

JX FUND

PROFESSIONAL

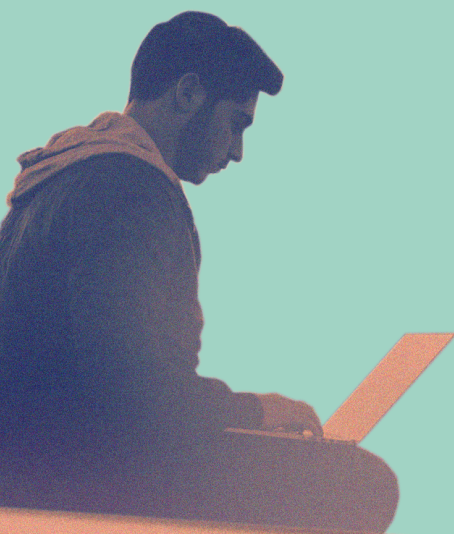
SITUATION AND

NEEDS OF AFGHAN

JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

BERLIN, DECEMBER 2023



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1 PREFACE

I. AFGHAN MEDIA BEFORE AND AFTER AUGUST 15, 2021

The Taliban's takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021 marked a dramatic shift in the conditions for the Afghan society and its media sector in particular. Whereas the past two decades had seen an unprecedented growth in the number of independent media outlets all over the country, Afghanistan dropped to rank 152 in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF 2023) as compared to 122 in the year prior to the takeover. The decline has been accompanied by a notable reduction in liberal forms of expression and programming, coupled with a rise in self-censorship. Before August 2021, 543 media outlets, including TV channels, radio stations, print publications, and online platforms operated across the country at both local and national levels. Under Afghanistan's contested democratic rule, they played an important role in holding government officials accountable, uncovering power abuse and corruption of high-level individuals. Besides, a relatively high level of freedom of expression enabled ethnic and religious minority groups to create their own media outlets and advocate for equal rights and opportunities (Salaam 2023). In doing so, independent media provided an important platform for the empowerment of marginalized voices, socio-political debates, and criticism of government behavior.

Yet, a nuanced analysis of the Afghan media landscape also reveals that predicaments and restrictions existed before August 2021. Violent conflict and the precarious security situation prevented journalists from traveling freely across the country and forced many to seek refuge abroad. Investigative journalists reporting on cases of corruption were subjected to threats, intimidation, and harassment. While most media outlets remained independent and worked towards the professionalization of journalism and media production in Afghanistan, some platforms were co-opted by government officials or warlords, taking a strong partisan stance and promoting political and ethnonationalist agendas. Despite these controversies, however, Afghanistan's independent, diverse, and critical media landscape is considered one key achievement of the twenty years following the first Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Since their second ascent to power, the Taliban have taken an accommodating and, to some extent, contradictory approach towards media (Ibid.). On the one hand, there are clear indications that they do not trust independent media organizations, viewing them as being foreign agents undermining the "Islamic Emirate". Journalists increasingly report incidents of harassment, violent attacks, and arbitrary arrests. Some have been detained for months without any known charges, others have been sentenced on the grounds of anti-state propaganda and foreign espionage while some were later released with an apology. At the same time, however, the Taliban are well aware of the power media institutions hold over public opinion. Within their public communications strategy, they aim at instrumentalizing Afghan media outlets to promote their own narratives and legitimacy (Ibid.). The result is a situation, where the de-facto authorities tolerate independent journalism but rely on censorship, coopting strategies, and intimidation to tightly control the narrative, leaving no room for critical reporting – a development that undermines the very essence of journalism.

Through a decree issued on July 21, 2022 as well as several public speeches, the Emir has prohibited any publication that could negatively affect public opinion about the state or undermine the “Islamic Emirate”. This ban in particular also concerns Taliban leaders who are not allowed to air their criticisms against policies in public platforms. Interviews and personal conversation with journalists, both within and outside the country, indicate severe restriction on reporting, particularly regarding security incidents like IS-K attacks. Also, prior to publishing, any media content that is deemed sensitive, must undergo scrutiny by the de-facto authorities for approval. In the case of security incidents, only information provided by official spokespersons can be published. However, as incidents persistently find their way onto social media through reports by citizen journalists, contradicting the information disseminated by mainstream media, this discord critically undermines the credibility of latter, introducing an additional layer of complexity the information landscape.

Another significant challenge for the media in Afghanistan is the absence of a constitution or regulatory system, creating uncertainty in discerning what is legal or illegal. While the Taliban has not introduced a new media law, they assert that the previous government’s media law remains in effect, prompting journalists to operate within the framework of this existing law. However, the Taliban’s frequent imposition of new, often uncommunicated restrictions creates an unpredictable and opaque regulatory environment, complicating the work of journalists. Afghan journalists, for example, face difficulties navigating this legal framework as different Ministries and the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) issue contradictory orders, further contributing to the complexity.

The new restrictions and censorship imposed by the de facto government significantly impact female Afghan journalists and media workers, who bear a disproportionate burden of these rules. In May 2022, for example, the Ministry of Vice and Virtue issued a decree ordering all female journalists to cover their faces when being on air. Although the media sector is one of the few areas in which women are still allowed to work, their room for maneuver is even more restricted than that of their male colleagues, as they are not allowed to interview male officials and cannot conduct research or participate in events without a mahram¹. In an interview, a prominent female Afghan journalist in Kabul described the situation of her fellow coworkers as “terrible” and declared it as “the end of journalism for women.”

These policies of the de-facto authorities have dire consequences for the private media sector in Afghanistan. By November 2021, 60% of journalists and media professionals had lost their jobs, with the number even higher among female journalists (84%). Besides, 231 media outlets closed down within the first three months after the fall (RSF 2021). The indefinite closure of several outlets was not solely due to policy shifts but was also exacerbated by the suspension of international donor funding and economic instability. Many media outlets were never financially viable from the outset due to their heavy reliance on donor funding, making them unsustainable. The media sector’s high dependency on foreign funds, which significantly diminished after the Taliban takeover, coupled with restrictions and repressive measures, especially against female journalists, played a major role in the majority of these closures.

¹ A male companion who is related to the woman such as husband, brother, etc.

As a result, many journalists have left the country and sought asylum elsewhere. The growing number of journalists in exile has fostered the emergence of Afghan exiled media platforms worldwide. On the one hand, well-established outlets have re-opened their offices operating from abroad. This includes newspapers, like *Hasht-e-Subh* and *Etilaat Roz* that are now publishing digital content, reaching their audiences online. Similarly, radio stations like *Radio Azadi* are now broadcasting their programs on the Internet (Salaam 2023). On the other hand, prominent Afghan journalists in exile have founded a number of new platforms, such as *Amu TV* or *Zan Times*. Many of these exiled media deploy a hybrid approach of collaborating with journalists inside Afghanistan for information and content creation, whereas management and publication are organized from abroad.

By disseminating news and countering state-sanctioned information and propaganda, Afghan exiled media play an important role in granting audiences access to restricted information. Their analyses provide a nuanced understanding of what is happening on the ground, including with regard to the security situation and political developments. Especially for Afghans inside the country, who are cut off from this kind of information, this type of reporting is crucial. Besides, many platforms allow audiences to share footage and disseminate information about sensitive events. Doing so, exiled media seem to have taken on the critical role Afghanistan's independent media sector played under the former Republic, providing a platform for citizens to express concerns and criticism, and facilitating a space for socio-political discussion. Yet, not all media outlets in exile foster inclusive debates. Some have taken a rather partisan stance, polarizing discourse by spreading conspiracy theories and fueling ethnic divides that could exacerbate existing tensions in Afghanistan, particularly along ethnic lines.

Beyond providing access to information, Afghan journalists in exile also play an important role in keeping communication channels between Afghans inside the country and the rest of the world open. Particularly in the West, media attention has largely shifted to other contexts and conflicts, like for example in Ukraine and the Middle East. Afghan media platforms located in those countries try to keep Afghanistan on the agenda, urging the international community to support Afghanistan in solving its economic, humanitarian, and political issues.

II. BEYOND AFGHANISTAN: EXILED MEDIA COMMUNITIES WORLDWIDE

Afghanistan's community of exiled journalists and media professionals is far from being the only one. In recent years, democratic backsliding and autocratic tendencies have led to an increase in exiled media platforms worldwide. Journalists from Iran, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russia and numerous other contexts have established media outlets operating outside their home countries. As in the case of Afghanistan, they take on an important role in keeping domestic and international audiences informed about what is happening on the ground. In doing so, they counter the spread of government-induced disinformation and aim at holding those in power accountable (Benazzo 2023).

Yet, accounts of journalists and media professionals around the world highlight how challenging the work in exiled media is. First, being forced to flee their home countries, many exiled journalists face psychological trauma. In new environments, they are confronted with language barriers and bureaucratic hurdles, including with regard to visa procedures and work permits, that make it difficult to find housing or employment. These challenges add to the financial pressure many exiled journalists and their families face, aggravating psychological stress.

Second, even once an exiled medium is set up, it is difficult to create reliable content. As in the case of Afghanistan, many exiled media outlets apply hybrid approaches, collaborating with local correspondents. While new technologies and secure messenger apps make this cooperation easier, challenges with regard to the safety of local staff and the verification of information remain. Besides, repressive governments try to inhibit audiences from accessing uncensored information, for example, by restricting access to certain webpages. To circumvent these restrictions and ensure that audiences can actually be reached, media outlets require expensive technical know-how and equipment. At the same time, opportunities for exiled media platforms to generate income, for example through advertisement or subscriptions, are very limited. Therefore, many rely on donor funding as insufficient financial resources remain a major challenge (Katz Marston 2023).

To address these challenges, journalists in exile have highlighted the importance of support networks, where they can exchange technical advice and provide each other with moral support (Rotinwa 2023). Besides, external support is considered vital, like for example through the provision of office spaces, language trainings, legal assistance, and the creation of networking opportunities (Hlinovská and De Schutter 2021).

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Continuously updated compilation of articles, reports, studies, academic research and toolkits on current global developments on media and journalism in exile: <https://jx-fund.org/journalism-in-exile/>

2 SURVEY OUTLINE AND METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study aims to conduct a needs assessment targeted at Afghan journalists and media professionals living in exile. The assessment presented is based on an online survey conducted by the JX Fund during the period of September 27 to November 8, 2023.

The survey has successfully attracted a diverse sample of 154 journalists located in 14 different countries. A combination of mandatory and voluntary questions explains the different samples for a number of questions. This approach allowed for a broader measurement of experiences with and perceptions of exiled media. Open questions allowed the collection of personal assessments and problem descriptions.

The results provide valuable insights into the needs of those journalists and media professionals and can significantly contribute to the work of organizations in designing support initiatives for Afghan journalists, with a special focus on those who are currently residing in exile in Germany.

The efficient collection of data through the online survey proves to be a practical tool, especially considering the circumstances surrounding the abrupt Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. The data collected through this online survey can serve as a foundation for more targeted research using random selection in the future.

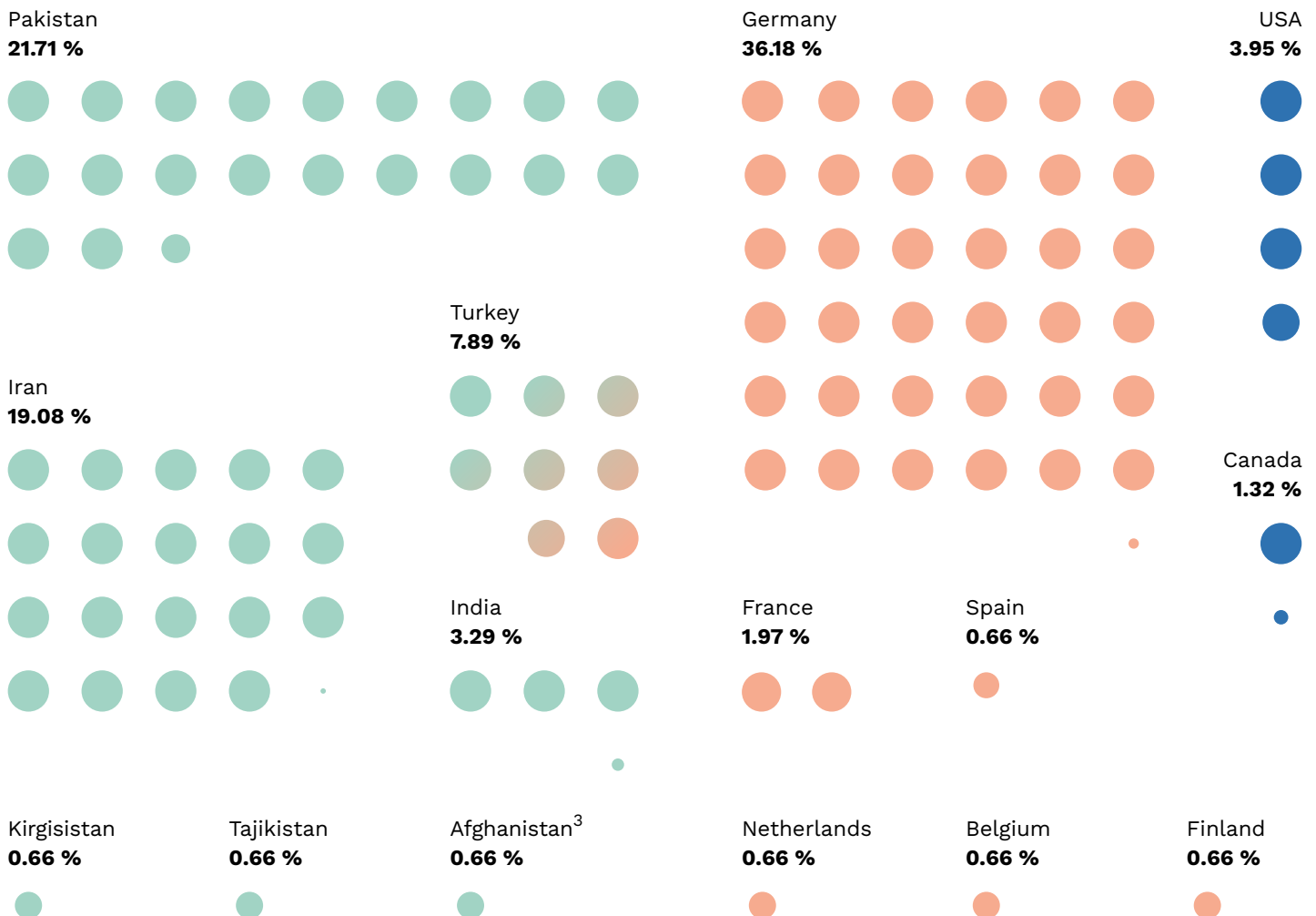
3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The survey garnered responses from a total of 154 participants, comprising both men (81.58%) and women (18.42%)¹.

