs to create a more equitable and safe media landscape in Myanmar.

The study highlights that gender discrimination in recruitment processes within the media industry is relatively low. While some individual cases indicate biased selection criteria that discriminate based on factors such as age, marital status, and religion, 75% of respondents reported access to a range of employment benefits.⁷⁴ These benefits included annual leave, medical leave, and maternity and paternity leave, albeit with varying levels of implementation across different organizations. Notably, only 4% of the respondents mentioned receiving a travel allowance, and merely 13% reported entitlement to annual pay increases.⁷⁵ State-owned media organizations in particular were found to offer progressive maternity leave policies, providing a full six months of maternity leave with full pay. Despite these advancements, social and cultural norms as well as family pressures continue to influence the decisions of many women in the media industry, leading them to leave their jobs after giving birth.

This is exacerbated by prominent issues of traditional gender roles, which constrain women journalists’ careers. Women often feel compelled to leave their journalistic roles upon marriage or childbirth due to the absence of policies facilitating re-entry to the profession. This phenomenon is attributed to societal expectations that prioritize women’s reproductive responsibilities over their professional aspirations.⁷⁶ This stereotyping of women as primary caregivers can only be combated

⁷² Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.19.

⁷³ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.19.

⁷⁴ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.16.

⁷⁵ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.16.

⁷⁶ Fojo Media Institute, “Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape,” p.16.

through the establishment of gender-inclusive policies that enable work-life balance and support career continuity.

Lastly, women journalists in this study faced significant challenges accessing training opportunities due to their demanding work schedules, highlighting the urgent need for flexible training programs tailored to their diverse requirements.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the report underscores the critical deficiencies in safety and gender training, which have historically been neglected in journalism training programs.⁷⁸ Safety training is essential for equipping journalists, especially women, with the skills and knowledge to navigate the potential risks associated with their profession. Gender training is equally vital, acting as a catalyst for fostering a more inclusive and equitable media environment. The combination of limited time for training and the historical absence of safety and gender training opportunities shows the need for more comprehensive and adaptable journalism training programs in Myanmar.

While the report identifies the need for safety and gender training, it would be beneficial to explore potential solutions, resources, or examples of successful training programs that could serve as models for the industry. This is something not included in the Fojo Media Institute report, but in our own research we will ensure that potential solutions and examples of best practices when present are included.

Nonetheless, the Fojo Media Institute's exploration of the intricate interplay between potential employment benefits and deeply ingrained gender norms within Myanmar's society is a facet that our preliminary research reveals to be largely unexplored in other academic works. Despite the publication date of this paper in 2016, its examination of the deficiencies in employment benefits within Myanmar's media landscape have been instrumental in enhancing our comprehension of the relationship between the potential availability of employment benefits and the pervasive influence of gendered societal norms that often impede their realization. The comprehensive methodology adopted in this research, which encompasses the diverse perspectives of 298 participants including male media professionals, along with the incorporation of numerous interviews threaded throughout the paper's findings, serves to enrich our study with a wide array of both quantitative and qualitative data. Consequently, this paper has significantly contributed to our understanding of how gender roles deeply entrenched in Myanmar's society can affect the accessibility of employment benefits for women journalists.

The "Gender in the Media Landscape" report by the Fojo Media Institute offers valuable insights into the obstacles faced by women in Myanmar's media industry. Its data-driven methodology, comprehensive examination of gender dynamics, and glimpses into potential solutions establish it as a valuable foundational resource for tackling gender-related issues.

⁷⁷ Fojo Media Institute, "Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape," p.20.

⁷⁸ Fojo Media Institute, "Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape," p.20.

Lisa Brooten & Jane Madlyn McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World: The Creative and Precarious Labor of Myanmar’s New Generation of Media Workers.”

In their March 2023 contribution to the Independent Journal of Burmese Scholarship (IJBS), Lisa Brooten and Jane McElhone offer valuable insights into the experiences of Myanmar’s media professionals, particularly those residing in exile in Thailand following the 2021 coup. Their paper, titled “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World: The Creative and Precarious Labor of Myanmar’s New Generation of Media Workers,” delves into the evolving landscape of Myanmar’s media professionals and their intricate intersection with revolutionary and professional creative labor.

The paper demonstrates notable strengths, particularly in its groundbreaking exploration of a previously underrepresented area in academic discourse. The authors draw attention to a noteworthy gap in existing literature – the underrepresentation of post-coup experiences, especially among women, in the independent media sector. They identify that “we could find no theory that provides an adequate, relevant framework for thinking about the creative, precarious labor of these media workers in the service of their profession and in the face of Myanmar’s revolution against military dictatorship.”⁷⁹ Hence, the authors introduce the concept of creative labor, utilized by various scholars in the past, such as James Jasper in *The Art of Moral Protest* (1997), and theorize a new framework to understand the labor undertaken by these media professions under duress and in exile.

