

Holistic Training for Journalists in Pakistan

Pakistan Press Foundation

Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) is the preeminent non-governmental organization promoting freedom of expression, media safety and the development of an independent media in Pakistan. For over six decades, PPF has enhanced journalism standards through fellowships, training programs, and capacity-building efforts, supporting women journalists and those from marginalized regions.

PPF was established in 1968 as a non-profit organization and continued working until 1974, when it had to suspend operations due to the political environment then prevailing in the country. It was reactivated in 1992, and has since been involved in assisting the development of independent media in Pakistan by conducting training programs for journalists, carrying out projects in research and documentation, and campaigning to defend and promote freedom of the press.

Over the decades, PPF has trained hundreds of journalists to meet the needs of the media of the time. PPF has strived to ensure that media professionals from all parts of Pakistan and vulnerable groups, including women, are given equal opportunities to enhance their journalism skills.

Over the years, PPF has developed, grown and sustained a vast network of media professionals across the country, which enables it to actively document and investigate attacks on the media and restrictions to free expression. PPF has always been a vocal voice defending the right to free expression and the safety of journalists in Pakistan, including issuing statements and engaging in advocacy efforts. In successive state reviews of Pakistan under the United Nations (UN) mechanisms, PPF's questions on the state of free expression and media safety have been raised by the UN bodies.

PPF's ability to connect varied stakeholders, including local and national media, as well as between unions, editors, and publishers, comes from years of expertise in implementing creative initiatives including the Editors for Safety Network (EFS), a network of top editorial decision-makers from print and electronic media united to promote media safety. The organization's ex-

perience, credibility, and reach enabled PPF to play a pivotal role in enacting the Sindh and national media safety laws.

PPF has long-standing relationships with international media organizations, including membership in the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network (MFC-CN), serving as a founding CN co-chair, International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) for which PPF has been elected to the IFEX Council several times, the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) for which PPF has been part of the steering committee, and served on the board of the International Press Institute (IPI).

Pakistan Context

In 2025, journalists and media professionals in Pakistan find themselves in an increasingly restrictive landscape for free expression. Legal challenges through restrictive legislation and cases, overactive regulatory authorities, continued violence against journalists with impunity, and threats to media professionals—the media is working in an environment of intimidation from all fronts.

On the occasion of International World Press Freedom Day 2025, PPF presented the current situation of journalists and media professionals in Pakistan.¹

2025 began with the passage of the much-opposed Pakistan Electronic Crimes Amendment Act 2025 (PECA) in January, which heightened concerns about the legal consequences journalists may face for their reporting, particularly online. Since then, criminal complaints have been registered against media professionals under sections of the amended cybercrime law, including Section 26-A, which pertains to fake or false information and carries punishments of up to three years of imprisonment, fines up to Rs 2 million, or both.

PPF urged the state to view the media as an essential stakeholder while developing policies and laws that impact their work, so that dangerous legislation, such as PECA, the impact of which is unfolding, would not be brought to fruition. Considering the impact on the media of such legislation should not be an afterthought. Despite loud and clear calls of concern, the government has decided to ignore the opposition to the amendments to PECA. Such patterns raise questions about the government's intentions.

In a media environment where broadcast media have been significantly silenced over the years through restrictive regulation and violence against media professionals, the further tightening of screws around expression online spells concern for journalists' ability to report freely without consequences both online and offline. In what has become the norm, the lack of accountability and the role of state bodies—in 2024-25, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), in particular—has set a dangerous pattern of action against media professionals.

At the same time, forms of physical violence, including assault and manhandling as well as arrests, detentions and the issuance of threats to journalists, continued to undermine the safety of media professionals and served as tools to intimidate the media alongside other punitive measures, including the suspension of advertising to media outlets.

PPF has so far (January – April 2025) documented at least thirty-four cases including seven instances of case registration, one defamation notice, three instances of call-up notices by the FIA, two arrests, four detentions, two abductions, at least six instances of assault and two of manhandling, two attacks on property including a raid, three instances of threats including a threat of legal action and threats to family, and two of online harassment.

The arrests of two journalists — *Raftar* CEO Farhan Mallick and Islamabad-based journalist Waheed Murad — in March 2025 exemplified the heavy-handed approach of the FIA. In the case of Mallick, the FIA visited the *Raftar* office without notice, and following his appearance at an FIA office in response to a verbal summon, he was arrested.

Just days after Mallick's arrest, Islamabad-based journalist, associated with *Urdu News*, Waheed Murad, was picked up from his home and had a criminal complaint registered against him by the FIA.

On World Press Freedom Day, PPF drew attention to the alarming patterns of intimidation being documented through legislation, legal cases, violence, and threats.

