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**acos**

A L L I A N C E

**VIRTUAL SAFETY  
COORDINATION  
MEETING · 2021**

# SUMMARY REPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

Every year the ACOS Alliance Annual Safety Coordination Meeting brings together signatory and partner organizations, freelancers and local journalists to advance cross-industry dialogue, collaboration, knowledge-sharing and best practice around journalist safety.

This report sums up the key findings from our 2021 meeting, which included a dedicated session on the safety needs of investigative journalists. It also lays out recommendations and next steps.

ACOS will implement some of these recommendations and we encourage signatories, partners and the newsgathering community at large to invest in addressing the issues raised.

Those who respond are invited to reach out to us - it gives us an opportunity to coordinate, collaborate, and share new initiatives at our next annual meeting. Thank you to all who took part.

**Elisabet Cantenys, Executive Director, ACOS Alliance**

**88 PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS**  
and  
**150 INDIVIDUALS**  
from  
**25 COUNTRIES**  
took part in  
**4 MEETINGS**  
over  
**3 DAYS**

# AGENDA

## **TRAUMA GROUP MEETING**

Moderated by

**Bruce Shapiro, Executive Director, The Dart Center**

## **SAFETY INITIATIVES**

### **REPORTING BACK. LOOKING FORWARD.**

Moderated by

**Maria Salazar Ferro, Director of Newsroom Safety & Resilience,  
The New York Times & President, ACOS Alliance**

## **SAFETY INITIATIVES**

### **INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' SAFETY NEEDS**

Moderated by

**Marc Perkins, Head of Investigations, BBC World Service  
& ACOS board member**

## **CRISIS, SAFETY & RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Spotlight on Afghanistan, Haiti and Myanmar**

Moderated by

**David Rohde, Executive Editor for News, The New Yorker  
& ACOS board member**

# TRAUMA GROUP MEETING

6 December 2021

Moderated by

**Bruce Shapiro, Executive Director, The Dart Center**

32 members of the ACOS Trauma Working Group shared their activities of 2021 and their plans for 2022, including lessons learned and recommendations for future trauma support and training.

## PARTNER PRESENTATIONS

### **UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING JOURNALIST BURNOUT**

**Kristen Neubauer, Videojournalist, Reuters Peer Support Network**

Kristin is working to raise awareness of journalist burnout, which is on the rise. Her one hour presentation for journalists and newsrooms is helping to increase recognition, show why it matters and encourage the implementation of practical tools and techniques to prevent and overcome it.

### **NEW TRAUMA INITIATIVES**

**Clothilde Redfern, Director Rory Peck Trust (RPT)**

RPT's new 'Resilience Programme' provides 100 journalists with access to the Dart Center's multilingual online resilience workshop and trauma therapy to 50 journalists. Their 'Trauma Fund for Afghan Journalists' will provide 10 Afghan journalists with access to therapy and psycho-educational workshops to Afghan journalists in exile. It will also train six Afghans with a medical background so they can lead psycho-educational workshops for journalists.

### **JOURNALIST SUPPORT NETWORK (JTSN)**

**Lucy Westcott, Emergencies Director, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)**

This 2021 pilot project - a collaboration between the Dart Center and CPJ - trained US-based therapists on the culture and stresses of journalism and provided a screening service for 35 journalists, matching them with suitable therapists. 70 journalists contacted JTSN showing a need for the service. JTSN is not currently available to journalists as a program but there is a directory of 18 trained therapists whose information is publicly available on their site.

# TRAUMA GROUP MEETING

6 December 2021

## CHALLENGES, PRIORITIES & NEEDS

- There is a large demand for trauma counselling among journalists but not enough therapists with an understanding of journalists' needs and the context in which they work. Finding clinicians who can treat journalists in their own countries and/or language remains a challenge. At the same time, regulations can limit where clinicians can practice geographically, including online.
- A lack of languages and local cultural understanding among trauma experts and therapists is a key challenge.
- More qualified trainers are needed to run trauma management training and workshops.
- Peer-to-peer support groups can be an important and effective means of support for freelancers and decentralized communities of journalists.
- Training in, and knowledge of, trauma preparedness and appropriate responses is needed for editors as well as journalists.
- Most freelancers are still not getting access to appropriate training and resources - outreach needs to be effective and on-going.
- Where access to therapy is not possible, workshops and resources can offer many benefits (ie. more reach and wider impact).

# TRAUMA GROUP MEETING

6 December 2021

## RECOMMENDATIONS & POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Mapping of current trauma resources, projects and potential new partners, with a focus on local and country-specific knowledge and expertise.
- Translation of existing resources.
- Sharing existing pilots and models that work. For example:
  1. IREX may pilot a peer-support network next year
  2. Freedom House is interested in trauma informed P2P forums
  3. The Dart Center is hoping to replicate First Responders initiatives in Australia for the journalist community
  4. Sharing the JTSN model for other countries.
- The creation of a one-stop-shop of trauma resources for journalists, bringing a curated selection of the best resources together in multiple languages.
- An awareness-raising campaign for freelancers and editors with signposts to the best resources.