The authors begin by drawing on communications scholar Marwan M. Kraidy’s conceptualization of “revolutionary creative labor”, which emphasizes the collective and embodied process of mobilizing innovative expression, production, and revolution to bring about profound social and political change. Accordingly, the paper broadens the lens through which the contributions of journalists are assessed. It offers a fresh perspective on the agency and labor of media professionals and draws attention to the dual nature of their work as both a creative piece and an activist rallying cry.⁸⁰ This expanded view extends beyond Myanmar’s borders, emphasizing the universal importance of journalists in conflict-ridden societies worldwide. By emphasizing the tension between media work and activism faced by exiled Myanmar journalists, this paper helps to illustrate the complex roles journalists play as both reporters and advocates. This duality serves as a powerful reminder of the dual responsibilities journalists often shoulder in conflict-ridden regions.

However, to encapsulate the transformation in the creative work of Myanmar media professionals following the coup, Brooten and McElhone go beyond the “revolutionary creative labor” framework to introduce a new theoretical perspective. They refer to this as “professional precarious creative labor” to convey the tension between media work and activism. In this context, Myanmar

⁷⁹ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.119.

⁸⁰ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.119.

media professionals demonstrate a dual commitment – both to professionalism and to the pro-democracy Spring Revolution. In the examination of the tensions between professionalism and activism experienced by Myanmar media workers, the conceptualization of “professional precarious creative labor” is enforced by the words of Ronald Koven, the then European representative for the World Press Freedom Committee: “sending in factual reporting is a form of political activism.”⁸¹ This perspective affords deep insight into the depth of the creative and emotional labor undertaken by Myanmar media professionals in response to the 2021 military coup and in exile.

The experiences of these media professionals, who are part of the communities directly affected by the violence, provide insights into how they are reimagining their future through unique forms of “professional precarious creative labor”.⁸² This point of view transcends conventional definitions of creativity and enables a more comprehensive understanding of the intertwined roles of media work and activism, illuminating the unique emotional proximity to violence that sets the work of these journalists apart from dominant journalistic and academic discourses on independent, professional journalism. Their commitment to professionalism, coupled with a dedication to the Spring Revolution, presents an ethical dilemma of bias, particularly when covering the resistance forces and the National Unity Government (NUG).⁸³ By acknowledging the proximity to violence experienced by Myanmar media professionals, the authors’ conceptualization of a new theory within the lens of creative labor moves “beyond the stale notions of distance that dominate the literature on journalism in the contexts of conflict.”⁸⁴ Brooten and McElhone’s formulation of the work of Myanmar journalists as “professional precarious creative labor” lays the groundwork for a debate between professional, ethical journalism and straight activism, but perhaps more importantly allows the nuance with which Myanmar media professionals operate in the post coup landscape to be perceived.

The paper further illustrates how the concept of “professional precarious creative labor” creates distinct forms of inclusion and exclusion, accentuating the role of factors such as education, class, ethnicity, and geographical location in shaping the opportunities and experiences of media workers. The coup has heightened their awareness of existing inequalities and deepened their understanding of Myanmar’s history, social dynamics, and regional disparities.⁸⁵ This newfound awareness molds their “professional precarious creative labor,” encapsulating the essence of their creativity in

⁸¹ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.120.

⁸² Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.138.

⁸³ On one hand, journalists have a commitment to objective reporting, factual accuracy, and balanced representation of events. Journalists are traditionally expected to provide unbiased information and present diverse perspectives, allowing the audience to form their own opinions. However, when Myanmar journalists are simultaneously devoted to the pro-democracy Spring Revolution, there is a risk that their personal beliefs and allegiances might influence their reporting. This can lead to the unintentional or subconscious inclusion of biases that favor the resistance forces and the NUG, compromising the journalistic principles of impartiality.

⁸⁴ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.137.

⁸⁵ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.139.

envisioning a new future for the country. By emphasizing the importance of “contextual objectivity,” the paper stresses that the pursuit of journalistic ethics, such as objectivity, necessitates resonance with and adaptation to the local cultural context. It argues that Myanmar’s media professionals pursue objectivity with more collective, dialogic, and multiperspectival methods than traditionally taught, aligning with a vision of a multicultural, inclusive, and egalitarian future for the nation.⁸⁶ This insight challenges prevailing notions of journalism and offers a promising path toward media practices that better reflect the unique cultural, social, and political milieu of Myanmar and its media both inside the country and that in exile.

Lastly, a critical aspect of the paper is the comparison between the experiences of the post-coup media workers and the generation that fled the country after the 1988 uprising. Both generations embarked on perilous journeys to escape military oppression and sought to harness the media as a tool for countering military propaganda. While the earlier generation laid the groundwork for independent media in exile, the post-coup generation continues to navigate the complex terrain of journalism, confronting issues of professionalism, objectivity, and commitment to countering the military regime.⁸⁷ It highlights that the pivotal role of journalists is not limited to one generation but continues to evolve and adapt in response to changing political landscapes. This comparison illustrates the enduring relevance of journalists in conflict-ridden societies, both in-country and in exile.

