METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY OF THE INDEX FOR INTERNATIONAL MEDIA FREEDOM SUPPORT

THEME 1: DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT FOR MEDIA FREEDOM

States' diplomatic support for media freedom is assessed through measures of their leadership, membership and advocacy within multilateral initiatives. As members of the MFC, all states assessed in this Index have signed the Coalition's Global Pledge which commits them to 'speak out and take action together' and 'reinforce international initiatives to champion media freedom'[12].

Criteria 1, Multilateral leadership: States are awarded points for holding executive roles in multilateral initiatives focused on media freedom. Qualifying leadership roles include serving as a chair (3 points), vice-chair (2 points), or rapporteur (2 points) for UNESCO's IPDC, serving as a co-chair (5 points) or Executive Group member (2 points) of the MFC and serving as a co-chair of at least one of the Groups of Friends on the Safety/Protection of Journalists at UNESCO in Paris, the UN in New York or the UN in Geneva (3 points). States that host global observances for World Press Freedom Day (May 3rd) and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (November 2nd) also qualify for leadership recognition (5 points). Leadership of these multilateral initiatives is determined via the relevant UN, UNESCO and MFC websites. While states were awarded five points for each leadership role they held in the 2025 IMFS Index, the scoring for these roles has been adjusted in the 2026 Index to better reflect the level of responsibility and commitment involved in each role. States also now receive recognition of membership of the MFC Executive Group.

Currently, recognition is not given to states that play a leadership role in regional or country specific donor support groups or MFC Embassy Networks because this information is not publicly available. Despite their importance, initiatives like the Team Europe Democracy Network are also not included because membership is not open to all states in the Index. Finally, recognition is not currently given to states that play a leadership role in multilateral initiatives which focus on supporting different aspects of the wider enabling environment for journalism, rather than media freedom specifically, such as the Freedom Online Coalition, the Open Government Partnership and the Community of Democracies.

Criteria 2, Multilateral membership: States can also demonstrate their diplomatic support for media freedom via membership of relevant multilateral initiatives. In this Index, qualifying initiatives include the International Partnership for Information and Democracy (IPID), UNESCO's IPDC and the Groups of Friends on the Safety/Protection of Journalists in Paris, New York and Geneva. States are awarded one point for membership of the IPID and one point for membership of the IPDC. States also receive one point if they are a member of at least one of the three Groups of Friends on the Safety/Protection of Journalists. States can be awarded a maximum score of three points for this criteria. Membership of these multilateral initiatives is determined via their public websites and statements.

Currently, recognition is not given to states that are members of regional or country specific donor support groups or MFC Embassy Networks because this information is not publicly available. Recognition is also not currently given to states that are members of multilateral initiatives that focus on supporting different aspects of the wider enabling environment for journalism, rather than media freedom specifically.

Criteria 3, Speaking out: States can also demonstrate their diplomatic support for media freedom by signing joint public statements or resolutions on journalism safety or media freedom adopted or published by multilateral initiatives. States are awarded two points if they sign all the joint public statements made by the MFC in the previous calendar year, which they were eligible to sign[13]. States that sign between 90% and 99% of the MFC statements they were eligible to sign are awarded one point. States that sign less than 90% of such statements receive zero points. States are also awarded two points if they co-author a resolution or declaration on media freedom or journalism safety at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The data sources for this criteria are the relevant UNHRC and MFC websites.

THEME 2: FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

States' financial support for media development is assessed through measures of their funding levels, fulfilment of financial commitments and contributions to pooled multilateral funds. As members of the OECD-DAC, all states assessed by this Index have committed to 'increas[ing] financial and other forms of support to public interest media', as part of their endorsement of the Development Co-operation Principles on Relevant and Effective Support to Media and the Information Environment[14].

Criteria 4, Aid spent on media: States are awarded points for the percentage of ODA they allocate specifically to media development. Assessing the percentage of ODA allocated to media development, rather than the total amounts, allows for fairer comparisons between states with different economic capacities.

The data source used for this criteria is the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database, which is a publicly available database that captures states' reporting on types of aid (grants, loans, development finance, etc.), recipient countries, sector and channel (NGOs, public sector, multilateral organisations, etc.), amongst other data. Due to lags in reporting at the granular level by states on the public-facing database, this Index must rely on data from two years prior, so the 2026 Index uses data from 2024.

Following a methodology used by the Global Forum for Media Development, the funding codes used to identify ODA spending on media development are: 'Media and Free Flow of Information' (code 15153) and 'Radio/television/ print media' (code 22030)[15]. Funding codes for Communications Policy and Administrative Management (22010); Telecommunications (22020); and Information and Communication Technology (22040) are not included because they focus on broader areas like strategic communications, telecommunications policy and equipment and internet access. While such support can contribute to the wider enabling environment, they fall outside of the scope of media freedom specifically.