PPF expressed concern over the lack of accountability and clarity in actions taken by state bodies such as the FIA, with details often being revealed in the aftermath of an incident. Such actions help maintain an environment of fear and uncertainty among the media, even beyond the individual journalists impacted. PPF urged authorities to ensure that media professionals are not targeted for their work and that due process is followed.

In addition to these, punitive measures including restrictions on advertising to certain media outlets have also been documented. The suspension of advertisements to *Dawn*, the leading English newspaper, which issued a public response defending its editorial policy, and the Ministry of Information's stoppage of advertisements to *Daily Sahafat*, highlight the underhanded methods used to financially cripple media outlets.

The precedent for the alarming patterns observed this year appeared to have been set in 2024, an election year that was a mix of political protests, internet shutdowns, and policies and legislation (proposed and passed) that would increase the policing of free expression, particularly online.

Between January and December 2024, PPF documented at least one hundred sixty-eight confirmed attacks on journalists and media professionals in connection to their work and attempts of censorship to regulate and restrict free expression either through punitive measures or regulation including two murders, seventy-six instances of assault, four instances of abduction, twelve attacks on property, five arrests, twelve detentions, fifteen instances of case registration, eight documented instances of FIA action and two of other legal action, two instances of placement on the Exit Control List, fifteen instances of online harassment, five threats, thirty-one instances of censorship including: nineteen instances of Internet, mobile connectivity and social media platform disruptions including the ban on X, four restrictive directives by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), and eight other directives, orders or actions tantamount to censorship; and remarks by the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkwa province targeting journalists.

In 2024, the sheer frequency of internet, mobile connectivity, and social media platform disruptions was of grave concern. At a time when the significance of digital spaces was growing, such measures cut off citizens' right to access information. This year (2025), following the escalation of tensions between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, the Indian government blocked access to sixteen Pakistani YouTube channels on the recommendations of its Ministry of Home Affairs.

PPF reiterated the urgent need to challenge the complete impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of violence against the media through the active implementation of media safety legislation, passed in the country, specifically for the protection of media professionals. PPF emphasized that it was completely unacceptable that journalists continue to be targeted for their

work. Despite the passage of the Federal Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021, and the provincial Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021, journalists continued to face violence with dismal accountability for perpetrators.

Areas of Concern

PPF focuses on:

- Establishing an effective network of media and journalists throughout Pakistan to gather violations against the press, which are then investigated and documented;
- Engaging with varied stakeholders, including national and international bodies and coalitions, to advocate for media safety and free expression;
- Raising the standard of journalism through media development activities, including capacity-building of journalists in line with changing trends and international best practices.

PPF investigates instances of attacks on journalists and media professionals, as well as any restrictive measures, including laws or directives that impact press freedom. As part of this, the first level of advocacy includes investigating incidents and documenting them.

Whenever journalists' safety is imperiled, PPF issues statements, mobilizes advocacy campaigns, and has repeatedly highlighted these concerns during Pakistan's periodic reviews under UN free-expression mechanisms.

In 2025, PPF issued the following alerts:

- January 27: PPF alarmed by passage of PECA Amendment without prior stakeholder consultation; lack of clarity and consensus raises questions about intent and possibility of misuse²
- February 11: Civil Society Condemns Threats to Journalist and HRCP Co-Chair Munizae Jahangir ³
- March 4: Police Forcibly Enter Quetta Press Club Undermining its Sanctity and Independence⁴
- March 6: PPF Deeply Concerned by Federal and Provincial Govts' Withholding of Ads to Dawn; Alarming Tool to Financially Strangle Publication with a Crippling Impact⁵

- March 21: PPF Concerned by FIA's Arrest of Raftar CEO Farhan Mallick; Call for his Release and Urge FIA to Clarify the Reasons and Circumstances of his Arrest⁶
- March 25: PPF Expresses Serious Concern Over Alleged Forcible Disappearance of Journalist Ahmad Noorani's Brothers⁷
- March 26: PPF Expresses Deep Concern Over Manner in which Islamabad-Based Journalist Waheed Murad Picked Up from his Residence, Later Found to Have a Case Registered Against him by the FIA⁸
- April 30: Journalist Inamullah Mehsud Abducted in KP; released through settlement mediated by a *jirga*⁹
- May 27: Journalist Latif Baloch killed in Awaran, Balochistan; PPF calls for investigation to ascertain the reasons for the murder¹⁰
- June 11: Neo News Team Assaulted by Lawyers During Quetta Bar Association Protest.¹¹