Nevertheless, Brooten and McElhone’s paper exhibits certain limitations. Notably, it relies more on a conceptual and theoretical framework than extensive empirical data or firsthand accounts from Myanmar media professionals themselves. This limitation leaves room for a more comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences, challenges, and contributions of these media professionals. Additionally, while the paper acknowledges the tensions between professionalism and activism among these journalists, it could delve deeper into the specific ethical dilemmas and complexities faced by media workers in their reporting. To overcome these limitations, our ongoing research aims to enhance the empirical foundation in this area, including at least 10 key informant interviews and data collection directly from exiled journalists through 80 survey respondents and 25 focus group discussion participants. By prioritizing these firsthand accounts, our research will offer a more nuanced exploration of their lived experiences, challenges, contributions, and seek to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities these media workers face.

Furthermore, there is a relatively limited focus on Myanmar women media professionals in Brooten and McElhone’s paper. The paper’s thesis was inspired by the experiences of young Myanmar media professionals, and specifically women who were panelists at the Myanmar Media Update conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand in March 2022, where they shared their experiences. The

⁸⁶ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.140.

⁸⁷ Brooten & McElhone, “Navigating the Post-Coup Media World,” p.124.

paper does provide valuable insights into the broader experiences of exiled media professionals, and touches upon the unique struggles of women media professionals, but it overlooks these distinct challenges. In contrast, our research places a deliberate emphasis on the experiences of exiled Myanmar women media professionals in Thailand within the post-coup landscape. This approach aims to offer a more inclusive and comprehensive examination of the specific issues faced by women journalists in exile, highlighting their unique struggles, security concerns, and the intersection of gender dynamics with their professional roles. By doing so, our research not only addresses a significant gap in the existing literature but also enriches the discourse on the experiences of women in the field of journalism during times of political upheaval and exile. This approach will ultimately contribute to a more holistic understanding of the challenges faced by media professionals in conflict-ridden Myanmar and elsewhere.

Jane Madlyn McElhone & Lisa Brooten, “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression.”

Throughout our preliminary desk research on existing literature about Myanmar media, one of the biggest gaps we identified was the dearth of comprehensive research on the media landscape. The country’s prolonged isolation during military dictatorship severely limited the scope of research scholars could undertake. Consequently, academic analyses are scattered, piecemeal, and challenging to access. This fragmentation impedes our understanding of media ownership, the status of independent media, and the historic role of international media development organizations for Myanmar media both inside the country and in exile. These factors ultimately create a fragmented, myopic perspective that hampers any comprehensive analysis of Myanmar’s media landscape pre or post-coup, as it fails to consider the intersections between ownership, economics, and political interests that perpetually influence media content.

This was the case until our researchers delved into *Myanmar Media in Transition: Legacies, Challenges and Change*. Edited by Lisa Brooten, Jane McElhone, and Gayathry Venkiteswaran, the book offers a unique perspective of Myanmar’s media landscape up until 2019. This collection of empirical and theoretical contributions, supplemented by insights from media professionals and reform advocates, bridges significant gaps in existing literature surrounding Myanmar media ownership, the structural organization of media houses and the complex interplay of media, politics, and society.

In particular, McElhone and Brooten’s chapter, entitled “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” offers historical insights and answers vital questions. It dissects the key actors, who supports them, and the assumptions underlying aid efforts during the military junta era, providing lessons for contemporary media development in Myanmar and beyond. This chapter dispels the misconception that media

development initiatives began exclusively post-2004 and offers a foundation for understanding the historical evolution of international media support pre-2021. By tracing the evolution of media development over two decades, the authors offer readers valuable insights into the complexities and dynamics of Myanmar’s media ecosystem. This historical perspective allows readers to appreciate the long journey that media development initiatives in Myanmar have undertaken and the challenges they have faced.

One of the notable strengths of “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” lies in its analysis of the intricate relationship between media development and democracy. The chapter comprehensively explores the multifaceted definition of “media development,” encompassing both its process and its outcome, while highlighting the definition’s contributions to good governance, economic development, and public participation.⁸⁸ It elucidates the robust association between a free press and a democracy, leading to a focus from media development organizations on journalism training, journalists’ safety, and safeguarding the freedom of the press. McElhone and Brooten shed light on how media development has been viewed as a fundamental component of regime change and democratization, emphasizing that the assumption is not that media itself embodies democratic values but that professional, independent, and ethical media possess intrinsic worth as a cornerstone of democracy.⁸⁹ In light of this, the authors explain how the conceptual framework regarding media development’s role in potential regime change and democratization has been effectively employed by international media development organizations to lay the foundation for their involvement in supporting Myanmar media as early as the 1980s.

