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RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières (Author)

The exile of journalists is on the rise worldwide: the number of countries from which journalists have fled has doubled in five years

To mark World Refugee Day on 20 June, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has released a map showing the exile of journalists supported by RSF since 2021. Against an international backdrop marked by political and security tensions, the number of countries from which media professionals have been forced to flee has doubled in five years, according to RSF data. For the journalists concerned - more than 1,400 people from at least 65 countries - the desire to continue reporting is hampered by the dangers associated with carrying out their work and the limitations of reception policies.

"The exile journeys of journalists supported by RSF paint a global picture of repression year after year. On the eve of World Refugee Day, RSF presents a distressing picture that echoes the findings of the 2026 World Press Freedom Index: over the past five years, 1,468 reporters from more than 60 countries have been supported by the organisation after being forced to flee threats, imprisonment or death. This is a staggering figure, yet it represents only a fraction of a much larger phenomenon. And the ordeal faced by these reporters does not end there: extortion, deportation and administrative abuse are a daily reality for many of them after they have been forced to flee. To defend the right to reliable information, states must offer effective protection to exiled journalists - the last line of defence against disinformation and propaganda, which are gaining ground - in the form of guarantees against refoulement, emergency visas, permanent residence permits, access to resettlement programmes and support to enable them to resume their work."

Vianney Loriquet
data journalist and head of the World Press Freedom Index

Six hundred and seventy-seven Afghan journalists, 160 Russian journalists, 101 Burmese journalists and hundreds more from some 60 different countries... Between 2021 and 2025, exile has struck swathes of the independent journalism sector. According to data from RSF International's assistance office, 65 countries have seen at least one journalist forced into exile; in 20 of these, at least 10 journalists have had to leave their country.

Far from being confined to any one region of the world, this phenomenon is still spreading. In five years, the number of countries affected has doubled, rising from 19 in 2021 to 40 in 2025. Over the same period, the number of exiled journalists who received assistance from RSF remained high: 235 in 2021 and 243 in 2025.

Wars and organised crime are driving journalists into exile

The worsening of security and political crises in several regions of the world is key to understanding this expansion of the areas from which journalists are fleeing.

- **Sub-Saharan Africa: deteriorating security in the Sahel and the Great Lakes region**

The resumption of fighting in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has opened up new routes of exile. In 2025, 21 journalists fled the country with RSF's support, mostly to Burundi and Uganda. In the Sahel, the phenomenon is now spreading to a growing list of countries - including Mali, Chad, Guinea and Burkina Faso - and has been advancing from east to west over the past five years, as far as Senegal.

- **In Latin America: a climate of political and criminal violence**

Institutional instability, pressure from drug cartels on independent journalism and authoritarian crackdowns by regimes such as those in El Salvador and Venezuela are fuelling a particularly worrying trend: since 1 January 2026, six journalists have already been killed in Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala. To avoid a similar fate, dozens of journalists have gone into exile in this region. Yet these cases remain among the most difficult to quantify: in such deteriorating contexts, RSF's assistance data captures only part of the phenomenon.

Repression, deportations, detentions: the spiral of Afghan exile

Afghanistan has become the global epicentre of journalist exile since the fall of Kabul on 15 August 2021. In five years, 677 Afghan journalists have fled their country with RSF's support, accounting for nearly half of the cases recorded by RSF's assistance programme. Now scattered across 28 countries, they represent one of the greatest exoduses of independent journalists in recent history.

According to RSF's assistance figures, the peak in departures was reached in 2022, when 183 Afghan journalists were forced into exile, and the repercussions are still being felt. In 2025, a further 82 journalists were forced to leave the country.

However, many of these journalists are still not safe in the countries where they have found temporary refuge. In Pakistan, a policy of mass deportation of Afghan refugees was launched in 2023, against a backdrop of tensions between the Pakistani government and the Taliban regime. At least 50 journalists were thus forcibly returned to Afghanistan. Residence visas for Afghan exiles are now rarely renewed, leaving them in an illegal situation.