Most respondents settled in Germany and other Western countries² (see figure 1), with others in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran, common destinations for Afghans over the last four decades. Approximately 8% of respondents found their way to Turkey, which has become a significant destination for the Afghan diaspora post-Taliban takeover. A majority of those who are currently based in Europe, the US, and Canada see their next one to five years in those countries. A majority of those currently based in Pakistan and Iran is looking for a way out of those countries to settle in the West. Some of these individuals report that their applications are in process.

FIGURE 1

WHERE DO YOU LIVE RIGHT NOW?



N = 154

¹ The underrepresentation of women in this sample indicates that existing professional networks are shaped by underlying gender dynamics that warrant closer examination. In order to assess the realities, challenges, and needs of female Afghan journalists in exile, further research is required.

² It is important to mention that the networks of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) were used as a key access point for reaching out to participants of this survey, which explains the relatively high proportion of responses from Germany.

³ One person stated that they were currently (temporarily) in Afghanistan after two years in exile.

4 CURRENT SITUATION IN EXILE

Approximately 86% of survey participants (see figure 2) left Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The majority of these individuals have been in exile since then, while approximately 9% left in the last few months. Around 14% departed Afghanistan before the fall, reflecting the precarious security situation in the country before the collapse of the former Republic.

Around 92% of respondents reported being unable to return to Afghanistan for various reasons (see figure 3), with 87% citing prosecution and threats in their home country (see figure 4).

FIGURE 2

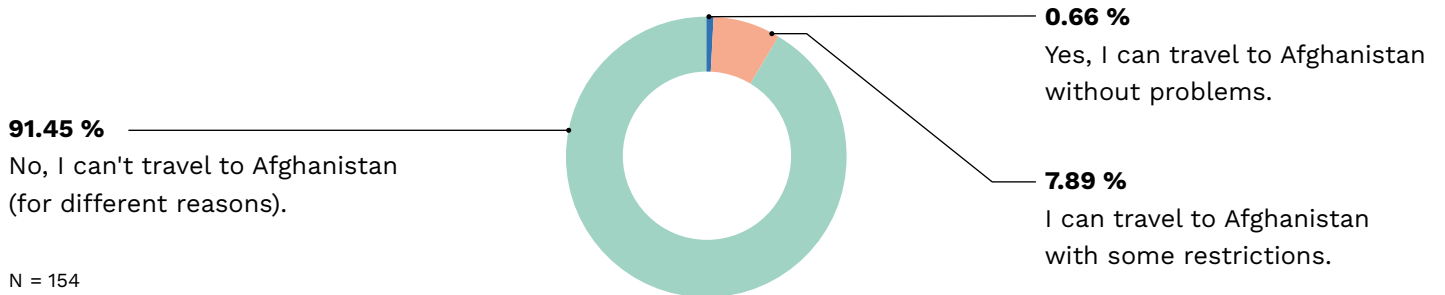
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN EXILE?



N = 154

FIGURE 3

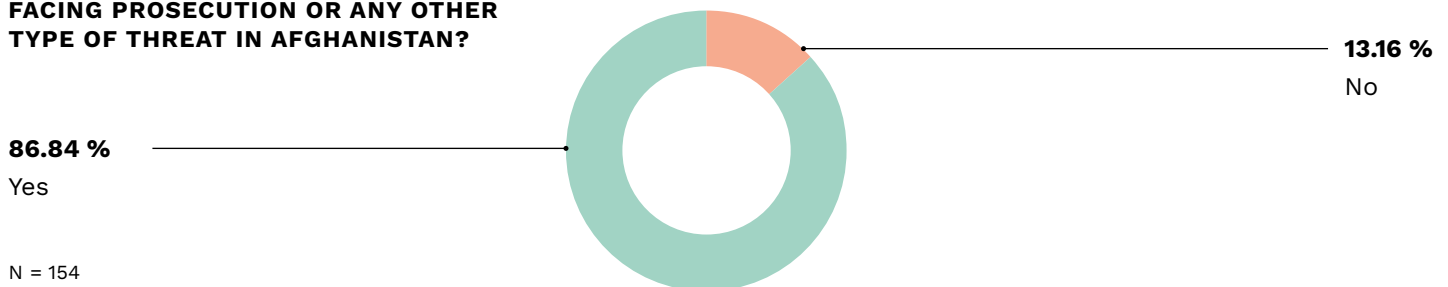
ARE YOU ABLE TO TRAVEL TO AFGHANISTAN?



N = 154

FIGURE 4

ARE YOU OR ANY OF YOUR FAMILY MEMBERS FACING PROSECUTION OR ANY OTHER TYPE OF THREAT IN AFGHANISTAN?



N = 154

75% of respondents managed to leave the country with their families (see figure B.1), while 68% of those currently living alone anticipate their families joining them (see figure B.2). This expectation is observed among those residing in Germany, as well as in Iran and Pakistan.

Regarding residence situation, 65% of respondents reported having received a work permit and visa (see figure B.3), while 28% did not possess either. The latter group, primarily situated in Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, faces challenges related to legal status. In Germany, around 18% of respondents are without a residence permit, and 5% reported their cases being processed.

The majority of those residing in Pakistan and Iran using legal entries arrived on tourist, medical treatment, and family visit visas, indicating potential overstay and undocumented status. Conversely, a majority of those in Germany and the broader Western world obtained necessary documents on humanitarian grounds (see figure B.5 and B.6).

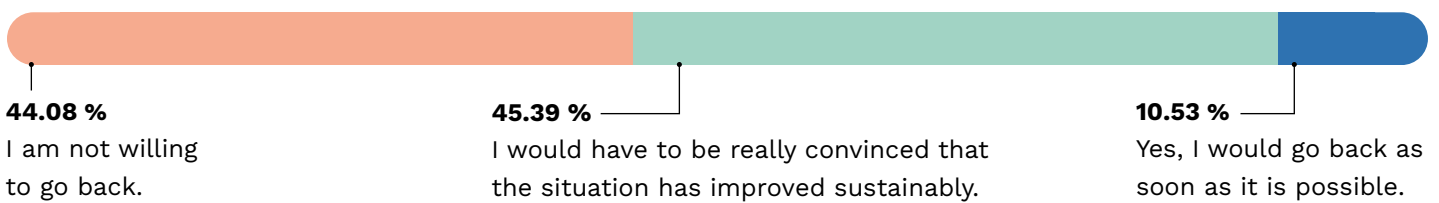
A significant challenge for journalists in exile is their financial situation. A majority of respondents reported no financial support, neither from the host governments nor specific individuals or organizations, with those settled in Europe, the US, and Canada faring comparatively better. For example, 85% of respondents in Germany receive financial support from the government (see figure B.3).

When queried about their aspirations for the next one to five years, more than 66% of individuals currently residing in Iran and over 49% of those living in Pakistan express a desire to establish residence and seek refuge in other countries. A significant portion of those in Iran voices concerns about the government’s policy prohibiting foreign nationals from engaging in journalistic activities, and they harbor fears regarding their personal safety.

Given the evolving nature of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the perspectives of respondents may have shifted, particularly in light of recent events⁴. This shift could be attributed to Pakistan’s decision to deport a substantial number of “undocumented foreign nationals”, potentially impacting the sentiments and plans of those who participated in the survey during this period.

FIGURE 5

IF THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN WERE TO IMPROVE, WOULD YOU CONSIDER RETURNING TO THE COUNTRY?



N = 154

Regarding plans to return to Afghanistan, 44% of the respondents stated that they are not willing to go back, while 45% are open to the idea but would require convincing evidence of sustained improvement in the situation. Only 11% indicated a willingness to return to their home country as soon as possible (see figure 5). For those residing in Germany, a mere 7% are willing to return as soon as possible, with 40% stating that they will not return to Afghanistan. Among Germany-based participants, 53% would consider returning only if they were genuinely convinced that the situation in Afghanistan has sustainably improved.

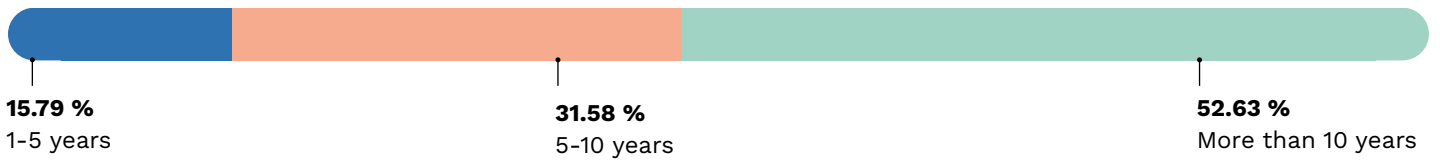
⁴ See <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/13/pakistan-afghanistan-taliban-refugees-deportation/>

5 PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES IN EXILE

52% of the 154 survey participants reported having more than ten years of professional experience (see figure 6). The majority of respondents indicated previous employment with various TV stations in Afghanistan (45.27%), followed by radio stations (around 17%), print media (11%), online platforms (10%), or a combination of the aforementioned (15%) (see figure 7). Participants reported experience with well-established media outlets, including privately-run TV and radio stations, international media outlets like DW, BBC, and others, as well as lesser-known regional and provincial outlets in Afghanistan.

FIGURE 6

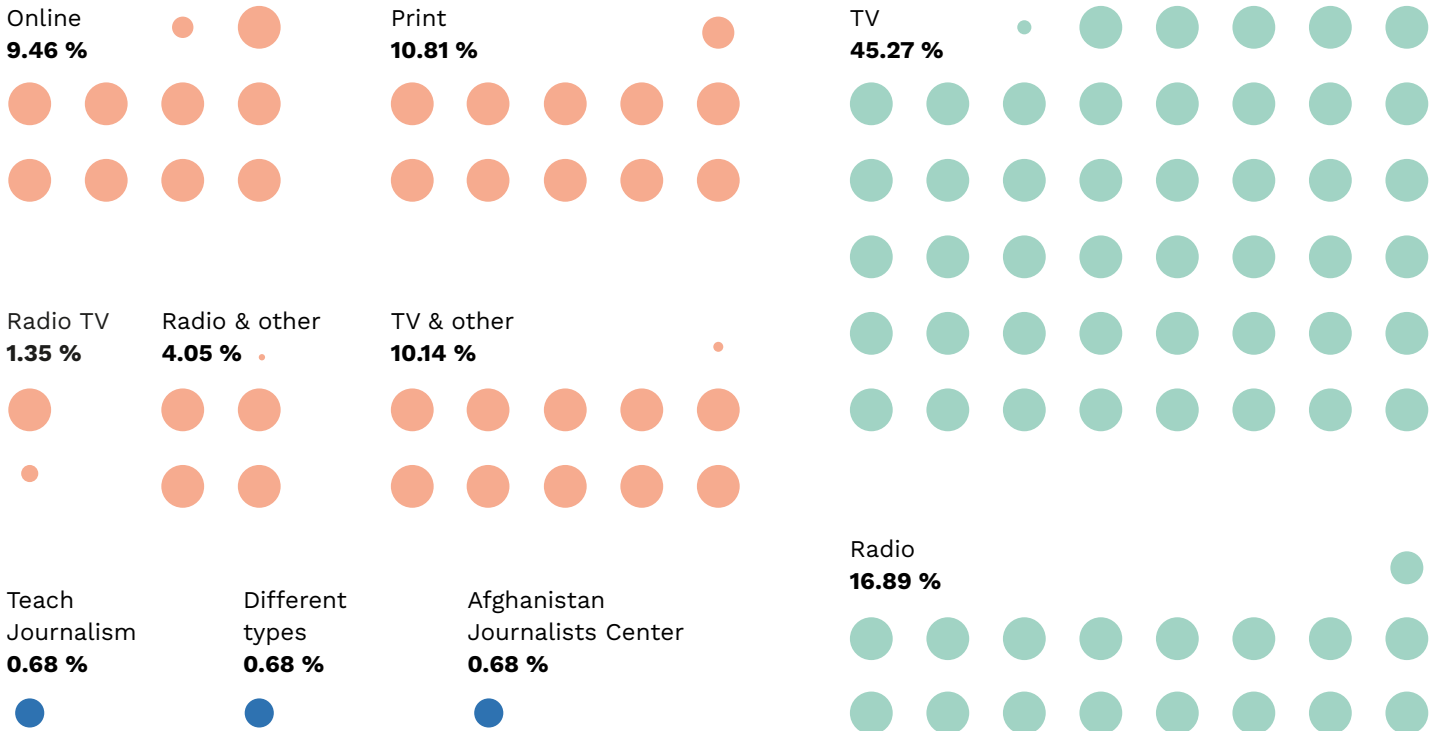
HOW MANY YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE?