However, the chapter does not shy away from acknowledging the limitations of this perspective. Drawing from the insights of political scientist Pippa Norris, it reminds the reader of the critical principle that correlation does not equate to causation. The authors use the example of Singapore to underscore this perspective, highlighting the paradox of zero tolerance for corruption but restricted press freedom in the country. This acknowledgment reflects the authors’ commitment to offering a balanced assessment of media development in the context of democratization. Furthermore, the paper thoughtfully considers and addresses other criticisms regarding international media development, including the argument that the predominant Western model is neocolonial, top-down, and project-driven. McElhone and Brooten effectively contend that such an approach imposes a Western paradigm on training and tends to employ an overly normative, one-size-fits-all strategy, often neglecting the nuanced complexities specific to individual countries.⁹⁰ These criticisms collectively emphasize the necessity of considering the broader context of civil society and the public sphere while also daring to acknowledge the intricacies inherent to

⁸⁸ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” pp.97-98.

⁸⁹ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” pp.98-100.

⁹⁰ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.99.

each culture, thereby steering clear of the parochial belief “that a free and plural media will always achieve positive democratic outcomes.”⁹¹ This comprehensive analysis demonstrates the significance of understanding the multifaceted dynamics of media development and its intricate relationship with the broader goals of democracy and good governance.

Another strength within “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” lies in its mapping of the diverse landscape of key actors and media development initiatives spanning the past three decades up until 2019. It highlights the involvement of a wide spectrum of donors, organizations, and advocates in various aspects of media development. As noted in the chapter, early supporters and key players included the International Media Support (IMS), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA), and Deutsche Welle (DW), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation (IMMF), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Burma Relief Centre, and Internews.⁹² These entities have made substantial contributions to different facets of media development, including: supporting exiled media outlets, empowering ethnic communities, bolstering opportunities for women and youth, conducting extensive journalism training, and promoting freedom of expression.⁹³ This profiling underlines the comprehensive approach that has underpinned media development in Myanmar, offering enhanced insight into the collaborative and multifaceted nature of these concerted efforts. Hence, media development in Myanmar prior to the coup was far from a one-size-fits-all endeavor; rather, it was a collaborative process that engaged a multitude of stakeholders across various domains, encompassing diverse training, scholarships, fellowships, and support for different segments of the media ecosystem. By recognizing the contributions of these key actors, the chapter paints a vivid picture of the network of support that had worked to foster independent journalism and free expression in Myanmar before the 2021 military coup, ultimately enriching our comprehension of media development in its entirety.

Furthermore, the authors adeptly fortify their assertions with a robust foundation of quantitative data, which includes detailed estimates of the financial backing extended to Myanmar’s media sector. Within the chapter, it becomes evident that media development in Myanmar has attracted considerable financial support from international donors. The statistics reveal that during the period between 2010 to 2015, official development assistance directed towards the media sector globally reached up to US\$454 million annually.⁹⁴ Within this, “at nearly US\$53 million, Myanmar was the fifth largest media support recipient country between 2010 and 2015.”⁹⁵ Sida, for instance, invested SEK 46 million (approximately US\$5.5 million) from 1998 to 2011, focusing on exiled

⁹¹ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.99.

⁹² McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.102.

⁹³ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” pp.105-106.

⁹⁴ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.100.

⁹⁵ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.100.

media outlets like Democratic Voice of Burma and The Irrawaddy as well as projects inside Myanmar.⁹⁶ Likewise, OSF spent around US\$6 million between 1994 and 2011 supporting Bamar-run exiled media outlets, small ethnic media in the borderlands, and various media training, scholarships, and fellowships.⁹⁷ These statistics illustrate the substantial resources committed to diverse initiatives within Myanmar’s media landscape. Consequently, this data-driven approach provides readers with a clear understanding of the substantial resources allocated to propel media development within Myanmar prior to the 2021 military coup.

In the context of media development aid in Myanmar, a significant portion of funding and resources were directed outside the country before the 2010s to support media outlets and journalists in exile, particularly in Thailand. This allocation strategy, as highlighted by McElhone and Brooten, reveals that “the vast majority of international media development aid went to media outlets and journalists working and studying outside of Burma.”⁹⁸ The central argument behind this approach stems from concerns about the safety and feasibility of funding media organizations operating within Myanmar. However, this strategic decision has not been without its share of criticism, primarily for not providing direct support to journalists within the country. To comprehend the reasoning behind this allocation strategy, “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” sheds light on the intricate and challenging environment that prevailed within Myanmar during the era of military rule. This is encapsulated by former OSF country director Liz Tydeman’s insights, in which she lists the multitude of obstacles and risks that accompanied efforts to provide support from within Myanmar’s borders. This included navigating the constraints imposed by a repressive regime and the inherent dangers associated with partnering with local organizations.⁹⁹ The tight grip of censorship regulations and restrictions on journalistic content further complicated the landscape, making it increasingly difficult for external donors to work effectively within the country. Consequently, a careful analysis of this perspective reveals the considerable barriers that thwarted direct support to media development efforts within Myanmar, ultimately leading to a preference for funding external entities.

Furthermore, the perspective of John Knaus from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), contributes additional insight into the reasoning behind allocating aid outside Myanmar. Knaus emphasizes the critical issue of access, highlighting the challenges faced by many donors and media development organizations in reaching journalists operating within the country due to the restrictions imposed by the government.¹⁰⁰ An assessment of the institutional capacity of

⁹⁶ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.105.

⁹⁷ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” pp.105-106.