## NEXT STEPS

**The ACOS Alliance Trauma Working Group will review these recommendations, prioritise which actions to take forward and consult on how these can be implemented.**

# SAFETY INITIATIVES

## REPORTING BACK. LOOKING FORWARD

7 December 2021

Moderated by

**Maria Salazar Ferro, Director of Newsroom Safety & Resilience,  
The New York Times & President, ACOS Alliance**

ACOS signatories and partners shared safety activities and lessons learned from 2021 and identified the key safety training challenges for 2022. 72 people took part.

## PARTNER PRESENTATIONS

### NEXT GEN SAFETY TRAINERS

**Nadine Hoffman, Deputy Director, International Womens' Media Foundation (IWMF)**

IWMF partnered with ROAAR on this 2021 pilot initiative that set out to create a new, more diverse model for journalism safety training that better reflects today's journalist community and improves newsroom safety management. The initiative has created 15 safety fellows who, between them, have already led training and workshops and joined news organizations' safety teams.

### SOURCE PROTECTION PROGRAMME

**Jake Charles Rees, Programme Manager, Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ)**

In 2021 the CIJ partnered with the Freedom of The Press Foundation to deliver an advanced information security syllabus free of charge for freelance journalists. The programme's pilot ran from 10th May – 30th June with eight weeks of online training, workshops, guest lectures and masterclasses from world leading journalists, investigators and security researchers. The programme will return in spring 2022.

### DIGITAL NEWS RISK

**Gareth Collins, Senior Manager, Digital News Risk, Dow Jones**

In 2021, acknowledging that digital threats were making journalists vulnerable and threatening the integrity of its journalism, Dow Jones set up Digital News Risk to ensure its newsrooms were served by a dedicated 'best in class' digital news risk function. It is focused wholly on digital safety for journalists (not organizational digital security) and works to identify risks, drive mitigation and equip Dow Jones journalists with specialized tools, knowledge and skills.

### LEGAL NETWORK FOR JOURNALISTS AT RISK (LNJR)

**Padraig Hughes, Legal Director, Media Defence**

This new initiative from 14 ACOS signatories was launched in November 2021 following a significant uptake in the number of journalists seeking legal help and an increased use of 'lawfare' (the weaponization of the law) to suppress journalism. The LNJR will ensure coordination around the legal needs of journalists and provide a more efficient process for those seeking legal assistance and representation.

# SAFETY INITIATIVES

## REPORTING BACK. LOOKING FORWARD

7 December 2021

### SAFETY TRAINING CHALLENGES

- **Online safety training:** lockdown has led to digital fatigue. There is a greater fall-out compared with in-person training and planning is difficult as many journalists register but don't attend. Interaction and engagement is less focused and some elements are hard to teach virtually. Courses need to be well-designed and well-run to maintain engagement. There is a digital divide when it comes to broadband access, etc. However, virtual courses can address focussed safety needs more quickly than in-person training.
- **Growing safety threats:** cyber surveillance and spyware, legal and psychosocial safety threats are increasing. Safety training needs to respond better to these new threats with specialist training elements - especially important for freelancers. Education around contracts remains a challenge.
- **Online abuse:** there are a lack of industry-wide training standards on how to navigate online abuse which is increasingly widespread and aggressive.
- **News editors and managers:** there is a general lack of awareness among news editors and top management regarding newsroom safety policies and protocols. Safety practice is often reactive and there is a lack of formal training for news editors around safety in relation to freelancers.
- **Safety trainers:** greater diversity (identity, geography, skillsets, languages) is needed among trainers to reflect a diverse journalist community and evolving threats which don't necessarily fit into the traditional HEFAT skillset. There is also a need for more trainers with a journalism background.
- **Access and awareness:** many freelancers still don't know where to find safety resources, and information and training remains inaccessible to many. A lack of languages among trainers and knowledge of local contexts continues to be a challenge.
- **Greater collaboration:** comprehensive, holistic safety training requires greater collaboration across the industry and among news organizations, NGOs and trainers, as different training elements become more specialized (eg. legal, digital, trauma).



# SAFETY INITIATIVES

# INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' SAFETY NEEDS

7 December 2021

Moderated by

**Mark Perkins, Head of Investigations, BBC World Service & ACOS board member**

Investigative journalists (IJs) around the world are facing growing, varied and intense safety threats. This meeting brought together 55 journalists, editors, NGOs and safety trainers to identify current safety challenges, gaps in training provision and what can be done beyond training to support Investigative journalists' safety needs. Participants shared experiences, observations and lessons learned to formulate practical recommendations.