N = 154

FIGURE 7

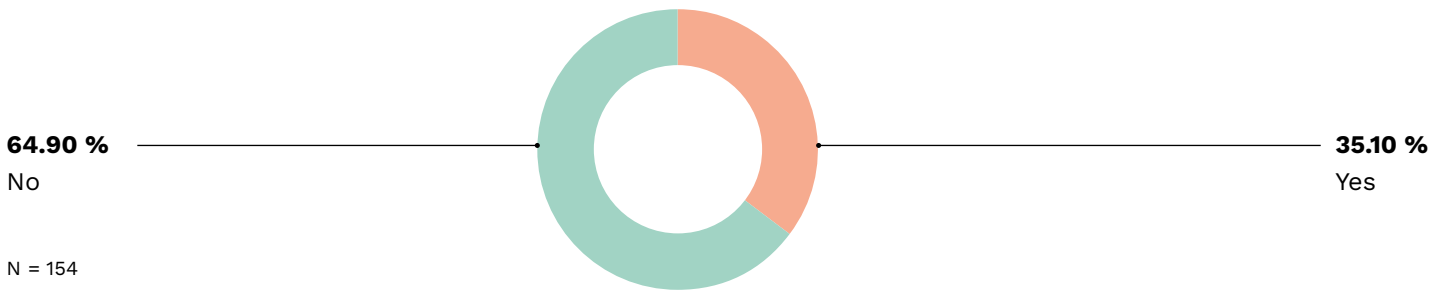
IN WHAT TYPE OF MEDIA DID YOU MOSTLY WORK?



N = 154

FIGURE 8

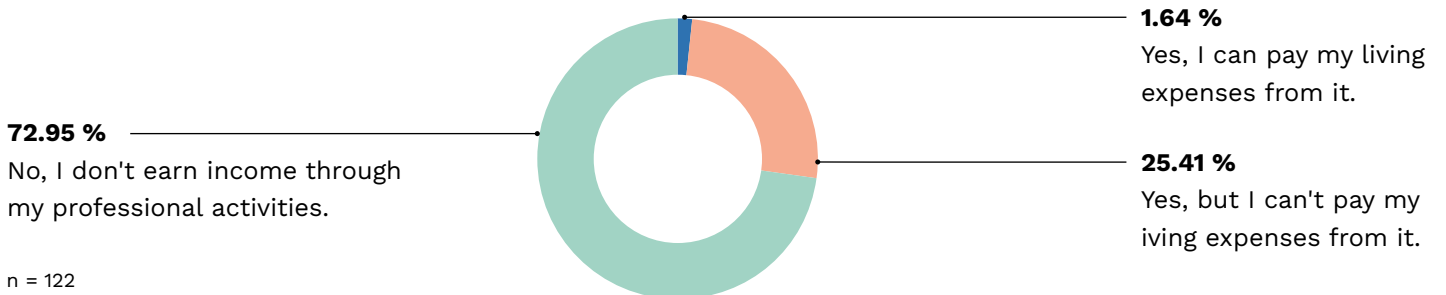
ARE YOU CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN ANY PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM OR MEDIA ACTIVITIES?



65% of the respondents report that they are currently not involved in any professional journalism or media activities (see figure 8). Of those who are currently residing in Germany, only 25% are involved in professional media-related activities.

FIGURE 9

DO YOU EARN INCOME THROUGH PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES?



73% of the respondents indicate that they do not generate any income through their professional activities (see figure 9). Only one freelancer and one editorial team member report being able to cover their expenses through their engagement. Other respondents state that it is insufficient to cover their living expenses.

FIGURE 10

ARE YOU ENGAGED IN ANY ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES TO SUPPLEMENT YOUR INCOME?

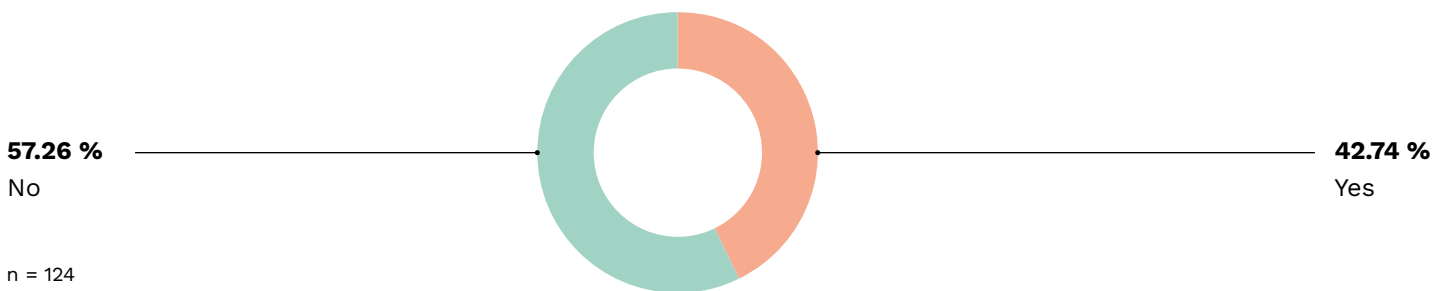
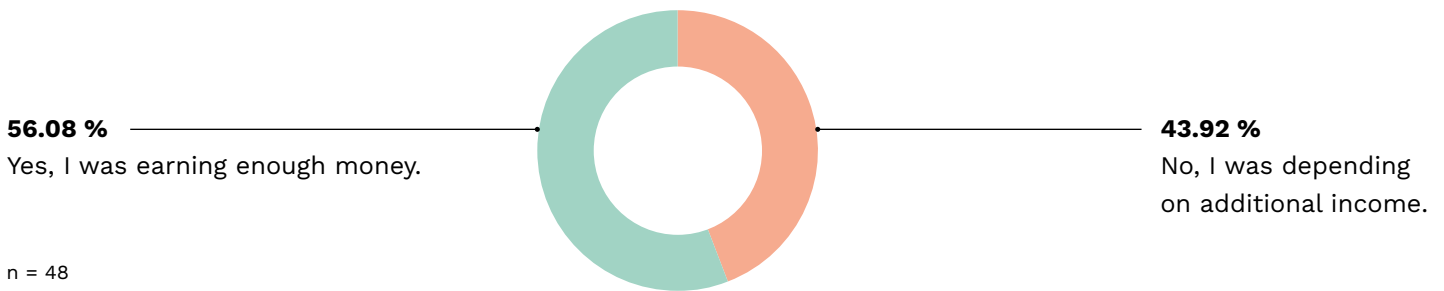


FIGURE 11

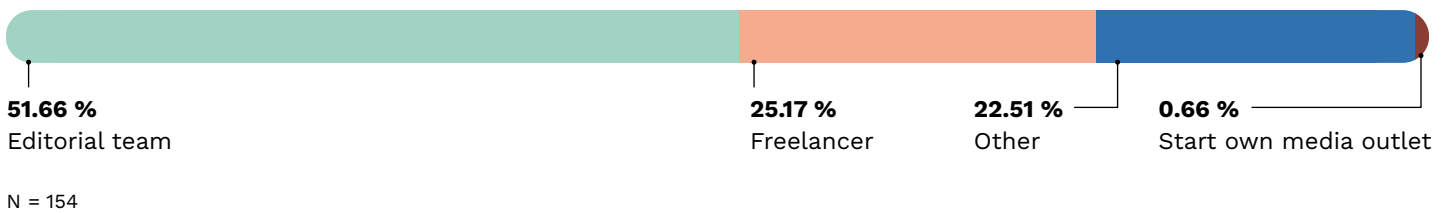
WERE YOU ABLE TO MAKE A LIVING THROUGH YOUR WORK AS A MEDIA PROFESSIONAL?



43% of the respondents indicate that they are engaged in supplementary jobs in order to cover their living expenses (see figure 10). In this context, it is noteworthy that around 44% of the participants reported relying on additional income sources even when they were working as journalists in Afghanistan (see figure 11)

FIGURE 12

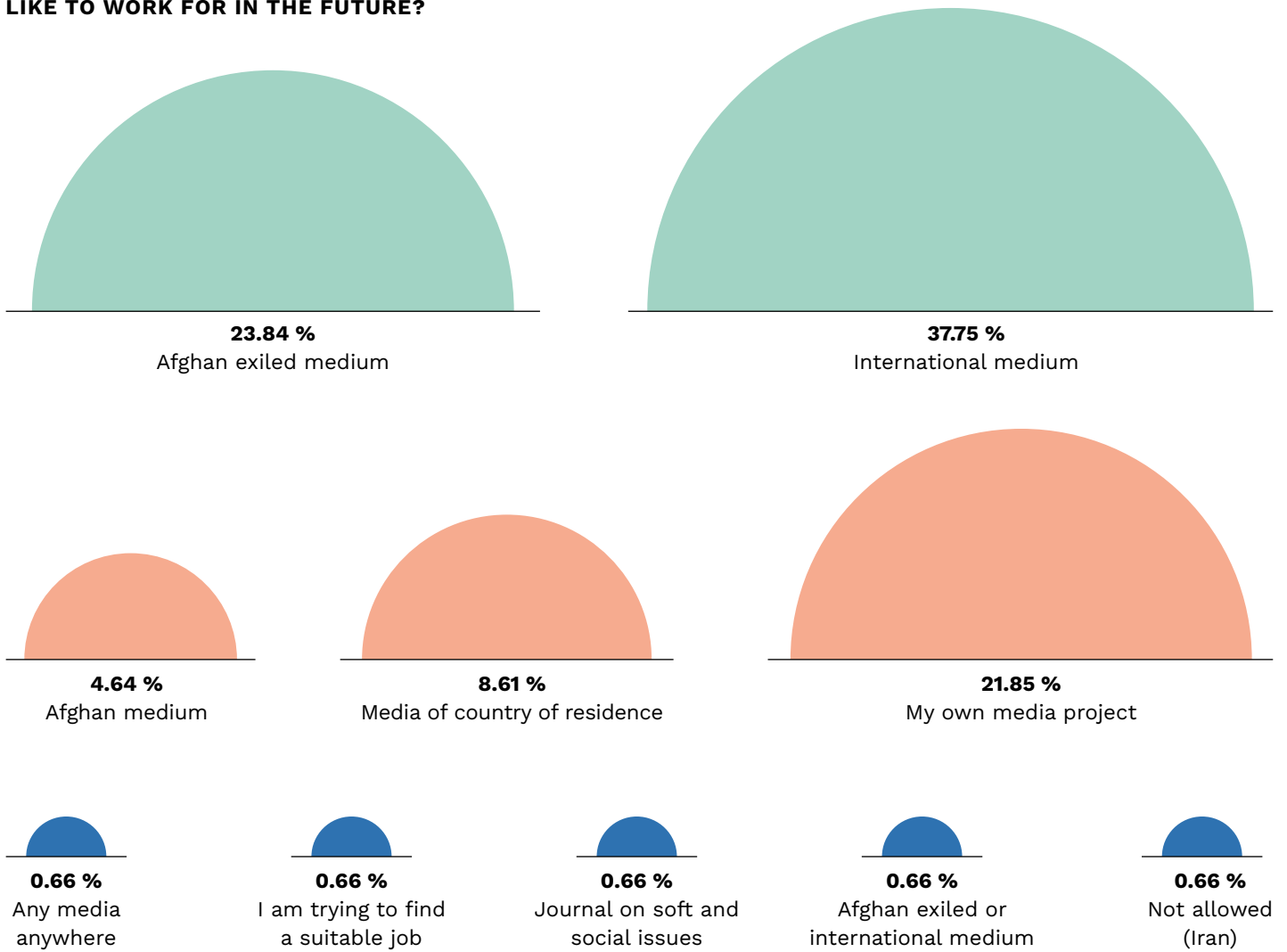
WHAT TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT ARE YOU SEEKING FOR THE NEAR FUTURE?