⁹⁸ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.109.

⁹⁹ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.109.

¹⁰⁰ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.110.

in-country media and the formidable challenges they confronted in circumventing censorship played a pivotal role in influencing the decision to allocate aid externally.

“It’s a valid criticism that most of the money didn’t get inside, but it was a question of access. We couldn’t get to journalists inside because we weren’t allowed in. Also, what were they really publishing? What could they get past the censors? And what was their institutional capacity to manage international aid? That said, the target audience of exiled media was predominantly inside the country and many of the journalists came out of the country for training.”¹⁰¹

This analysis identifies that donors believed the best way to disseminate revolutionary information inside of Myanmar was to fund exile media organizations located outside the country. Understanding the complexities of media development aid allocation in Myanmar, and the factors that have driven the decisions of international donors, is crucial for formulating effective and contextually relevant approaches to support media development within the country. The historical context illuminates the intricacies of the decision-making process and offers valuable insights for shaping future strategies while acknowledging the persistent challenges in a politically restricted environment. Moreover, the authors emphasize the contributions of international organizations such as USAID and Internews in fortifying independent media, expanding access to vital information, and honing the technical skills of journalists within Myanmar.¹⁰² Notably, the inception of the Journalism School (J-School) by Internews in Chiang Mai emerged as a critical development, with the school’s extensive training initiatives playing a pivotal role in the education of a substantial number of journalists hailing from both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border.¹⁰³ This emphasis on training and capacity-building introduces a tangible and practical dimension to the chapter, offering a comprehensive view of how such initiatives have actively contributed to the development of the media landscape by empowering journalists and media professionals.

“Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” offers a compelling perspective on the critical evaluation of media house sustainability within Myanmar. This strength of the chapter lies in its ability to shed light on the role of international donor organizations in supporting media outlets, which often grapple with issues of long-term financial independence. It recognizes the enduring dependence of many media organizations on donors or alternative income sources, raising pivotal questions concerning the sustained viability of these media houses. Kenneth Van Toll, a former deputy-director of Free Press Unlimited (FPU), echoes these concerns in the chapter, highlighting the inherent limitations of media support groups in terms of their ability to advertise or directly fund projects within Myanmar: “We were an NGO. We knew a lot about media but we didn’t really have any business

¹⁰¹ John Knaus cited in McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.119.

¹⁰² McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.106.

¹⁰³ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.107.

sense. If we had had that kind of background and experience, then maybe we would have done things differently.”¹⁰⁴ This raises valid concerns regarding the effectiveness of the intended trickle-down effect for media development within the country. A detailed analysis of these challenges emphasizes the constrained role that donors and media development organizations can play in fostering the self-sustainability of media houses within Myanmar. The chapter, by raising this issue, encourages readers to engage in a reflective examination of the intricacies involved in maintaining independent and externally uninfluenced media outlets. Such a critical evaluation has become paramount for our own research in contemplating the potential pitfalls associated with continued donor reliance.

Tessa Piper, the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) Southeast Asia Program Director stresses the significance of long term training and mentoring programs along with a focus on institutional development, the practical implementation of which we wish to explore in future research.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the insights of Sarah McLean, who points out the strengths of the Indochina Media Memorial Fund (IMMF) training program (particularly the long-term engagement of quality trainers and building trust with local journalists) suggest a more effective approach to training.¹⁰⁶ McLean suggests bringing back promising participants for further training rather than seeking new ones, a valuable lesson for optimizing the effectiveness of media development initiatives. Our research can benefit from these insights by proposing and exploring concrete strategies to foster media sustainability in Myanmar while considering the nuances and intricacies that have been identified by experts and practitioners in the field.

“Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” also addresses the significance of strategic adaptation from media development organizations funding Myanmar media houses based on lessons learned. The recurrence of financial crises, as exemplified by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) and its embezzlement scandal, offers valuable insights into the critical need for effective oversight and engagement with grantees. In this chapter, John Knaus acknowledges the trust placed in organizations like DVB and the imperative for more rigorous monitoring.¹⁰⁷ This particular case casts a spotlight on how rapid increases in funding, notably during the 2007 Saffron Revolution, could lead to inadequate oversight structures. It suggests that the inadequacy of international donor decision-making and oversight played a significant role in the scandal. Moreover, the recurrence of financial crises at DVB in 2018, despite continuing to receive substantial donor funding, implies that perhaps the lessons from the past were not fully absorbed. Consequently, it reinforces the need for donor organizations

¹⁰⁴ Kenneth Van Toll cited in McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.111.

¹⁰⁵ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.112.

¹⁰⁶ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.112.

