




Challenges for Independent Media Report 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study assesses the state of independent media in Cambodia in 2025, covering the period from 01 January to 31 December 2025. It draws on a desk review, an online survey of 109 journalists and citizen journalists, four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and nine Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The findings indicate that Cambodia’s media environment remains constrained, with pressures becoming more complex and interconnected compared to 2024.

In the Challenges for Independent Media (CIM) 2025 Report, press freedom in Cambodia continues to decline, with 69% of surveyed journalists reporting concerns about legal imprisonment as the most significant pressure (Figure 3), and 39% experiencing safety concerns in 2025 (Figure 4).

The legal and regulatory framework remains a central challenge and has at times been used against journalists, contributing to a climate of legal uncertainty and self-censorship. The continued use of broadly defined Criminal Code provisions, particularly incitement and defamation, contributes to this restrictive climate. In 2025, these pressures increased with the use of national security provisions, including Article 445, under which two journalists were sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment. New regulatory measures, such as the Prakas on Qualifications and Journalistic Professionalism (2025), have also introduced stricter requirements for press accreditation, raising concerns about barriers for freelance and citizen journalists.

This study presents nine key findings that collectively form the foundation for its conclusions and recommendations on the state of journalism and the challenges facing media professionals today.

Key Finding One, Challenging for Independent Journalists: Journalists reported facing significant pressures from both internal and external environments. Significantly, 94% of respondents (Figure 2) expressed serious safety concerns, with many reporting persistent fear of legal threats, including the risk of imprisonment or legal action as a consequence of their work. When identifying the sources of these threats, journalists most frequently cited law enforcement officers and local officials as the primary perpetrators of harassment and intimidation.

Key Finding Two, Sensitive Topic Drive Higher Levels of Concern among Journalists: Coverage of sensitive topics-particularly corruption and the exploitation of natural resources, deforestation, and forest destruction was found to drive significantly higher levels of concern among journalists. Reporting on these subjects was most frequently associated with exposure to threats and legal action, making them among the highest-risk areas of journalistic work documented in this study.

Key Finding Three, Access to information: Access to information remained a significant barrier for journalists, with the most commonly reported challenge being difficulty in requesting data or securing interviews with government officials. Notably, even the presentation of a valid press card or official institutional identification did not

consistently guarantee access, with many journalists reporting that these credentials were insufficient to obtain interviews or retrieve information from key sources.

Key Finding Four, Work Related Stress and Mental Health for Journalists: The findings highlight an urgent need for psychological support among journalists. Financial constraints and persistent concerns about personal safety were identified as the primary drivers of psychological distress, with 30% of respondents reporting that they had sought counselling, therapy, or other mental health support services as a result.

Key Finding Five, Journalists Experienced Sexual Harassment While Performing Their Work, yet Only 35% Reported That Their Newsrooms Have Support Mechanisms: Journalists experience sexual harassment while performing their work, the findings reveal an urgent need for newsrooms to establish clear and enforceable mechanisms to address sexual harassment in the workplace. Currently, only 35% of surveyed journalists reported that their newsroom has a formal mechanism in place to handle such issues leaving the majority of media professionals without adequate institutional protection.

Key Finding Six, Gender Responsive and Equality in the Newsrooms: The findings reveal significant gaps in how newsrooms recruit, support, and elevate women and gender-diverse professionals within the media sector. Evidence from KIIs further reveals that female journalists face a complex and overlapping set of structural, professional, and gender-based challenges that significantly limit their access to key career opportunities and leadership roles.

Key Finding Seven, Supporting Mechanisms for Journalists: The findings indicate that editorial standards and reporting safety remain the primary areas of institutional focus within newsrooms. However, other critical supporting mechanisms including mental health support, anti-discrimination and sexual harassment policies, gender-responsive policies, and fair pay practices remain priorities that are yet to be fully realized. Notably, less than half of surveyed journalists reported that their newsroom has these standards formally in place, highlighting a substantial gap between what is needed and what is currently provided (Figure 9).