PPF also produces annual reports that present in-depth look at trends regarding press freedom and media safety in Pakistan. In 2025, PPF produced two reports. *Pakistani Journalism Under Pressure In A Tightly Restricted Political Environment, Safety Threats and Internet Shutdowns — Press Freedom and Media Safety in Pakistan in 2024*¹² provided details of attacks on and challenges to journalists and media professionals during 2024 and was released at the beginning of the year. A second report was released on World Press Freedom Day in May, *Intimidation on All Fronts: Press Freedom and Media Safety in Pakistan*.¹³ This report focused on the situation in 2025, including the passage of restrictive legislation such as the PECA Amendment 2025 and the impact being documented.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, in March 2025, PPF published a statement on challenges faced by women in the media in Pakistan and emphasized an urgent need to address the patterns of threats and harassment women in the media in Pakistan are subjected to.¹⁴

On a weekly basis, PPF releases a newsletter, the *Pakistan News Digest*, which provides updates from across Pakistan regarding media safety, press freedom, developments in the media sector and any opportunities. The articles included in the newsletter are posted on PPF's website which includes regular updates on news that affect journalists and media professionals in

Pakistan. These can be accessed on PPF's website at <https://pakistanpress-foundation.org/>

PPF maintains documentation on the following categories: Freedom of Expression, Mass Media including print, broadcast and digital media, laws and governance, opportunities and publications including reports, newsletters and guidelines.

Fellowship Program

PPF set the precedent for capacity-building fellowship programs for journalists and media professionals in Pakistan. Over the years, PPF has engaged hundreds of journalists in fellowship programs that develop their skill set, provide practical experience in drafting and publishing stories and develop networks of journalists. These fellowships have kept pace with the changing media landscape and have attempted to respond to gaps in the media's development, including focusing on investigative reporting.

Investigative Journalism Fellowship: A Legacy of Excellence

PPF's Investigative Journalism Fellowship has emerged as a cornerstone of investigative reporting in the country, reflecting PPF's long-standing commitment to strengthening journalistic standards. With thirteen successful batches completed, the program has played a pivotal role in shaping journalists capable of conducting rigorous, evidence-based investigations. The fellowship provides a platform for mid-career and young journalists to deepen their skills while working on high-impact stories that challenge entrenched power structures and amplify marginalized voices.

Structured over a period of three to six months, the fellowship blends intensive training sessions with ongoing editorial mentorship. Journalists are introduced to techniques in data collection, source protection, and ethical storytelling. These tools are essential in navigating the often-risky terrain of investigative journalism in Pakistan. The guided editorial process ensures that each fellow not only learns the craft but also applies it effectively, resulting in stories that meet professional standards.

The fellowship's outcomes have been far-reaching. Investigations produced through the program have exposed a wide range of critical issues — from systemic corruption and mismanagement in public institutions to

violations of human and labor rights. These stories have sparked public debates, policy discussions, and in some cases, official inquiries. Many fellows have gone on to win national and international journalism awards, further cementing the program's reputation as a catalyst for excellence in investigative reporting.

Beyond the stories themselves, the fellowship has fostered a vibrant network of skilled investigative journalists now working across media outlets in Pakistan. This community of alumni continues to collaborate, mentor newer fellows, and raise the bar for accountability journalism across the nation. By institutionalizing investigative journalism training and nurturing a culture of professional integrity, the PPF Investigative Journalism Fellowship continues to make a lasting impact on Pakistan's media ecosystem.

Media Safety Fellowship: Protecting Journalists in High-Risk Environments

The PPF Media Safety Fellowship is a vital initiative designed to promote freedom of expression and highlight the pressing issues of media safety and impunity in crimes against journalists. Having successfully completed six batches, with the seventh currently underway and the eighth about to begin, the fellowship continues to provide crucial support to media professionals committed to investigative journalism. Through this program, journalists are empowered to produce impactful stories that shed light on threats to press freedom and the violence that often goes unpunished.

This fellowship offers selected media professionals the opportunity to participate in two intensive capacity-building workshops. These sessions focus on enhancing investigative journalism skills and offer deep insights into the complex challenges facing media safety in Pakistan. Fellows also receive hands-on mentoring through personalized online sessions with senior journalists and subject-matter experts. This combination of training and mentorship ensures that participants not only strengthen their professional capabilities but also develop a nuanced understanding of the media landscape and its vulnerabilities.

A key component of the fellowship is the production of investigative stories, which are developed under the close guidance of experienced journalists serving as fellowship editors and mentors. These stories are published or broadcast by national media outlets, giving voice to critical issues that might otherwise remain unexamined. Fellows are encouraged to investigate

specific cases of violence against journalists, particularly where impunity has prevailed, bringing much-needed attention to these injustices.