¹⁰⁷ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” p.113.

to enhance their monitoring practices to ensure the effectiveness and integrity of media development initiatives.¹⁰⁸

This insight serves as a pertinent reminder of the potential for donor organizations to evolve and refine their approaches to media development in Myanmar. The chapter accentuates the significance of establishing robust monitoring mechanisms and transparent financial procedures when collaborating with media organizations. By presenting this case, the chapter reveals the profound consequences of inadequate oversight structures and their propensity to result in financial mismanagement. “Whispered Support: Two Decades of International Aid for Independent Journalism and Free Expression” significantly contributed to our understanding of media house sustainability and donor limitations by allowing us to draw essential lessons from these past experiences. These strengths collectively enrich our comprehension of the intricate complexities and challenges associated with supporting media development within a politically restricted environment, reinforcing the significance of continuous improvement and adaptation in donor practices in the contemporary post-2021 military coup landscape.

However, this insightful chapter focuses on a period that predates the Feb 1st coup. An up-to-date analysis is essential to understand the evolving challenges and opportunities faced by media outlets both in Myanmar and in exile. The post-coup period has brought new obstacles, which necessitate a more recent evaluation of media development efforts in the rapidly changing political environment. As we embark on our own research, we will incorporate the insights and knowledge gleaned from this chapter in *Myanmar Media in Transition: Legacies, Challenges and Change*. We aim to use this foundation to inform our research concerning the contemporary Myanmar media landscape post-2021 military coup, with a specific focus on exiled media in Thailand.

We also wish to provide a more holistic approach. In order to do so, we will conduct an in-depth examination of specific cases and their tangible impacts on media organizations. The incorporation of qualitative data, such as interviews and surveys with journalists and media practitioners operating within the country, could offer a nuanced perspective on the challenges and successes experienced by media outlets in Myanmar. The inclusion of qualitative research methods will complement the existing historical and analytical approach and provide richer insights into the experiences and viewpoints of those directly engaged in Myanmar’s media landscape. As part of our ongoing research, we are committed to implementing a mixed-methods approach, which will blend insights acquired from desk research with quantitative data derived from surveys conducted with Myanmar women journalists in Thailand. Qualitative data from our focus group discussions and interviews with key stakeholders will complete the gamut of information we will offer.

¹⁰⁸ McElhone & Brooten, “Whispered Support,” pp.113-114.

Within the context of Myanmar's media landscape, the current literature has unveiled both strengths and shortcomings. However, a noticeable gap exists in the literature regarding the safety and labor rights of women journalists. While our literature review of the three aforementioned sources addresses fundamental aspects of gender in the Myanmar media landscape, the role of media in conflict ridden society, and international media development aid, these sources do not explore the specific challenges confronted by women journalists in the Myanmar media landscape post-2021 military coup. In our research, we will prioritize addressing this critical gap and shed light on the unique obstacles and opportunities encountered by women in Myanmar's media industry. We will also scrutinize the rights and conditions afforded to women journalists employed at media houses and those working as freelancers while in exile in Thailand. By doing so, we aspire to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of media development and its intersection with gender equality within the Myanmar media landscape post the 2021 military coup.

Appendix III: Survey

exile hub



Voices from Exile: The Safety Needs of Myanmar Women Journalists in Thailand Survey

Overview¹⁰⁹

This survey is part of a research project coordinated by Exile Hub that aims to gain a deeper understanding of the work and living conditions of Myanmar women journalists who are currently residing in Thailand following the February 1st 2021 military coup. The valuable inputs received through this survey will play a vital role in shaping our findings. Our intention is to share these insights with the Myanmar media community and relevant support groups, providing them with nuanced and tailored recommendations on how they can effectively sustain their support for women journalists. You can access some of our researchers' past projects by following this link: <https://drive.proton.me/urls/S4X8Q77MP8#w5RAzYbxNF1O>

The primary objective of this research project is to shed light on the material conditions that affect Myanmar journalists living in Thailand. Specifically, we seek to explore:

- The working and living conditions of exiled Myanmar women journalists.
- The challenges that media houses and publications face in supporting the material needs of their staff and freelance journalists under the current circumstances.
- Recommendations for donors and implementers on how best to provide long-term psychosocial, educational, and material support for Myanmar women journalists and media more broadly.

We are interested in learning about your personal experiences as a woman journalist and any pressing needs you may have in your life and career. Your responses will be collected and analyzed to help us understand the complex environment and working conditions of women journalists, and the safety risks they face.

Exile Hub is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of all participants. Your responses will only be used for research purposes, and we will not share any personal information without your explicit consent. To ensure anonymity, no identifying information will be collected, and data will be stored securely. Any data used or published will be presented in aggregate form without identifying information.

¹⁰⁹ Please note that these survey questions were all translated and distributed to participants in Burmese language.

Instructions

1. Please read each question carefully before answering.
2. The first section of the survey asks about your personal information, including your demographics, living situation, and livelihood.
3. The second section of the survey asks about your experience with safety risks and mitigation strategies.
4. The third section of the survey asks about your perception of safety training needs and support mechanisms for the safety of women journalists.
5. Some questions in this survey ask for more detailed responses, while others are straightforward and require simple answers. Please answer each question according to the instructions provided.
6. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe answering any of the questions in the survey, you may choose to skip them.
7. Your responses to the survey will be kept confidential, and to ensure anonymity, no identifying information will be collected. Informants are in total control of the information they provide, and can revoke that consent at any time by contacting us at research@exilehub.org.