In response to the question regarding the type of involvement respondents are seeking in the near future, 52% expressed a desire to become part of an editorial team (see figure 12). 25% aspire to work as freelancers, while the remaining respondents opted for the “other” category without providing clear elaboration on their specific preferences. Among participants residing in Germany, 46% express a desire to work as members of an editorial team, while 22% are seeking engagements as freelancers.

FIGURE 13

IN WHAT TYPE OF MEDIUM WOULD YOU LIKE TO WORK FOR IN THE FUTURE?



N = 154

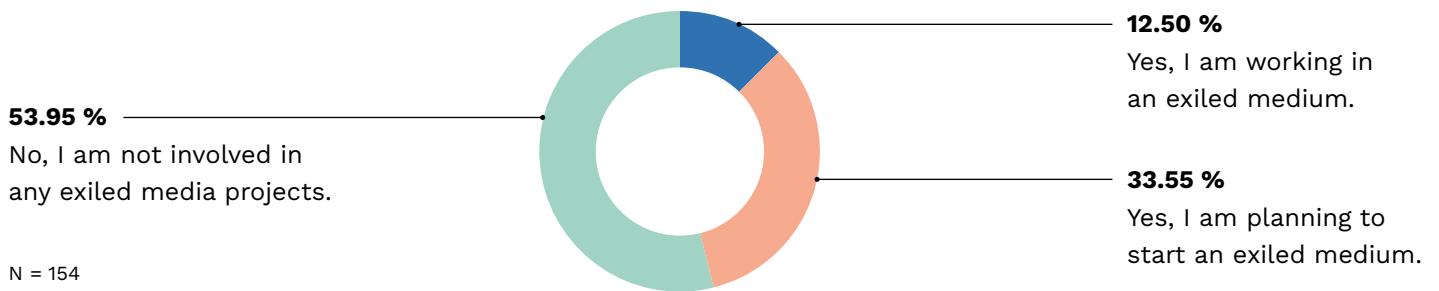
It is remarkable that most respondents to a semi-open question about the type of medium for their future work indicated an international medium (38%), followed by a medium in exile in Afghanistan (24%) and their own media project (22%).

6 MEDIUM IN EXILE: EXISTING, PLANNED, AND RESOURCE NEEDS

Only around 13% of the overall participants reported that they work for a media outlet in exile, while 34% are planning to establish an exiled medium. 54% indicate that they are not involved in any media in exile (see figure 14). Among respondents in Germany, around 6% work in an exiled medium, whereas approximately 46% are planning to establish one.

FIGURE 14

ARE YOU PART OF AN EXILED MEDIUM OR PLANNING TO START ONE?

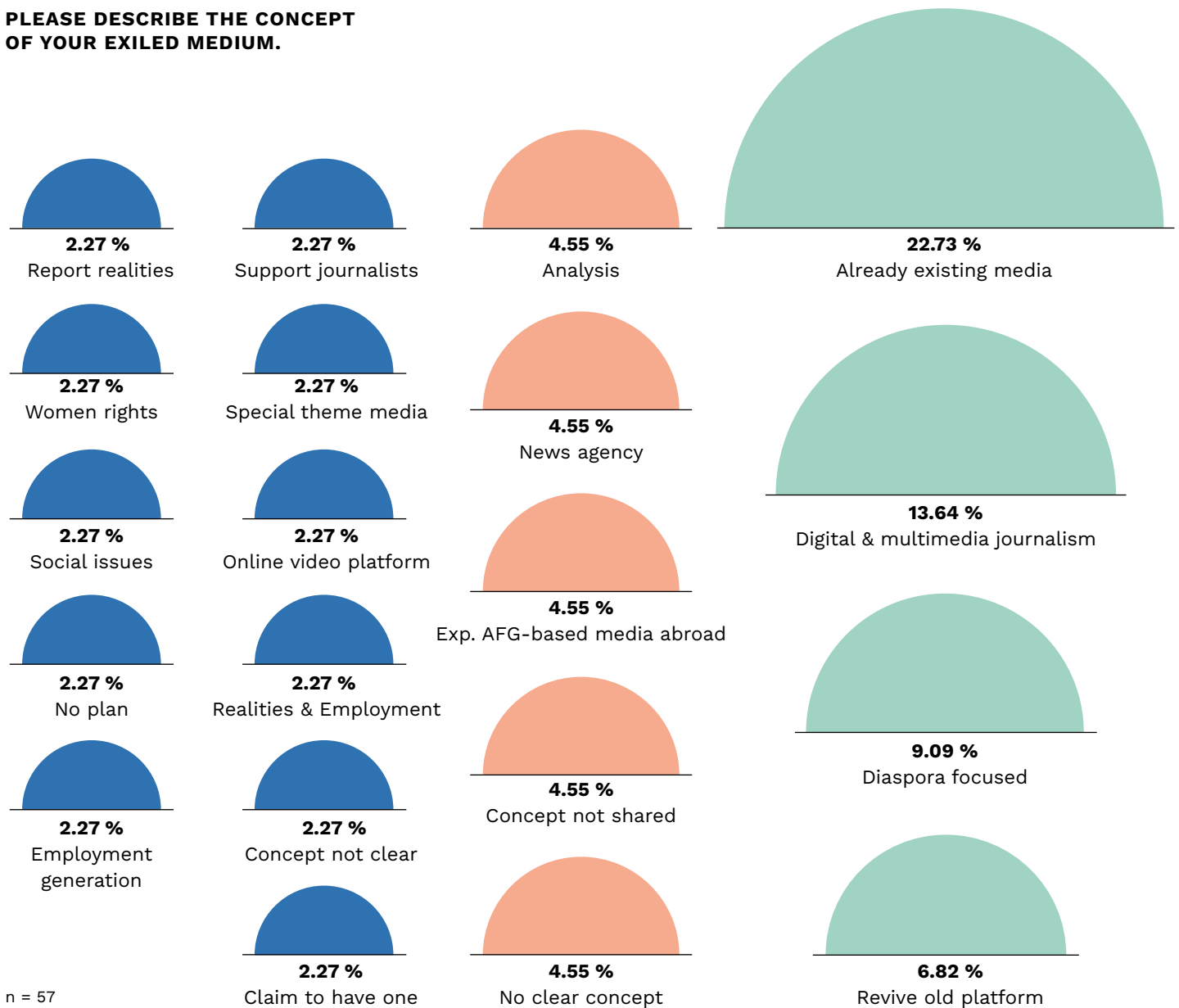


In terms of concept outlines for media in exile, approximately fifty-seven participants have responded. Among those, 18 individuals are residing in Germany. In some cases, the responses do not clearly represent concepts, and in other cases, the concepts are not well-defined.

Regarding common themes and trends, the most significant relate to already existing media (23%), followed by concepts surrounding the establishment of digital and multimedia journalism platforms (14%), reviving old platforms that participants were either a part of or were founders of, in the past in Afghanistan (7%), and aspirations to expand Afghanistan-based mediums abroad (5%). The 23% (out of 57) whose concepts are based upon existing mediums, 7% (2 individuals in Germany) are seeking support for their already running mediums in exile. Additionally, there are a few individuals who claim to have ready concepts but will share them only if there is interest in supporting their ideas (see figure 15).

FIGURE 15

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE CONCEPT OF YOUR EXILED MEDIUM.



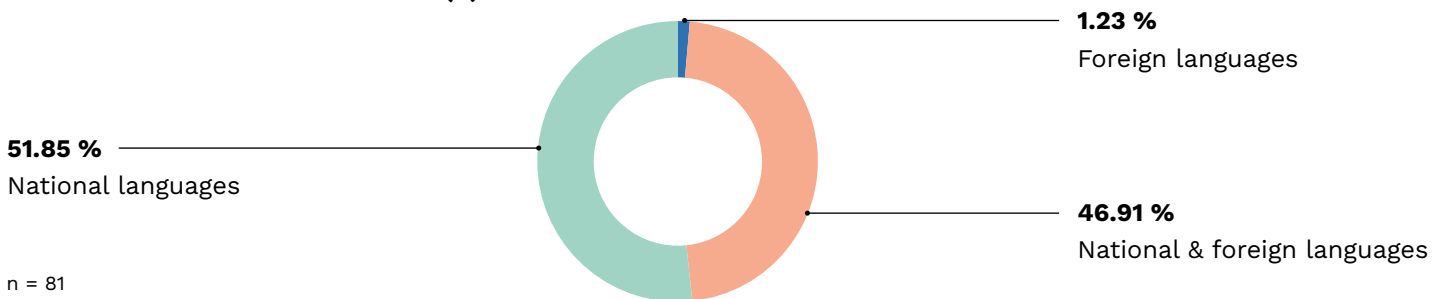
In terms of the main topics that ninety-seven respondents would like to cover as part of their future planned/desired exiled media, or currently covering in their already existing media in exile, the topmost mentioned is news from Afghanistan, culture, economy, and human rights (36%), followed by participants opting to choose most of the other categories presented to them, including international news, practical information for the Afghan diaspora, local news from the countries where the respondents are currently residing, and sports. Reflecting realities on the ground in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, mainly related to human rights and women’s rights, is also a recurring theme mentioned by a significant number of the participants.

An absolute majority of the individuals who are currently engaged in media-related activities use online outlets for their work, with YouTube being the top choice, followed by other platforms such as Telegram channels, blogs, and podcasts. To a somewhat lesser extent, participants continue their activities via TV and radio channels from Afghanistan and those established in exile.

Out of those who are currently engaged in professional media activities, 35% indicated that they broadcast or plan to broadcast in the national languages Dari and Pashto as well as English. Another 23% reported that they broadcast in Pashto and Dari. 16% stated that they broadcast in only one national language, Dari. The remaining few broadcast in the national languages and some other foreign languages, including Hindi, Urdu, and German (see figure 16 for aggregate levels).

FIGURE 16

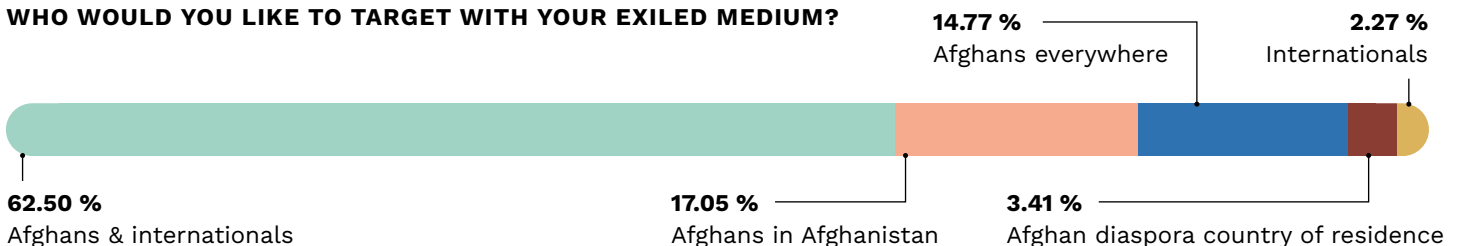
PLEASE INDICATE THE LANGUAGE(S) OF THE EXILED MEDIUM YOU WORK FOR.



Of the eighty-eight individuals who responded, 63% indicated that their target audience comprises Afghans both inside and outside Afghanistan, including the country where they are currently based, as well as the broader international community (see figure 17). 17% viewed Afghans living in Afghanistan as their target audience, while another 15% stated that they catered to Afghans everywhere, both inside and outside the country.

FIGURE 17

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO TARGET WITH YOUR EXILED MEDIUM?

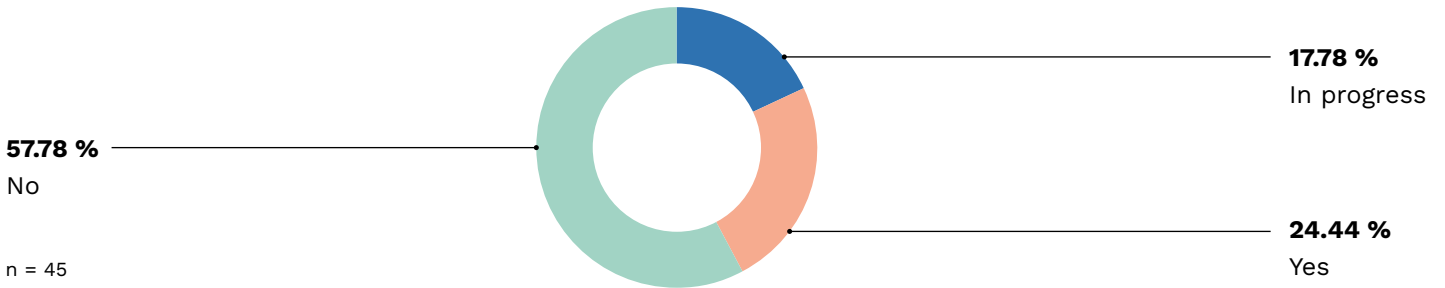


n = 88

When asked whether their media projects were already registered or in the process of being registered as legal entities, 24% (out of a total of 45) of those who are planning to start an exiled medium stated that their projects were registered, 18% indicated that their projects were in the process of registration with 58% reporting that their projects were not yet registered (see figure 18). As for those who reported that they are already working in exiled medium, 63% indicated that their projects were registered with another 13% reporting that they are in the process of registration. Of the 29 participants who are based in Germany and plan to establish an exiled medium, 24% indicated that their media projects were registered, whereas 17% reported they were in the process of registering their projects.