Following the methodologies used by the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) and the OECD-DAC Governance Network (GovNet), funding allocations for 'international broadcasting' by Germany, UK and France within these codes are excluded[16]. While international broadcasting makes an important contribution to

ensuring citizens' access to independent news and information - especially when it is largely absent or extremely limited in a country - it is generally excluded from calculations of ODA spending on media development because it does not directly contribute to the development of a domestic independent media sector.

It is important to note the limitations of this publicly reported data. Public donors must try to collect and standardise information that may be spread across several government agencies or bureaucracies, such as the foreign ministry, aid/ assistance ministry and defence ministry. Additionally, not all donors have a common understanding of media development or media assistance and may include funding for development communication, public diplomacy, or open government data in their reporting. Finally, the figures may exclude confidential (and thus, non-reported) data, or support for election-related reporting or investigative journalism which may be reported as part of election programming or anti-corruption efforts, respectively.

States are awarded one point per 0.1% of ODA allocated to code 15153 or code 22030. States committing less than 0.05% of ODA to these codes are awarded zero points. There is no limit to the number of points a state can be awarded in this category.

Criteria 5, Fulfilled spending commitments: States are also awarded points for delivering the funding amounts they previously pledged to media development. This is also assessed via the OECD CRS database, which records them under "flow type," separating funding commitments – amounts of planned and approved funding – and disbursements – funding actually paid out to the recipient. As there can be a delay between when commitments are finalised and when disbursements are made, there can sometimes be a lag time beyond two years in disbursing a commitment. States are awarded three points if they deliver at least 90% of the funding they committed and they are awarded zero points if they deliver less than 90% of their financial commitment[18]. States do not receive additional points for exceeding the financial commitments they made. The maximum number of points a state can be awarded in this category is three points.

Criteria 6, Pooled multilateral funds: States are also awarded points for contributing to pooled multilateral funds dedicated to supporting media freedom or media development. Such funds are, in principle, an effective way of coordinating resources and can provide core support to local entities, reduce the earmarking of contributions and support the principle of multilateralism[19].

The pooled multilateral funds recognised in the IMFS Index include three funds administered by UNESCO: the IPDC, the GMDF and the MDP. In addition, the Index recognises IFPIM in this category. This is because IFPIM's governance structure is multilateral (with representation from more than three nation states) and its financial contributions are pooled together into a single financing mechanism overseen by a centralised governance structure and distributed in alignment with a collective strategy.

States are awarded one point for each of these pooled multilateral funds they contributed to in the previous calendar year, up to a maximum score of four points. Funding allocations are determined by the websites of the relevant fund and corroborated by the fund managers themselves. Multilateral pooled funds focused on supporting media freedom in a single country are currently excluded because they may not be open to all states within the Index and because the funding data is often not publicly available.

THEME 3: SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISM REFUGE AND PROTECTION

States' support for the refuge and protection of journalists at-risk or in exile is assessed through their commitment to providing safe refuge and assistance programmes. The issue of safe refuge to journalists at risk has consistently been designated a key priority for the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom - the MFC's independent advisory arm. The High Level Panel has provided MFC states with a clear plan to fulfil this commitment, via its advisory Report on Safe Refuge for Journalists at Risk, with the key recommendation being to create an emergency visa for journalists at risk[20].

Criteria 7, Safe refuge for journalists: States are awarded points for having a dedicated emergency visa scheme or residence permits that explicitly include provision for media workers in exile. In line with the recommendations of the High Level Panel, these visas/permits should be open to journalists in need of immediate or urgent protection due to an ongoing threat to them and/or their families and continue to be available until the risk subsides[21]. All states with an active visa/permit scheme for journalists at risk receive five points.

The existence of such a scheme is determined by relevant public reports including from the MFC and the High Level Panel. It is important to track how visa/residency schemes for media workers are implemented in practice. However, this is not currently possible, as there are no publicly available data sources to track or verify this data.

Criteria 8, Journalist protection mechanisms: States are awarded points for supporting programmes or initiatives that promote the protection and safety of media workers in exile, as recognised in UNESCO's Global Repository of National Safety Mechanisms for Journalists. These initiatives are run domestically, but offer mechanisms that address the safety of exiled journalists in one or more of the three areas of prevention, protection and prosecution. Such initiatives can focus on policy, advocacy, fellowships, training, or grant assistance to at-risk journalists, media professionals and defenders of freedom of expression in exile. All states supporting at least one such scheme will receive three points.

The only significant presentational change to the 2026 IMFS Index, from the 2025 Index, is the ranking of countries with equal scores. Where two or more countries receive the same overall number of points, they are no longer given a joint ranking. Instead, the higher ranking is awarded to the country that allocates the larger proportion of its ODA to international media development (criteria 4).