We thank you for your time, and please do not hesitate to [reach out to us](#) should you have any questions, or any further information to share.

Survey Questions

Livelihood

1. Who was/is your most recent employer? *
2. What was/is your most recent job title? *
3. What were/are your responsibilities? *
4. Since the military coup, do you use a pen name or your real name when publishing your work? *
 - a. Pen name
 - b. Real name
 - c. Both - it depends
 - d. My name is not included when my work is published
 - e. Prefer not to answer
5. How many days per week do you usually work? *
 - a. 5 days (Monday to Friday)
 - b. 6 days (Monday to Saturday)
 - c. 7 days (Every day of the week)

-
- d. Other
 6. How many hours do you usually work in a week? *
 - a. Less than 20 hours
 - b. 20-30 hours
 - c. 30-40 hours
 - d. 40-50 hours
 - e. More than 50 hours
 7. What is your average monthly income? Please include the cost in Thai Baht. *
 - a. Less than 5,000 THB
 - b. 5,000 - 10,000 THB
 - c. 10,000 - 15,000 THB
 - d. 15,000 - 20,000 THB
 - e. 20,000 - 25,000 THB
 - f. 25,000 - 30,000 THB
 - g. 30,000 - 35,000 THB
 - h. 35,000 - 40,000 THB
 - i. Over 40,000 THB
 - j. Prefer not to answer
 8. Do you or your immediate family have any other source of income? *
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
 9. What do you see as the 3 most significant challenges in carrying out your work now? Feel free to answer in as much or as little detail as you like.*

Relocation Support

10. Did the coup in Myanmar put you, as a journalist, in a position where you had to leave the country out of concern for your personal safety? *
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 11. When did you arrive in Thailand (month and year)? *
 12. How much did your relocation to Thailand cost? Please include the cost in Thai Baht.
 13. Did you receive any relocation assistance? *
 - a. Yes
 - i. If yes, what kind of assistance?
 - ii. If yes, assistance from whom?
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
-

14. What were the biggest challenges in your relocation? *

Perception of risks and safety

15. What does the safety of journalists mean to you? *

16. How vulnerable do you feel your safety is as a Myanmar journalist in exile in Thailand? *

- a. Not vulnerable
- b. A little vulnerable
- c. Vulnerable
- d. Very vulnerable
- e. Extremely vulnerable

17. Do you think the risks you face in your work are the same as that of your male colleagues both in and outside of the newsroom? Please explain your answer. *

18. Do you feel that the safety risks and your overall safety situation have changed after arriving in Thailand? Please explain your answer. *

19. Do you feel that the safety risks are different for women journalists inside Myanmar compared to those in Thailand? Please explain your answer. *

Work experience in a media house (optional)

20. Do you believe there is gender-based pay disparity between you and your male colleagues?

- a. Strongly believe
- b. Believe
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly disagree

21. Are your off days and leaves treated equally compared to your male colleagues?

- a. Yes
- b. To some extent
- c. No
- d. Unsure

22. Have you encountered any instances of harassment or threats from male colleagues within your current or most recent media house?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Experience with risks to safety and mitigation strategies

23. From the choices below, what are the safety concerns you face in your work as a Myanmar journalist living in exile in Thailand? You can select as many as you wish. *

- a. Threats to physical security
-

-
- b. Lack of job security
 - c. Difficulty in having a steady income
 - d. Uncertain legal status
 - e. Digital security
 - f. Safety of loved ones & family
 - g. Threat of imprisonment
 - h. Threat of deportation
 - i. Poor mental wellbeing
 - j. Lack of media-related work opportunities
 - k. Difficulty collecting media stories
24. From the choices below, what are the most common cyber challenges that you face? *
- a. Online surveillance
 - b. Cyberbullying, harassment, threats etc.
 - c. Hacking or phishing of accounts
 - d. Exposure to inappropriate or harmful content online
 - e. Lack of control over personal data online
25. How are you dealing with the safety risks you have experienced as a journalist living in exile in Thailand? *
26. What safety precautions have you implemented in your daily and professional life? *
27. Do you take specific precautions to protect your digital safety or online safety? *
- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, please state the precautions you take online.
 - b. No
28. Have you, as a journalist, experienced any security breaches personally since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar? *
- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, how did this affect you mentally?
 - b. No
29. What other conditions which have not been mentioned hinder your capacity to fully operate as a journalist living in exile in Thailand? *

Identification of safety training needs

30. Select your level of confidence in your knowledge/skills to deal with the safety risks that come with being a journalist in exile? *
- a. No confidence
 - b. Some confidence
 - c. Average confidence
 - d. High confidence