FIGURE 18

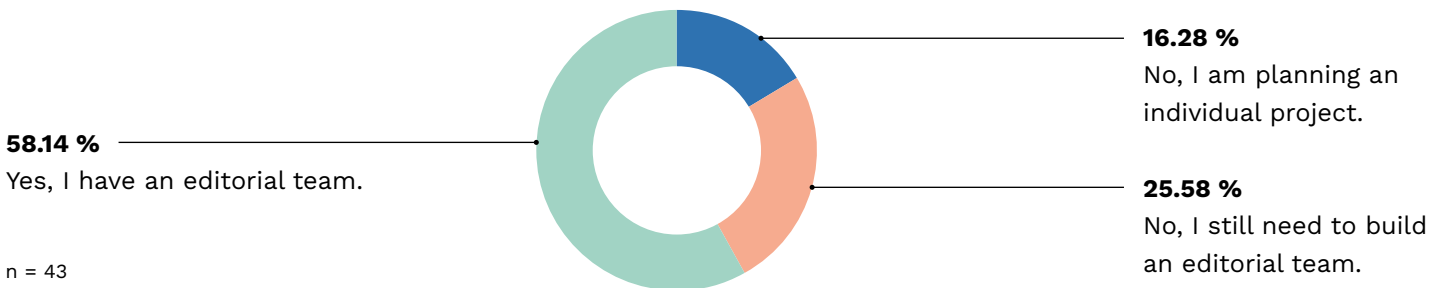
IS THERE ALREADY A LEGAL ENTITY ESTABLISHED FOR YOUR MEDIA PROJECT, OR IS ONE PLANNED?



Of the total of 43 individuals (22 in Germany) who indicated that they were planning a medium in exile, 58% (59% in Germany) reported having an editorial team to work with (see figure 19). Meanwhile, 26% (23% in Germany) stated that they still needed to build an editorial team, with an additional 16% (18% in Germany) indicating that they were planning individual projects. Among the forty participants who responded, the most frequently mentioned range for team members needed or currently working with was between three and eleven people.

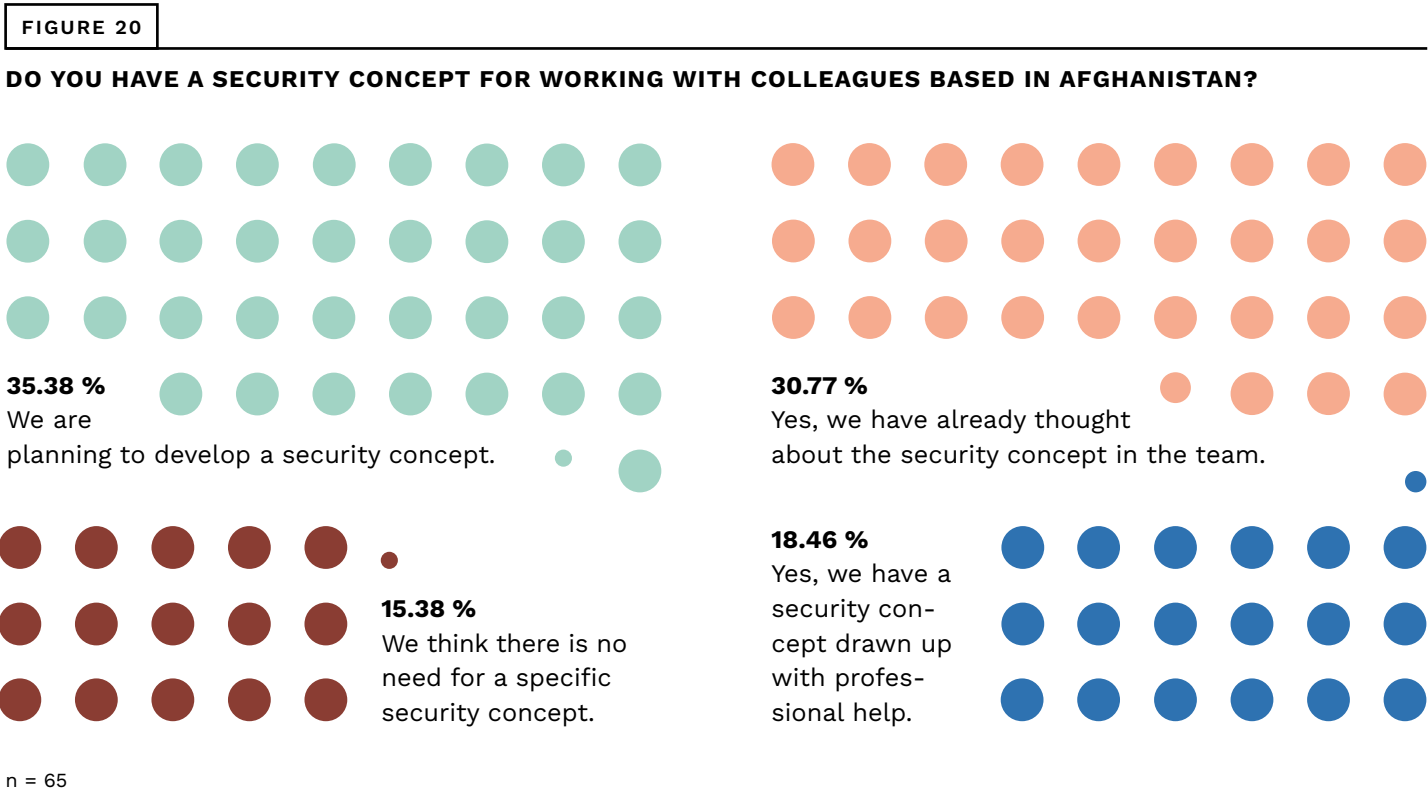
FIGURE 19

DO YOU HAVE AN EDITORIAL TEAM, OR ARE YOU LOOKING TO FORM ONE?



For those who are working or planning to work with colleagues in Afghanistan, security is an important issue to consider. Out of the sixty-five participants who responded to the security question, 35% indicated that they were planning a security concept, while 31% had already considered a security plan within their team. Additionally, 18% reported having a security concept drawn up with professional help, and another 15% believed that there was no need for a special security concept (see figure 20).

In terms of the business model, only forty-four participants, seventeen of whom are based in Germany, responded. The majority indicated that their business models relied on marketing ads, online revenue generation from platforms such as YouTube, and donor funding, especially during the start-up phase.



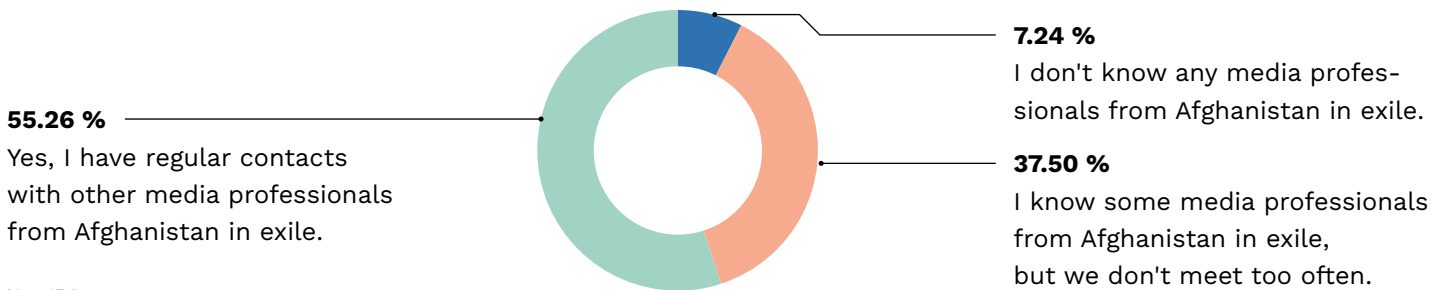
An absolute majority of the 85 participants who responded highlighted their need for financial resources for their existing or planned/desired media outlets in exile. This need was followed by a combination of other requirements, including the need for human resources, technical resources, and know-how. Some participants also expressed the need for access to international networks. This trend was consistent among the thirty-five respondents based in Germany who answered the resource needs question.

7 AFGHAN MEDIA IN EXILE: CONTACTS, MODES OF COMMUNICATION

55% of all respondents reported having regular contact with other exiled media professionals from Afghanistan (see figure 21). 38% indicated knowing some exiled media professionals from their home country, while only 7% stated that they do not know any exiled media professionals from Afghanistan. The trend looks similar for the 55 individuals based in Germany, where 53% said they have regular contact with media professionals from their home country. Additionally, 42% indicated they knew some media professionals from Afghanistan, with only 5% indicating that they do not know any media professionals from the country who are currently living in exile.

FIGURE 21

DO YOU HAVE ANY CONTACTS WITH OTHER MEDIA PROFESSIONALS FROM AFGHANISTAN IN EXILE?



An absolute majority of the participants reported using WhatsApp to communicate with their peers. They are mostly part of WhatsApp groups where they receive information and exchange messages. This is followed by other means of communication, such as social media, Google Meet, Signal, Clubhouse, and Telegram. Some participants also reported connecting with fellow journalists in regular in-person and virtual meetings, most of which are organized by organizations such as RSF. Participants also reported improved networking after participating in events organized by various organizations, including the Exile Media Forum in Hamburg organized by the Körber Foundation, conferences organized by MiCT, fellowships, and training programs by DW, IWMF, and Afghan media such as Elitaat Roz. These events were mentioned by several respondents as occasions that have helped improve their networking abilities with fellow Afghan journalists. Meanwhile, a significant number of participants cited reasons such as lack of funding for their travels, preoccupation with bureaucratic procedures in the countries they have settled, and, most importantly, lack of information about opportunities for networking as reasons for not being able to participate in media-related events.

A majority of the participants (54%) rated solidarity within the Afghan media community as either low or very low (see figure 22). The remaining participants had a more positive opinion on the matter, rating solidarity within this particular community as very high or quite high. This trend is even more pronounced in Germany, where 74% rated solidarity within the Afghan media community as either low or very low.

FIGURE 22

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE LEVEL OF SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE AFGHAN MEDIA COMMUNITY?



N = 154

Participants were asked a series of questions to gauge their interest in networking with the Afghan media community in exile. An absolute majority of the respondents (93%) indicated that they were either interested or very interested in connecting with the Afghan media community in the countries where they are currently based (see figure 23). The trend is even more pronounced for those based in Germany with 98% of the participants being either interested or very interested in connecting with the Afghan media community based there. Similarly, participants overwhelmingly (95%) indicated that they were either interested or very interested in establishing contacts with media professionals who are currently in exile in countries other than where the respondents themselves are based (see figure C.2). This trend holds true for all participants based in Germany with 94% indicating that they are either interested or very interested in establishing contacts with the Afghan media community in other countries.

FIGURE 23

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING CONTACTS WITH AFGHAN MEDIA PROFESSIONALS BASED IN THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



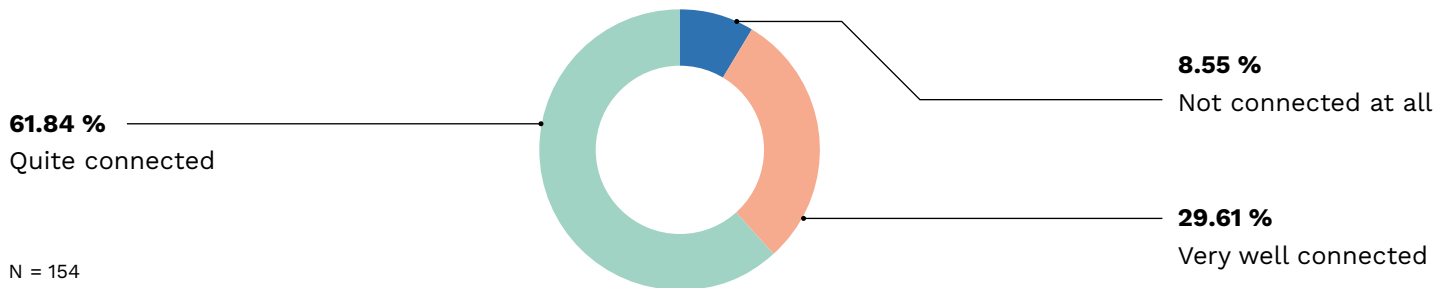
N = 154, Germany: n = 55

8 AFGHAN DIASPORA: NETWORKING, USE OF MEDIA OUTLETS, AND CONCERNS

Approximately 93% of the respondents indicated that they were either very well or quite connected with the Afghan diaspora, with only 9% stating that they were not connected with the diaspora at all (see figure 24).