## JOURNALIST & EDITOR PRESENTATIONS

### **PAVLA HOLCOVÁ**

**Founder, Czech Centre for Investigative Journalism**

Following the murder of her colleague and friend Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in 2018, Pavla and a group of journalists began an investigation into their murder. Their reporting created public pressure that eventually led to the arrest and imprisonment of those responsible and to elections that toppled the government of Robert Fico in Slovakia. Judges and senior police figures were also arrested and charged with corruption. Whilst successful, the investigation took a psychological toll on the journalists involved. Many were put under paid surveillance by the lead suspect and Pavla and her team were constantly attacked by politicians and trolls in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

### **EMMANUEL FREUDENTHAL**

**Freelance investigative journalist, based in Nairobi**

Freelancers have the freedom to pick the investigations they are interested in but their lack of organisational affiliation can also increase risks. Freelancers do not have paid holidays, sick leave or a stable income, which can lead some to do riskier jobs than they would otherwise. This lack of institutional and financial stability can also heighten psychological risks. Finally, many of the journalists who undertake investigations in their own country - and thus the most at risk - are freelancers.

### **RON NIXON**

**Global investigations Editor, The Associated Press**

Ron leads a group of investigative reporters based around the world. The threats they face usually vary from country to country but Ron is seeing increasing threats in the US and Europe: arrest, physical assault and abductions. Legal threats and lawsuits before the publication of a story are increasing. Online threats have intensified over the last 3 years. Working during the pandemic has also increased the mental toll on journalists.

# SAFETY INITIATIVES

# INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' SAFETY NEEDS

7 December 2021

## KEY SAFETY THREATS

- The investigative journalism community is resilient and growing but it is also facing overwhelming safety threats that are not being addressed by current resources and safety training. There is a big sense of urgency.
- The surveillance of investigative journalists and sources has become widespread and commonplace as digital surveillance becomes privatized. Many are unaware that they're being surveilled.
- Physical, digital and legal threats are commonplace against investigative journalists and on the rise.
- The digital nature of their work makes investigative journalists and their sources more vulnerable to threats and attack.
- Safety threats (including surveillance) are often extended to family and friends, not just to direct sources.
- Investigative journalism is expensive, long and time consuming, often involving large local and international teams - this makes safety complex and potentially resource-heavy. Investigative teams often need continued safety and psychological support requiring additional resources.
- Online harassment is a huge issue which has a psychological impact on the journalist and potential impact on the story, affecting trust and credibility.

# SAFETY INITIATIVES

# INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' SAFETY NEEDS

7 December 2021

## KEY SAFETY NEEDS

- The traditional HEFAT model is perceived by most investigative journalists as not relevant to their safety needs.
- Training needs to include legal safety and preparedness, greater digital and information security, psychological preparedness, communication with sources and source protection, etc.
- The safety needs of investigative journalists and editors usually vary from project to project, team to team and among individual team members. Safety oversight and risk assessment needs to be on-going.
- During an investigation, both news organizations and journalists need to be empowered to identify their own safety needs. They can only do this with the right skills and knowledge.
- Most investigative journalists need to have a greater awareness of their own digital footprint and how their digital presence affects their safety.
- Training in trauma management skills is essential for investigative journalists.

# **SAFETY INITIATIVES**

## **INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' SAFETY NEEDS**

7 December 2021

### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There is an urgent need for a safety strategy for investigative journalists.
- A new generation of trainers is needed to address safety training skills-gaps, such as specialists in legal, surveillance, etc. These could also include experienced freelancers who understand the pressures of the job.
- A safety training curriculum needs to be developed for IJ's - online tip sheets and resources aren't enough on their own.
- Greater awareness among news organisations of the need for robust safety protocols, training, awareness and skills within newsroom. Safety cannot be outsourced to trainers.
- Freelancers and editors need to be involved in safety training development.
- Sharing of successful safety models and protocols that have been developed by organisations such as OCCRP.
- More virtual training courses (2 days +) for freelance IJ's with awareness-raising campaign. Training and resources in more languages.
- Retreats for IJs - burnout and psychological pressure is often huge during an investigation (NB finances for freelancers a consideration here).

### **NEXT STEPS**

**The ACOS Alliance will convene a small group of key partners to develop a safety training strategy for investigative journalists.**

**PUBLIC EVENT**

# **CRISIS, SAFETY & RESPONSIBILITY**

## **Spotlight on Afghanistan, Haiti and Myanmar**

8 December 2021

**Moderated by**

**David Rohde, Executive Editor for News, The New Yorker  
& ACOS board member**

**Speakers**

**Aye Min Thant, Features Editor, Frontier Myanmar**

**Najiba Noori, Video journalist**

**Ralph Thomassaint Joseph, Director of Publication, Ayibopost**

2021 shone an intense spotlight on the safety of journalists living and working in Afghanistan, Haiti and Myanmar with large numbers forced into exile and hiding because of their reporting. What is the reality for journalists who continue to report from their home country? What more can be done to support their safety? And how can editors continue to get stories out whilst ensuring the safety of local journalists and contributors.

This panel of young journalists came together to share their experiences and recommendations.

**Watch the recording @**

**<https://www.acosalliance.org/annual-safety-event-2021>**

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