-
- e. Extremely high confidence
31. Have you undergone any form of journalist safety training? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
32. If yes, did any of these trainings specifically focus on the safety of women journalists? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not relevant - I never had any journalist safety trainings
33. If you have undergone some form of journalist safety training, when was the last training you attended? *
- a. After the February 1st 2021 military coup
 - b. Before the February 1st 2021 military coup
 - c. Not relevant - I never had any journalist safety trainings
34. If you have undergone some form of journalist safety training, where was the last training you attended? *
- a. Online
 - b. At a media house (in-person training)
 - c. At a training center (in-person training)
 - d. Other
 - e. Not relevant - I never had any journalist safety trainings
35. If you have undergone in-person journalist safety training, do the organizers pay for your transportation, the logistics and/or legal fees? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not relevant - I never had any in-person journalist safety trainings
36. If you have undergone some form of journalist safety training, how long on average was the training? *
- a. Less than 1 hour
 - b. 1-2 hours
 - c. 2-4 hours
 - d. Half a day (4-6 hours)
 - e. A full day (6-8 hours)
 - f. 2-3 days
 - g. 3-7 days
 - h. Over 1 week
 - i. Not relevant - I never had any journalist safety trainings
37. If you have undergone some form of journalist safety training, how useful was it? *
- a. Not useful at all
-

-
- b. Somewhat useful or relevant
 - c. Useful
 - d. Very useful
 - e. Extremely useful
 - f. Not relevant - I never had any journalist safety trainings
38. Does your current or most recent media house offer any safety training to journalists? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
39. What are the most pressing topics that you feel need to be covered in a safety training for women journalists? *
40. Do you believe safety training for women journalists should include sensitive topics (such as harassment)? *
- a. Strongly believe
 - b. Believe
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
41. Do you think that you as a woman journalist would benefit from safety training? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
42. Which other groups would benefit from such training in safety besides women journalists themselves? *

Support mechanisms for safety of women journalists

43. Is safety in general and that of women journalists in a particular topic of discussion in the newsroom? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
44. Does your current or most recent media house have a human resources (HR) policy? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
45. Does your current or most recent media house have a workplace harassment policy? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
46. Does your current or most recent media house provide separate devices for work? *
-

-
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
47. When something does go wrong, what support from your colleagues/ superior/ employer can you fall back on? *
48. Are there any challenges that prevent women journalists from accessing support from experts, such as lawyers, psychologists etc.? *
- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, which challenges?
 - b. No
49. What other support mechanisms with regard to safety issues are accessible to women journalists in exile in Thailand? *
50. How effective are these support mechanisms? *
- a. Very effective
 - b. Effective
 - c. Moderately effective
 - d. Ineffective

Demographics

To gain a comprehensive understanding, we request demographic data from participants. This helps identify patterns, trends, and differences based on age, ethnicity, location, and employment. It enhances inclusivity, and informs research and decision-making. All data collected is confidential and used solely for research purposes.

51. Date of Birth (month and year) *
52. Ethnicity *
53. Current location in Thailand (please specify the province) *
54. Employment *
- a. Unemployed
 - b. Part-time
 - c. Full-time
55. What is your relationship status? *
- a. Single
 - b. Married
 - c. Divorced
 - d. Widowed
 - e. In a partnership/relationship
 - f. Prefer not to answer

-
56. Do you have any children? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
57. If yes, how many children do you have?
58. If yes, which schools are your children attending, if any?
- a. Public School in Myanmar
 - b. Private School in Myanmar
 - c. Public School in Thailand
 - d. Private School in Thailand
 - e. Migrant School in Thailand
 - f. Online School
 - g. Informal learning
 - h. No School
59. If yes, who pays for your children's schooling?
60. Do you have health insurance? *
- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, who pays for it?
 - b. No

Living Situation

61. Do you rent or own your current residence? *
- a. Rent
 - b. Own
 - c. I don't rent or own my current residence
 - d. Prefer not to answer
62. What percentage of your monthly income, on average, is allocated towards rent if you are currently renting?
- a. Less than 20%
 - b. 20-40%
 - c. 40-60%
 - d. 60-80%
 - e. Over 80%
63. Do you share your residence with others outside of your immediate family? *
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
64. If yes, who do you share the residence with? (select all that apply)
- a. Friends
-

-
- b. Coworkers
 - c. Strangers
 - d. Other
65. Do you feel safe in your current living arrangements? If not, why? *
66. Do you have a visa or the necessary legal documentation required to live in Thailand? *
- a. Yes
 - i. If yes, what visa or the necessary legal documentation do you have?
 - b. No
 - c. Prefer not to answer
67. If you have a visa or the necessary legal documentation required to live in Thailand, how much of your income do you spend on the visa fees per year?
- a. Less than 10%
 - b. 10-30%
 - c. 30-50%
 - d. 50-70%
 - e. Over 70%
68. If you do not have a visa or the necessary legal documentation required to live in Thailand, how much of your income do you spend on police extortion per month?
- a. Less than 10%
 - b. 10-30%
 - c. 30-50%
 - d. 50-70%
 - e. Over 70%
69. Do you have any questions you would like to ask us? We are available to provide answers and address any inquiries you may have.
70. Are you open to staying connected with us for future updates on our research and the opportunity to ask additional questions? We value the possibility of staying in touch and providing you with ongoing information. *
- a. Yes
 - b. No

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