By supporting in-depth reporting on media safety, the PPF Media Safety Fellowship plays a critical role in holding power to account and advocating for a safer environment for journalists. It not only enhances the professional capacity of individual reporters but also contributes to a broader culture of accountability and transparency. As the fellowship continues to grow, it stands as a testament to the resilience of journalism and the ongoing struggle for freedom of expression in Pakistan.

Rural Media Support Program: Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide

PPF's latest initiative, the Rural Media Support Program, addresses the systemic neglect of journalists working outside major cities. This effort provides tailored training for smaller newsroom setups, bringing digital tools and professional standards to reporters in Pakistan's peri-urban and rural areas. The program combats professional isolation through mentorship networks that connect rural journalists with urban peers, while small grants enable community-focused reporting on undercovered issues.

Other Fellowships, Training, and Activities

Other fellowship programs included the Inclusive Election Reporting Fellowship in Pakistan, which aimed to enhance minority representation and amplify their voices in the 2024 general elections. This fellowship project aimed to support local reporters, including women citizen reporters and bloggers, to produce factual and conflict-sensitive multimedia reports addressing the needs of minorities, especially women, and speaking truth to power in the aftermath of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Pakistan.

Apart from its fellowship programs, PPF organizes specialized training sessions on critical issues like ethical journalism, holistic safety, and combating misinformation. These workshops are designed to equip journalists across Pakistan with practical skills to navigate the country's challenging media landscape while upholding professional standards.

PPF's commitment extends beyond just advocating for media safety laws; the organization continuously conducts awareness-building training sessions about these legal protections. Through interactive workshops, jour-

nalists learn how to practically utilize the federal and provincial journalist protection laws in their daily work. PPF brings together legal experts, senior journalists and policymakers to explain the provisions of these laws and demonstrate how reporters can invoke them when facing threats.

The ethical journalism trainings focus on maintaining accuracy and balance while reporting on sensitive issues. Participants learn verification techniques to counter misinformation and strategies for responsible reporting on conflicts or communal tensions. These sessions emphasize the importance of fact-checking before publication and the ethical considerations that arise when covering vulnerable groups.

For holistic safety, PPF takes a comprehensive approach that addresses physical, digital, and psychological risks. Workshops cover a range of topics, including secure communication methods, risk assessment, trauma awareness, and stress management techniques. Journalists participate in situational awareness drills and learn emergency protocols tailored to various threat scenarios they may encounter in the field.

Recognizing the growing challenge of misinformation, PPF organized sessions on identifying and countering false narratives. These trainings equip journalists with digital verification tools to detect manipulated content and deepfakes.¹⁵ Participants learn investigation techniques to trace the origins of viral claims and strategies for debunking misinformation without amplifying it.



Professor Dr. Tauseef Ahmed Khan, Member of the Sindh Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners, addresses participants at PPF's session on the effective use of journalist safety laws, held on International Women's Day, 8 March 2024.



Participants engage in a group activity during the Pakistan Press Foundation's Holistic Safety Training Workshop 2024, held in Karachi.



Trainer Mubasher Bukhari leads a session with the twelfth batch of participants in PPF's "Promoting Investigative Journalism in Pakistan" workshop, held in Karachi on 5-7 May 2023.



A participant sharing her insights during a Pakistan Press Foundation training workshop for the fifth cycle of media safety fellows, held in Karachi on 19-21 March 2023.



Former IGP Sindh Dr. Syed Kaleem Imam leads a session during the two-day “Inclusive Election Reporting in Pakistan” workshop on safety and security, organized by PPF on 15–16 October 2023.



Commemorating International Women's Day in March 2024, PPF, with the support of UNESCO, organized a seminar to discuss the effective implementation of the Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021 with a focus on safety challenges faced by women in the media.

Additionally, PPF places special emphasis on training journalists about the effective use of Right to Information (RTI) laws as a powerful tool for investigative reporting. Through hands-on workshops, media professionals learn how to file precise RTI applications to access crucial government documents and data that can uncover stories of public interest.

These RTI training sessions provide journalists with practical templates and step-by-step guidance on navigating bureaucratic systems. Participants learn strategies to frame their information requests in ways that maximize the chances of receiving meaningful responses, while also understanding the legal recourse available when authorities deny information.

PPF also educates journalists about the relationship between RTI laws and other press freedom safeguards. Sessions highlight how access to information complements constitutional protections for free expression and how reporters can use RTI findings to support their cases when facing legal harassment over their work.