"After spending a whole day in a Pakistani police detention centre, I was forced to pay 115,000 Pakistani rupees [around 350 euros] to avoid deportation and secure my release. In early February, my landlord asked me to leave the property," an Afghan reporter living as a refugee in Islamabad told RSF in March 2026.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban regime is continuing to clamp down on the public sphere. Five journalists remain officially detained, according to data from the RSF Barometer.

For Afghan journalists, the choice becomes more limited with each passing year: disappear from the media landscape, go into exile, or risk detention.

Myanmar: the junta wants to silence the press

In four years, more than a hundred journalists supported by RSF have been forced to flee the country. Since the coup in February 2021, the Burmese military junta has been waging a relentless crackdown on the press. Seven journalists and press freedom campaigners have been killed. In total, around 300 Burmese journalists are believed to have sought refuge in Thailand to escape this climate of terror. Conditions are particularly precarious for these exiles, the majority of whom work for very low wages, without legal status or health coverage.

In response, RSF has provided support to more than 350 Burmese journalists, both those still in the country and those in exile, notably

through the Myanmar Press Freedom Project launched in Thailand in October 2024.

Russia: the Kremlin persecutes journalists across borders

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine marked a sudden turning point: in 2022, at the height of the regime's crackdown on the independent press, 78 exiled journalists received assistance from RSF, compared with four the previous year. In total, since 2021, 160 Russian journalists who have received assistance from RSF have been forced into exile, but the total number of media professionals who have had to flee the country was already ten times higher in 2023, according to a report by The Fix and the JX Fund, a support fund for journalism in exile set up by RSF

As independent journalism disappears from Russian territory, newsrooms in exile are becoming one of the last sources of free information for the public. According to another report by the JX Fund and The Fix published in 2025, 63 independent Russian media outlets based abroad remain active, despite their precarious situation, caught between declining US funding and constant pressure from the Kremlin. The report's authors estimate their audience at between 6% and 9% of Russian adults, amounting to several million people. To silence them, Moscow is now extending its repression beyond its borders. Between February 2022 and September 2025, 66 media professionals were arrested or sentenced in absentia because of their work, according to data cross-referenced by RSF with that of Justice for Journalists (JFJ).

Egypt, Turkey: welcoming journalists while failing to protect press freedom

In several countries, the welcoming of journalists fleeing conflict zones coexists with the exile of domestic reporters critical of the authorities. Egypt illustrates this ambivalence: since 2021, at least 31 journalists supported by RSF, mostly Sudanese and Palestinian, have found refuge there. Some continue to report from within the country, such as the Sudanese media outlets that have set up operations there. In total, more than 300 journalists are believed to have fled the conflict in Sudan to Egypt.

However, these media outlets remain under threat of censorship by the Sudanese government, with the help of its Egyptian ally.

"Acts of intimidation, ranging from expulsion from the country to death threats and smear campaigns, have targeted the team at *Sudania 24*, notably the programme's presenter, who was pressured to issue a

statement supporting the Sudanese army," a journalist from the channel told RSF in 2025, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Furthermore, at least 11 journalists also fled Egypt during the same period. Under the military dictatorship of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, the country remains - despite recent releases such as that of Alaa Abdel Fattah - one of the world's biggest prisons for journalists: 18 of them are currently detained there for doing their job.

Further north, Turkey is experiencing a similar trend. As a regional hub for refugees, it has seen at least 46 journalists exiled from Afghanistan, Palestine or Syria settle there since 2021. But for journalists in Turkey, working independently remains a major challenge. t least 10 of them fled the country between 2021 and 2025, according to data from RSF's assistance programme (a figure likely to be far lower than the actual number, which runs into the dozens).