FIGURE 24

HOW WELL ARE YOU CONNECTED WITH THE AFGHAN DIASPORA IN THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE?



Regarding interest in establishing contacts with Afghan cultural communities at large, an absolute majority (90%) indicated that they were interested or very interested in connecting with such communities in the countries where they are currently based (see figure C.3). This trend is similar for participants living in Germany with 89% indicating comparable interest. Likewise, 93% of the respondents stated that they were either interested or very interested in connecting with Afghan cultural communities in countries other than where they are currently based (see figure C.4). This trend is similar in Germany, where 87% of the participants are either interested or very interested in establishing contacts with these communities.

Participants believed that a majority of the Afghan diaspora used social media platforms as sources of information, including those with video content such as YouTube. According to the participants, this was followed by other online platforms, TV and radio channels from Afghanistan and those that are established in exile.

In response to a question regarding concerns associated with media consumption within the diaspora, a few notable themes emerged. Some participants expressed concerns about the lack of freedom of speech in the countries where they are currently based. Upon closer inspection, a majority of these respondents currently reside in Iran. Another significant theme worth mentioning is the fear of fake news and propaganda directed at Afghans in exile. Participants believed that such news could contribute to ethnic tensions in Afghanistan.

Moreover, participants also referred to negative news regarding migration by media outlets of the countries where they are based. They fear that the narratives driven by these media outlets may lead to hatred directed at the Afghan diaspora, which has dispersed around the world.

9 SKILLS/COMPETENCES AND TRAINING NEEDS

Only a minority of the participants have mastered the languages of their host countries but also English – albeit at comparatively higher levels of proficiency – with a majority stating that they need extra language courses (see figures D.1-D.4). The need for extra language classes is particularly pronounced in Germany with 89% of the respondents feeling the necessity for extra German and English language courses.

79% of the respondents (82% in Germany) indicated that they needed a workspace (see figure E.3). 92% of the respondents (93% in Germany) stated that they do not have all the equipment they need for their work. In terms of equipment needs, an absolute majority of the respondents mentioned that they needed all necessary equipment, followed by another category which includes computers, cameras, and microphones. Other most frequently mentioned equipment items were mobile phones, tripods, sound systems, lights, and studios. 59% of the participants indicated that they would be happy to participate in training workshops on how to use media-related equipment (see figure E.2).

In addition, the survey asked respondents to self-evaluate their technical and legal skills. Findings indicate that capacities vary across different areas of competence. A majority of the participants considered themselves most competent (well-informed and professional) in the area of digital security followed by media management, social media promotion, and multimedia production. Comparatively, participants felt considerably less competent in areas related to information about the legal framework for media outlets in other countries followed by business model development, fundraising, and legal framework for freelancers (see figures F.1-F.8).

Building on this self-evaluation, participants were asked to rate the usefulness of training offers for the community of Afghan journalists and media professionals in exile. Findings indicate that the ratings of journalists and media professionals living in Germany do not deviate significantly from the overall sample. Overall, all trainings were rated at the higher end of the scale (either very needed or useful) by the absolute majority of the respondents with only slight differences. Equal and highest level of importance is attached to trainings regarding legal framework for media and freelancers followed by multimedia production as well as fundraising, media management as well as psychological support training, and finally business development (see figures G.1-G.9).

10 CONCLUSIONS

This study has rendered the needs of Afghan journalists in exile more visible and identified several stress factors and challenges they are facing. Those include psychological trauma, uncertainty about the future, and economic hardship, aggravated by the fact that many do not earn a living through current professional activities. While journalists exiled in Germany do receive government support, the situation is particularly precarious for those in Iran and Pakistan, where risks to personal safety, impending deportations, and professional bans add to financial pressures.

Findings indicate that Afghan exiled journalists worldwide struggle to continue practicing their profession. Even among the few who still work in media, the vast majority depend on additional sources of income. This demonstrates a clear need for support, especially since many respondents aspire to establish their own medium in exile in the future and would like to continue working in the field. The majority of Afghan journalists in exile would like to continue to report on Afghanistan related issues and thus reach Afghans both inside and outside the country with their independent stories.

Regarding networks, the survey has shown that Afghan media professionals are well connected with each other, as well as with the Afghan diaspora. Networking events are well received and there is a strong interest in further networking opportunities. At the same time, however, solidarity within the Afghan media community is perceived to be low, raising the question of how this impacts relationships and networks among journalists in exile.

In addition, two major concerns have been identified: first, fake news and propaganda spread online risk exacerbating ethnic tensions in Afghanistan. Second, Afghan journalists are worried about increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in online spaces around the world. The polarization of online spaces poses a particular challenge to the work of journalists in exile and warrants closer examination.

Finally, the report identifies a number of support measures based on the capacities, interests, and needs of respondents. Journalists in Germany are particularly interested in improving their German and English proficiencies. Besides, there is a clear need for tangible support, such as equipment, as well as legal and technical training.

Based on the needs identified in this survey, the following recommendations can be identified:

- 1 Networking events for Afghan journalists and media professionals in exile play a vital role in offering a platform for exiled media development. Wider participation can be achieved through better public communication surrounding such events and through financial assistance for travel-related expenses.
- 2 The many economic challenges identified in this report underline the importance of financial and tangible assistance for Afghan journalists in exile, such as seed funding, technical equipment, and adequate workspaces.
- 3 Training programs for Afghan journalists in exile should cover a wide range of competence areas, including language proficiency, legal frameworks, as well as technical skills related to journalism and media professions.
- 4 Training programs should be complemented by individually customized support that helps Afghan journalists in exile to. Such measures could, amongst others, include assistance in the media business planning, media development, and security strategies.
- 5 Given the involvement of various organizations in providing certain support measures for the exiled Afghan journalist community, it is strongly advisable to coordinate the efforts among the relevant actors to avoid duplications and maximize the impact of its future programming based on the results of this survey.
- 6 Further research is necessary to better understand the Afghan media in exile sector as a whole as well as the core concerns. This includes an assessment of gender-specific challenges and needs. Additionally, it is important to understand how polarization, fake news, and anti-immigration sentiments online impact the work of Afghan journalists in exile and how related challenges can be addressed.

A BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

FIGURE A.1

GENDER



B CURRENT SITUATION IN EXILE

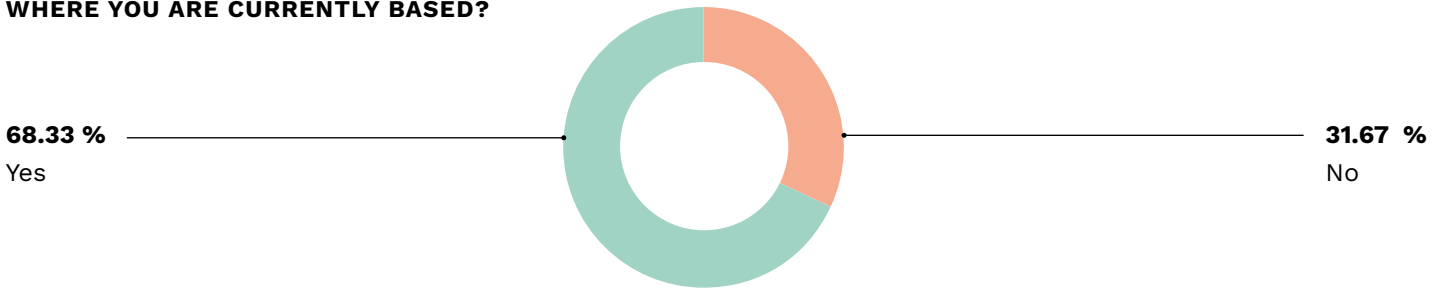
FIGURE B.1

DO YOU LIVE ALONE, OR DO YOU LIVE WITH YOUR FAMILY IN EXILE?



FIGURE B.2

DO YOU EXPECT ANY FAMILY MEMBERS TO JOIN YOU SOON IN THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU ARE CURRENTLY BASED?

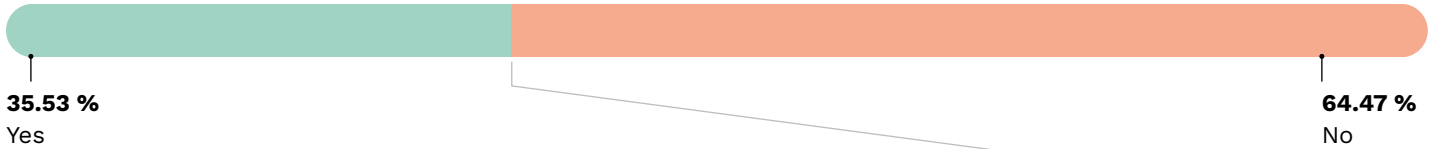


N = 154

FIGURE B.3

DO YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU ARE CURRENTLY BASED?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE B.4

HAVE YOU ALREADY OBTAINED YOUR VISA AND WORK PERMIT?

ALL RESPONDENTS



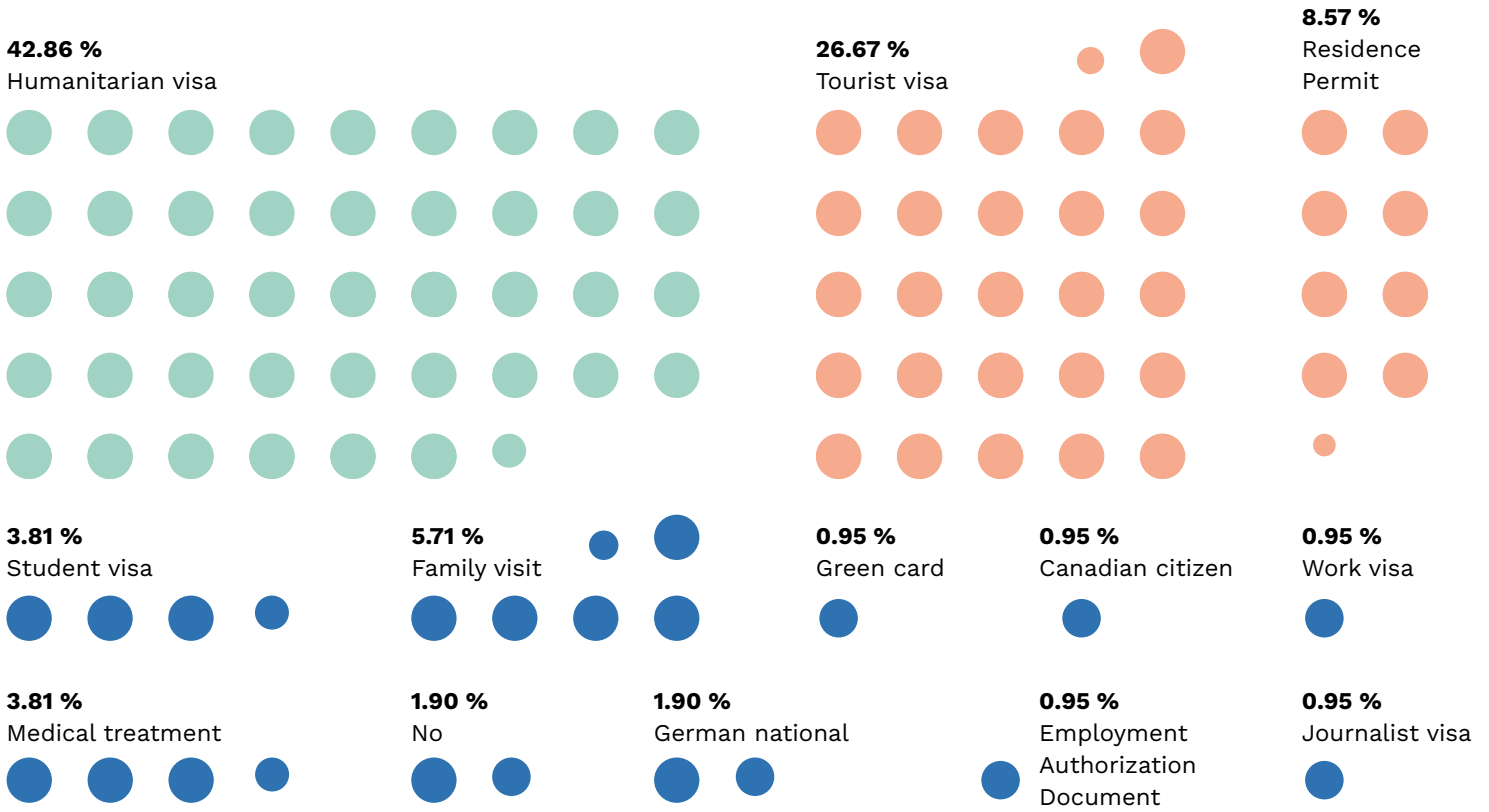
RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE B.5