Through these ongoing training initiatives, PPF ensures that journalists across Pakistan - from major cities to remote regions - have access to continuous professional development. PPF adapts its workshops to address emerging challenges while reinforcing core journalism values, creating a more resilient and responsible media ecosystem in the country.

PPF was pivotal in enacting the Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021 and the national law, Protection of Journalists and Media Professional Act 2021. This result was achieved through lobbying



Trainer and RTI activist Dr. Raza Ali Gardezi conducts a session for participants of the three-day capacity-building workshop on media safety and investigative reporting, held on 26-27 December 2024 in Karachi.

with the President, federal and provincial ministers, senators, and members of the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. PPF also arranged consultations with key stakeholders to gain their input on the draft laws so that the input shared with senators, ministers and assembly members was based on multiple perspectives. This process involved engagement with different lawmakers.

PPF established a Media Safety Laws Help Desk in April 2025 to guide journalists through the complaint-filing processes under Sindh and federal media-safety legislation. Through published guidelines and one-on-one assistance, the Help Desk clarifies procedures for invoking legal protections

Conclusion

PPF continues to support the capacity-building of journalists with a goal of keeping pace with changing circumstances regarding media safety and free expression as well as changes in the media landscape. As new technologies emerge and new challenges present themselves, PPF aims to stay on the pulse of change so that activities support the growth and capacity-building of media professionals keeping in mind the ground realities.

Endnotes

1 Intimidation on All Fronts: Press Freedom and Media Safety in Pakistan, https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/intimidation-on-all-fronts-press-freedom-and-media-safety-in-pakistan/?fbclid=IwY2xjawKHnzRleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETFQTUpwbzBvRoxSMW4wUlJUAR61bGtdUga5yUrDSZJpf-O-6g6exAHUUe-ONtrnd8wo1c_cvY1uflWpeHjXpsw_aem_CNytVovdOy1RviEcBgcTfg.

2 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/ppf-alarmed-by-passage-of-peca-amendment-without-prior-stakeholder-consultation-lack-of-clarity-and-consensus-raises-questions-about-intent-and-possibility-of-misuse/>.

3 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/civil-society-condemns-threats-to-journalist-and-hrcp-co-chair-munizae-jahangir/>.

4 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/police-forcibly-enter-quetta-press-club-undermining-its-sanctity-and-independence/>.

5 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/ppf-deeply-concerned-by-federal-and-provincial-govts-withholding-of-ads-to-dawn-alarming-tool-to-financially-strangle-publication-with-a-crippling-impact/>.

6 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/ppf-concerned-by-fias-arrest-of-raftar-owner-farhan-mallick-call-for-his-release-and-urge-fia-to-clarify-the-reasons-and-circumstances-of-his-arrest/>

7 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/ppf-expresses-serious-concern-over-alleged-forcible-disappearance-of-journalist-ahmad-nooranis-brothers/>.

8 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/ppf-expresses-deep-concern-over-alleged-abduction-of-islamabad-based-journalist-waheed-murad/>.

9 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/journalist-inamullah-mehsud-abducted-in-kp-released-through-jirga-media-settlement/>.

10 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/journalist-latif-baloch-killed-in-awaran-balochistan-ppf-calls-for-investigation-to-ascertain-the-reasons-for-the-murder/>.

11 PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/neo-news-team-assaulted-by-lawyers-during-quetta-bar-association-protest/>.

12 *Pakistani Journalism Under Pressure In A Tightly Restricted Political Environment, Safety Threats and Internet Shutdowns — Press Freedom and Media Safety in Pakistan in 2024*, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Pakistani-Journalism-Under-Pressure-In-A-Tightly-Restricted-Political-Environment-Safety-Threats-and-Internet-Shutdowns-PPF-Annual-Report-on-Press-Freedom-and-Media-Safety-in-Pakistan-in-2024.pdf>.

13 *Intimidation on All Fronts: Press Freedom and Media Safety in Pakistan*, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/intimidation-on-all-fronts-press-freedom-and-media-safety-in-pakistan/>.

14 On International Women's Day, PPF Calls For an Urgent Need to Address the Patterns of Threats and Harassment Against Women in the Media in Pakistan, 7 March 2025, PPF Research Team, <https://pakistanpressfoundation.org/on-inter->

national-womens-day-ppf-calls-for-an-urgent-need-to-address-the-patterns-of-threats-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-media-in-pakistan/.

¹⁵ Deepfakes, in essence, are synthetic media (typically video or audio) created by Artificial Intelligence (AI) models to mimic real people's faces, voices, or movements with eerie realism. See *What Are Deepfakes?*, Sentinel One, www.sentinelone.com/cybersecurity-101/cybersecurity/deepfakes/.