"When a journalist is forced to flee his or her country, exile does not put an end to the threats. Precarious living conditions, isolation and transnational repression often compound the administrative and linguistic difficulties faced in the host country. Yet these professionals continue to produce essential news coverage, often at the risk of their own safety. Ensuring their protection and enabling them to continue their journalistic work is not merely a humanitarian obligation: it is an essential prerequisite for defending the right to information and maintaining democratic debate. States have a responsibility to provide them with reception, protection and integration conditions commensurate with the scale of this challenge."

Victoria Lavenue
head of the Assistance Office at RSF

Journalism in exile: a bulwark against disinformation, yet reception policies remain inadequate

RSF has issued 10 recommendations for countries hosting exiled journalists, organised into three main areas: legal protection, financial support and capacity-building.

1. STRENGTHEN LEGAL PROTECTIONS

- Grant long-term visas to provide immediate, renewable protection for journalists at risk and their families.
- Facilitate the issuance of long-term residence permits and work permits to enable exiled journalists to resettle more easily and resume their work in the host country, particularly where a swift return to their country of origin is unlikely.
- Establish mechanisms enabling journalists under threat to alert the police in the event of transnational repression.

- Adopt legislation requiring platforms to respond to harassment targeting journalists in order to protect exiled journalists from transnational repression and online abuse.

2. SUPPORT FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Fund existing programmes, such as the Journalism in Exile Fund, to facilitate the transition from project-based funding to structural and sustainable operational funding for media organisations in exile.
- Facilitate the registration of media organisations in exile and provide tax exemptions and public grants for such organisations during their early years of development.
- Fund and promote media hubs offering media organisations in exile co-working spaces, production tools and mentoring programmes – such as Voix en exil in France.

3. STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITIES OF MEDIA IN EXILE

- Support the development and shared adoption of technologies or circumvention capabilities, such as the Svoboda satellite package or Collateral Freedom, to help media in exile break through the wall of state censorship in their countries of origin.
- Encourage media organisations in exile to undertake a process of certifying their editorial practices – notably by adhering to international standards such as the Journalism Trust Initiative – to protect them from external pressures that could compromise their journalistic integrity.
- Fund training programmes that enable exiled journalists to continue developing their skills in areas such as cybersecurity, legal and financial management, digital security, open-source investigation, audience measurement, etc.

RSF Germany: 479 journalists in exile supported since 2021

The German national section of RSF is also particularly active in supporting journalists in exile: between 2021 and 2025, 479 journalists – including 209 Russians and 192 Afghans — were supported by the NGO throughout their forced displacement. These figures do not appear on the map due to a lack of information on the exact dates of these journalists' departure. For this study, we have chosen to base our analysis on the year of exile rather than the year of arrival in their current country of residence, so that the movements reflect the situation in their country of origin.

Methodology

This map illustrates the exile trajectories of exiled journalists who received support from RSF's assistance office between 2021 and 2025. The information presented is based on a simplified representation of often

complex journeys and should be interpreted in the light of the methodological details set out below.

- A simplified representation of the journeys

Journalists' journeys into exile may involve successive stays in several countries before they settle permanently. For clarity, only the country of departure and the most recent host country to date are shown. Countries of transit or temporary residence are therefore not included in the map.

Furthermore, the situation of some journalists has changed since RSF provided support. In some cases, journalists have been forced to return to their countries of origin, notably Afghan journalists deported from Pakistan to Afghanistan. In order to reflect the initial exile, these trajectories have been retained, even where they no longer correspond to the current situation of the journalists concerned.

The date shown for each journalist corresponds to the date of their departure into exile and not to their date of arrival in the destination country shown on the map. This approach reflects the moment when the journalist was forced to leave their country of origin.

- A data analysis based on figures from RSF International's assistance office

This map aims to illustrate the main patterns of journalists' exile supported by RSF from the organisation's headquarters. It does not constitute an exhaustive reconstruction of their individual journeys and does not necessarily reflect their current geographical location, let alone provide a comprehensive overview of current global trends in journalists' exile.

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