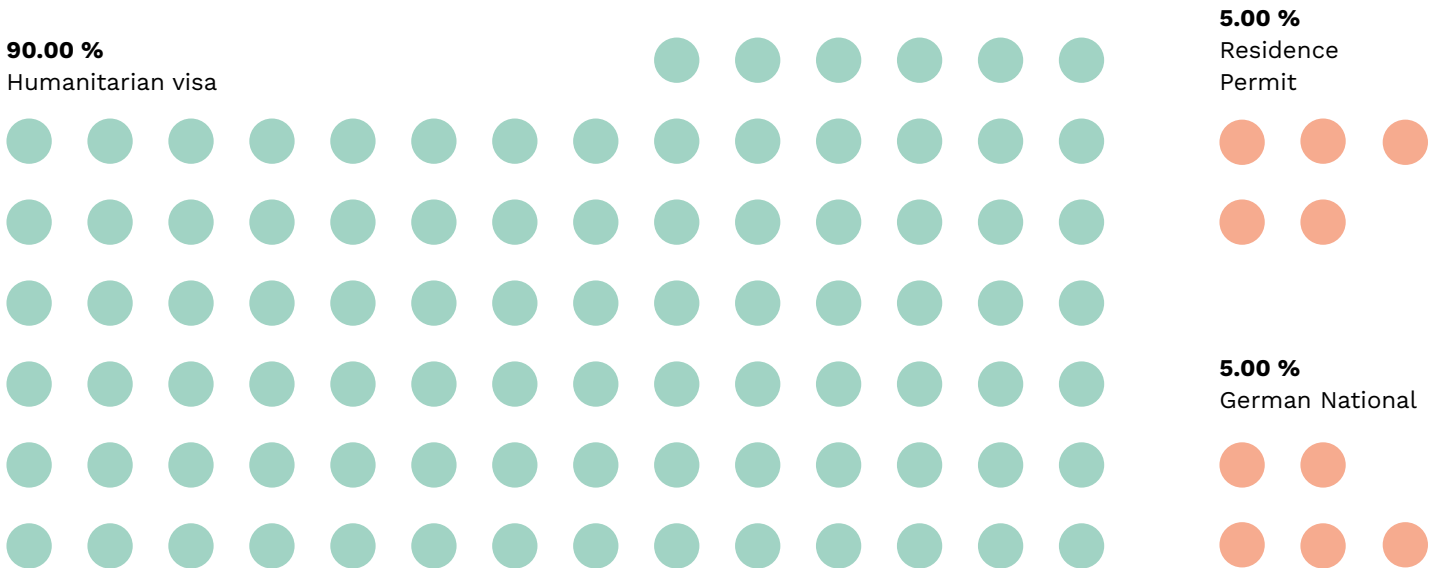
IF YES, PLEASE SPECIFY THE TYPE OF VISA YOU CURRENTLY HOLD:



n = 105

FIGURE B.6

IF YES, PLEASE SPECIFY THE TYPE OF VISA YOU CURRENTLY HOLD IN GERMANY:



n = 40 [from a total of 55 respondents from Germany]

C AFGHAN MEDIA IN EXILE: CONTACTS, MODES OF COMMUNICATION

FIGURE C.1

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING CONTACTS WITH AFGHAN MEDIA PROFESSIONALS BASED IN THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154

FIGURE C.2

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING CONTACTS WITH AFGHAN MEDIA PROFESSIONALS BASED IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY

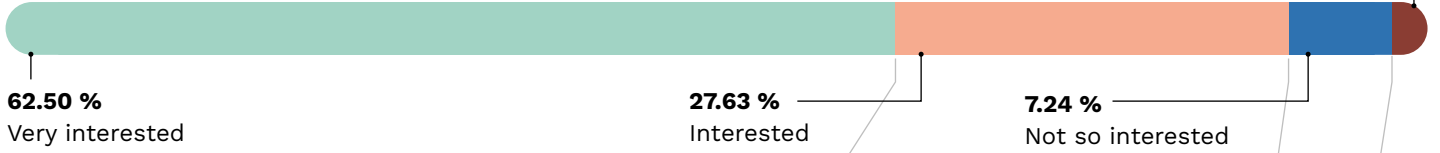


N = 154, Germany: n = 55

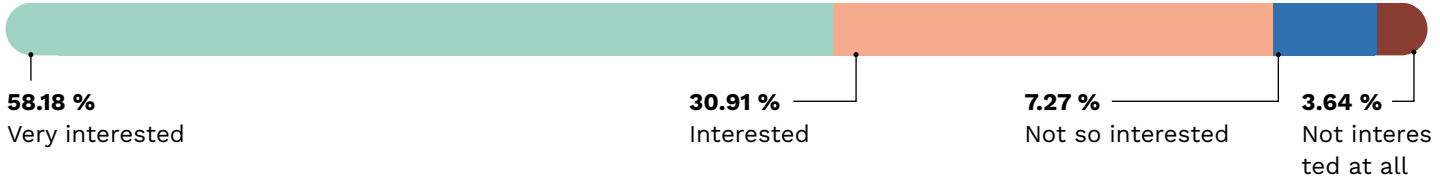
FIGURE C.3

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING CONTACTS WITH MEMBERS OF THE AFGHAN CULTURAL COMMUNITY IN THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

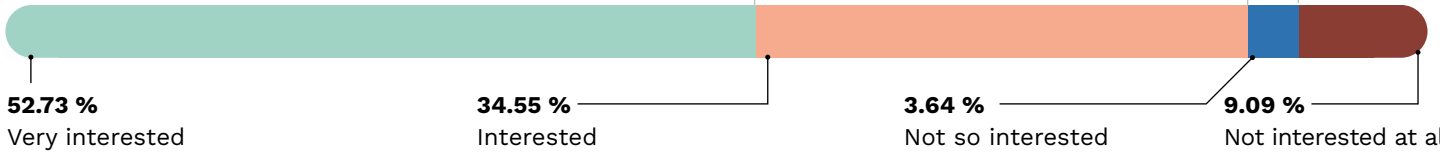
FIGURE C.4

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ESTABLISHING CONTACTS WITH MEMBERS OF THE AFGHAN CULTURAL COMMUNITY LIVING IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



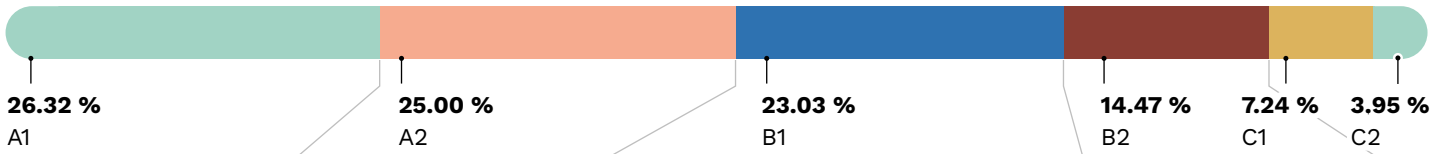
N = 154, Germany: n = 55

D NEEDS RELATED TO LANGUAGE PROFICIENCIES

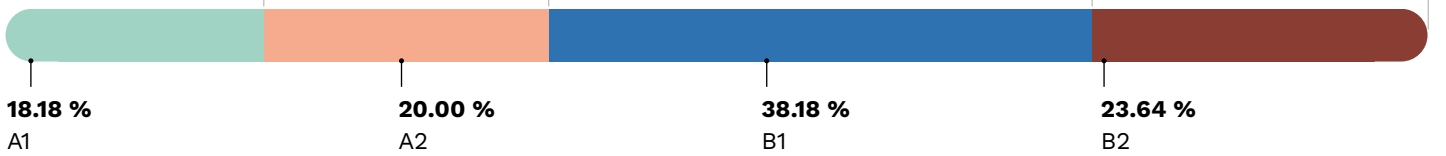
FIGURE D.1

WHAT IS YOUR PROFICIENCY LEVEL IN THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU COUNTRY LIVE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE D.2

DO YOU NEED ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE COURSES TO LEARN THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE D.3

WHAT IS YOUR PROFICIENCY LEVEL IN ENGLISH?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE D.4

DO YOU NEED ADDITIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSES?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

E NEEDS RELATED TO TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT

FIGURE E.1

DO YOU HAVE ALL THE EQUIPMENT YOU NEED FOR YOUR WORK?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY

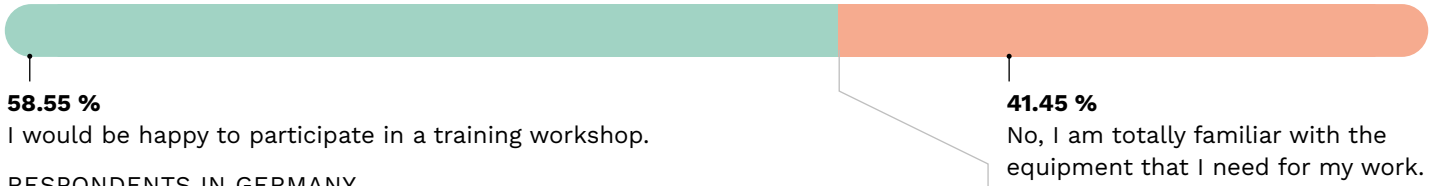


N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE E.2

DO YOU NEED TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR THE USE OF THIS EQUIPMENT?

ALL RESPONDENTS



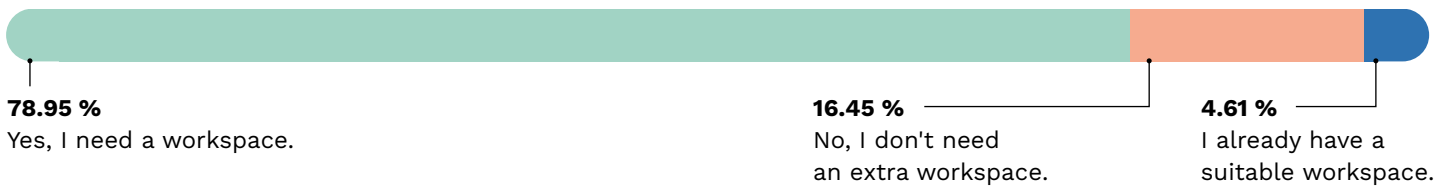
RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE E.3

DO YOU NEED A SPECIFIC ROOM FOR YOUR WORK AS A JOURNALIST OR MEDIA PROFESSIONAL?



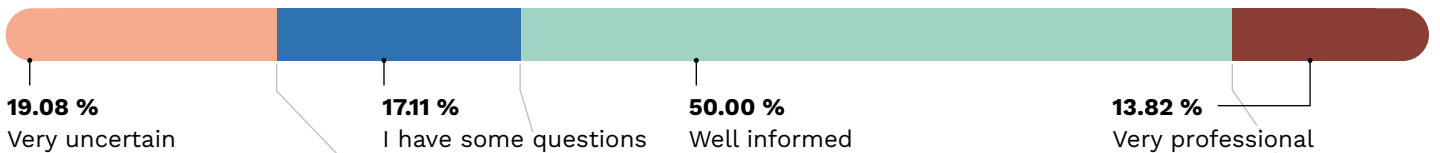
N = 154

F ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS AND COMPETENCES

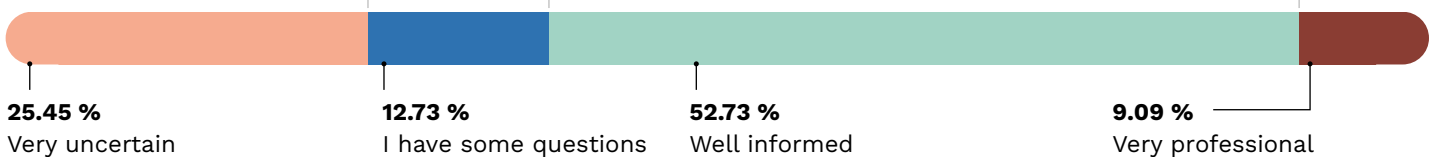
FIGURE F.1

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR DIGITAL SECURITY COMPETENCE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE F.2

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR COMPETENCE IN MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTION?

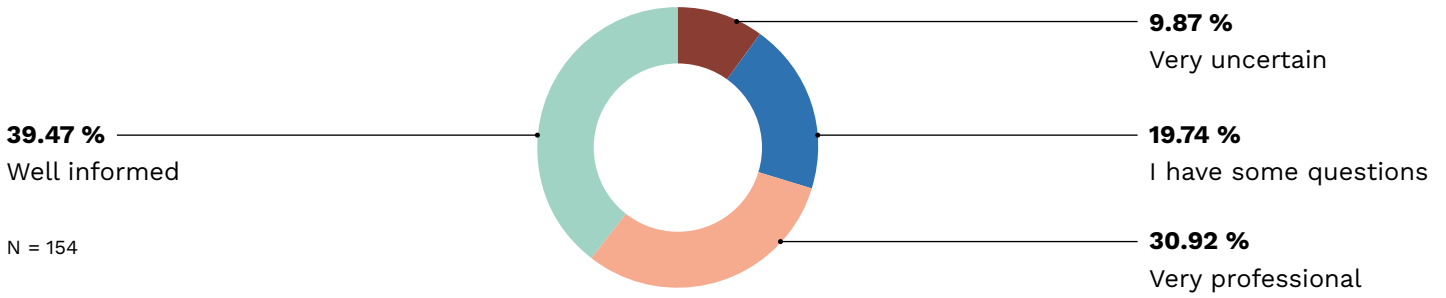


FIGURE F.3

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION?

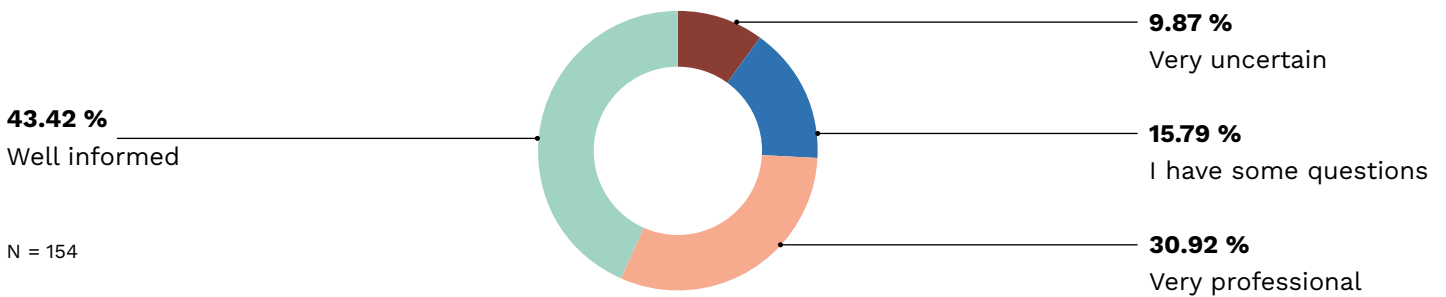
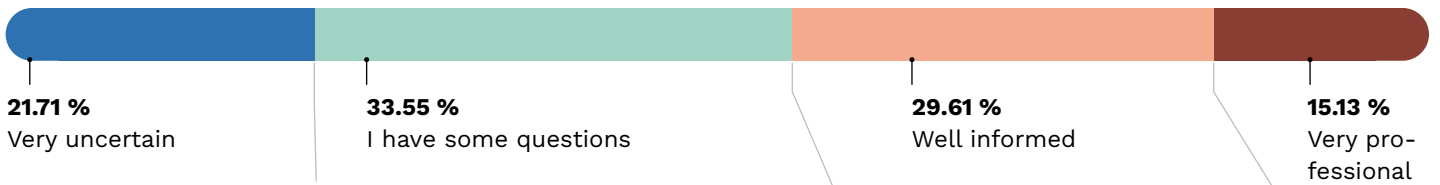


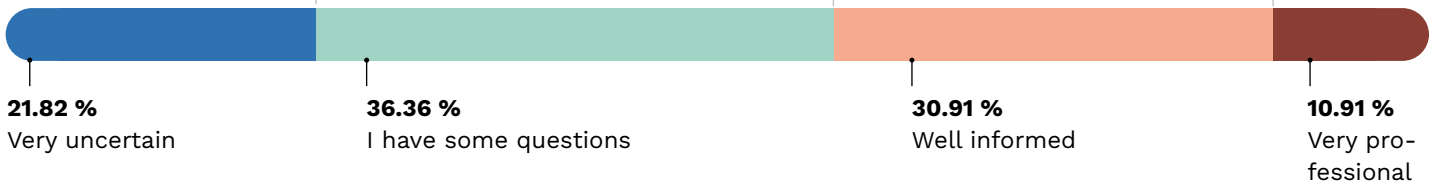
FIGURE F.4

HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR FREELANCERS IN THE COUNTRY WHERE YOU CURRENTLY LIVE?

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE F.5

HOW FAMILIAR ARE YOU WITH THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEDIA IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

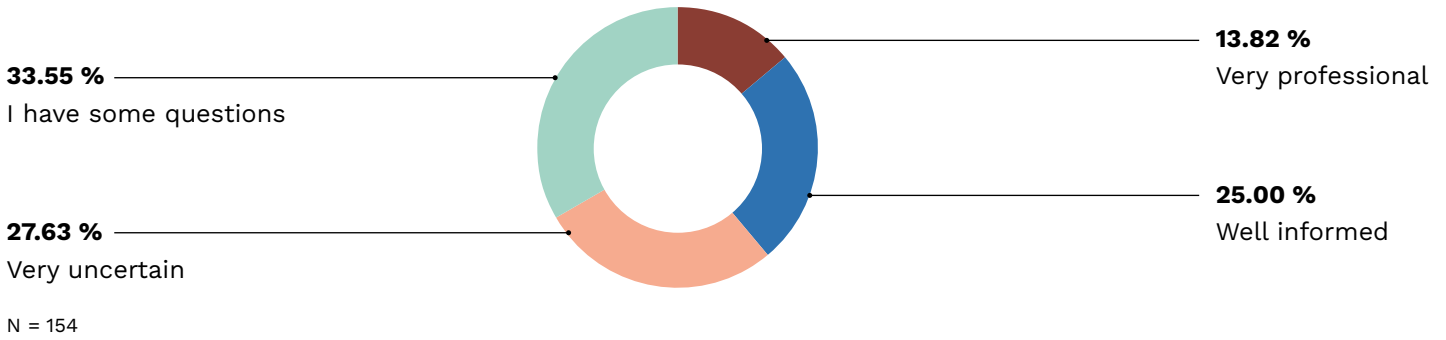


FIGURE F.6

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR MEDIA MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE?

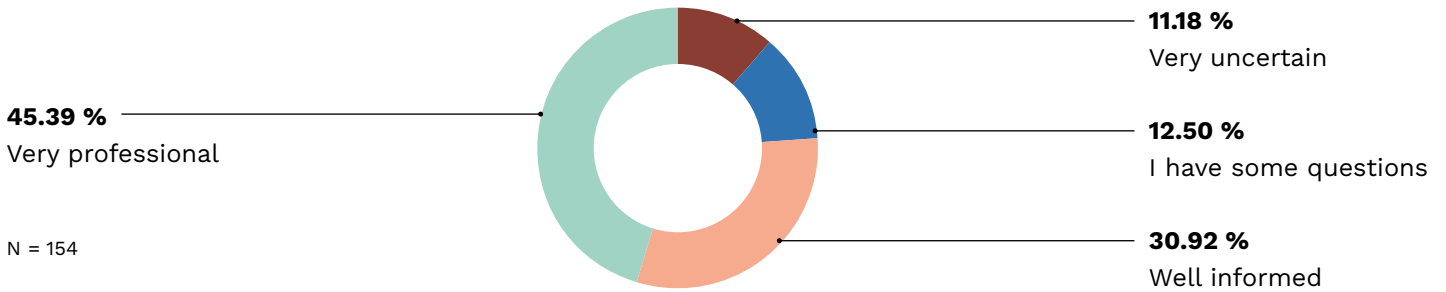


FIGURE F.7

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR FUNDRAISING COMPETENCE?

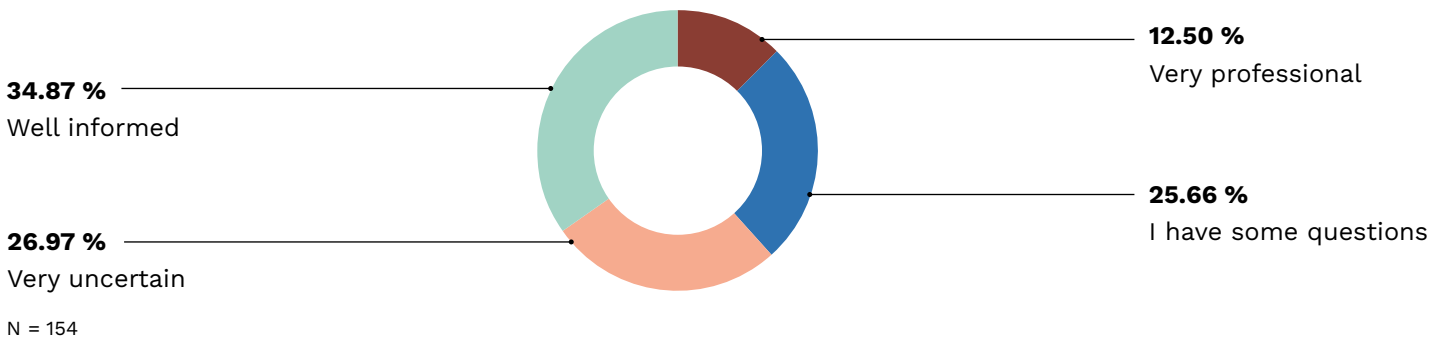
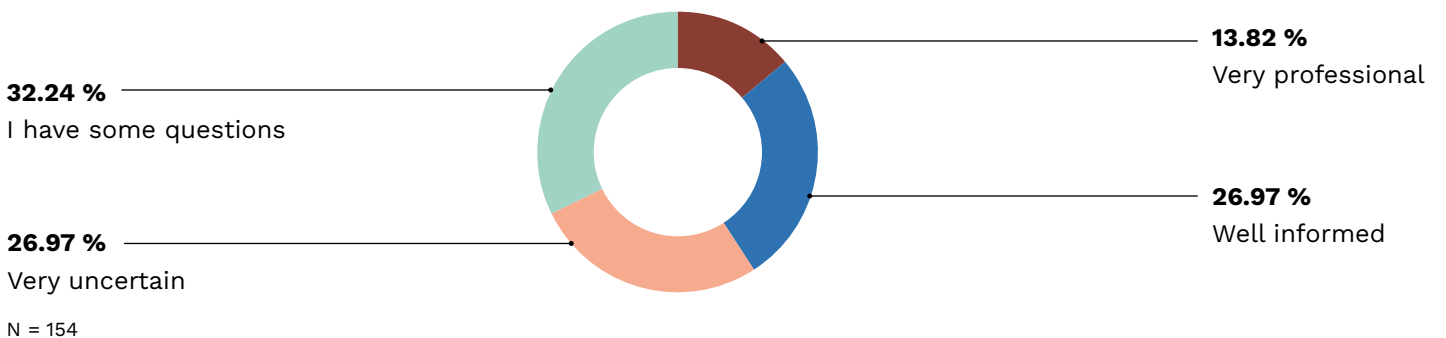


FIGURE F.8

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR COMPETENCE IN BUSINESS MODEL DEVELOPMENT?



G NEEDS RELATED TO LEGAL AND TECHNICAL TRAININGS

Please rate the usefulness of the following training offers for the community of Afghan journalists and media professionals in exile.

FIGURE G.1

DEMAND FOR DIGITAL SECURITY TRAININGS

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.2

DEMAND FOR LEGAL TRAININGS FOR FREELANCERS

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.3

DEMAND FOR LEGAL TRAININGS FOR MEDIA START-UPS

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.4

DEMAND FOR TECHNICAL TRAININGS FOR MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTION

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.5

DEMAND FOR TRAININGS IN BUSINESS MODEL DEVELOPMENT FOR MEDIA

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.6

DEMAND FOR TRAININGS IN AUDIENCE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY



N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.7

DEMAND FOR MEDIA MANAGEMENT TRAININGS

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY

67.27 %
Very needed

21.82 %
Useful

10.91 %
Not urgently needed

N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.8

DEMAND FOR FUNDRAISING TRAININGS

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY

70.91 %
Very needed

25.45 %
Useful

3.64 %
Not urgently needed

N = 154, Germany: n = 55

FIGURE G.9

DEMAND FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT TRAININGS

ALL RESPONDENTS



RESPONDENTS IN GERMANY

52.73 %
Very needed

38.18 %
Useful

9.09 %
Not urgently needed

N = 154, Germany: n = 55

JX FUND

JX Fund – European Fund for Journalism in Exile
Published in Germany, December 2023
Publisher: JX Fund

JX Fund gGmbH
PO Box 304108
10756 Berlin
Germany
info@jx-fund.org
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Design: Anton Delchmann/ taramparam.com
The title image is from Avi Richards/Unsplash,
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The report publication was conducted by JX Fund.
We thank Basir Feda for evaluation of the results.

The JX Fund helps media workers quickly and flexibly to continue their work after they have fled war and crisis zones. It aims to strengthen independent media in exile beyond a current phase of high attention and to support the building of sustainable media outlets accessible for their home countries. The continued work of journalism in exile will have to provide the independent sources of information that will make future democratic developments in their home countries possible. Without them, censorship wins out. To learn more, reach out to info@jx-fund.org or visit www.jx-fund.org

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The research report was made possible by funding from the



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