Key Finding Eight, The Rise of AI-Driven Misinformation and Disinformation: The findings highlight a critical gap in technical capacity within the media sector, particularly in the ability of journalists to verify AI-generated or manipulated content. This gap is further reflected in the fact that 74% of surveyed journalists identified training on AI-generated content as a pressing professional need. Alongside this, there is a clear demand for the development of transparent and practical guidelines governing the use of AI tools within newsrooms. These findings signal that the media sector must treat AI literacy not as an optional skill but as a fundamental and urgent professional competency—one that requires coordinated investment in both training and institutional policy to ensure responsible, informed, and ethical use of AI in journalism.

Finally, Key Finding Nine, Needs for Future Journalism Training: The findings point toward the road ahead, identifying the capacity-building investments and skills development priorities needed to prepare media professionals for a rapidly changing industry. Importantly, this need extends beyond staff journalists to include freelance and citizen journalists-groups that are increasingly important to the modern media landscape yet are often left out of formal training opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, independent media in Cambodia operates in a complex and increasingly constrained environment shaped by overlapping legal, political, financial, and technological pressures. This year was marked by several significant developments, including reductions in international funding affecting key media outlets, heightened sensitivity around reporting during the Cambodia–Thailand border tensions, and the introduction of new regulatory measures governing journalistic practice. In addition, the rapid growth of digital platforms and artificial intelligence has accelerated the spread of misinformation and reshaped how audiences’ access and engage with news.

In this context, journalists face growing challenges in conducting public interest reporting. These include rising legal risks, financial instability, restricted access to information, and emerging digital threats such as AI-driven misinformation and disinformation. These pressures affect journalists’ ability to report freely and safely, while also contributing to more cautious newsroom practices with wider implications for information integrity and public trust.

CCIM has produced the Challenges for Independent Media (CIM) Report¹ every year since 2013. The report provides a regular assessment of the operating environment for independent journalists in Cambodia. It documents key developments in the media sector, including legal and regulatory changes, political pressures, financial challenges, and safety risks faced by journalists including providing suggestions and recommendations to the state, CSOs, media organizations and journalists to ensure how we can overcome the challenges

This report aims to offer a grounded and evidence-based resource for policymakers, CSOs, media practitioners, and international partners. It supports efforts to strengthen press freedom and media resilience in Cambodia, particularly in response to the shifting dynamics that define the media landscape in 2025.

¹ “Challenges for Independent Media 2024 (English)”, CCIM, 2024, https://ccimcambodia.org/?page_id=6232.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing independent media. Data collection was conducted through a desk review, an online survey, FGDs, and KIIs from January to early February 2026 to capture both statistical trends and the lived experiences of journalists in Cambodia.



Desk Review: The study analysed the current media landscape through news articles, joint statements, press releases, quarterly monitoring reports, and annual reports. Sources included both Cambodian and international organizations. The legal and policy review covered key frameworks, including the Charter for Professional Journalism, the Media Law, the Press Law, the Access to Information Law, the Penal Code, sub-decrees, and other relevant instruments.



Online Survey: The survey gathered quantitative data on working conditions, perceptions of press freedom, and daily challenges in journalism practice. A total of 109 respondents (37 female) took part. These included 26 full-time journalists, 27 freelancers, and 34 of citizen journalists, as well as editors and media workers. Of the total, 45 are based in Phnom Penh and 64 are from provinces.



Focused Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs captured shared perspectives on daily challenges, legal and policy barriers, and gendered experiences in media work. Four discussions were held with different groups. These included female journalists, freelance journalists, citizen journalists, and journalists from registered media outlets.



Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into the current media landscape. A total of nine interviews were conducted with representatives from media organizations, a journalism institution, and CSOs working on media development and journalist support.

The study used purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research topic. This included media practitioners, CSOs, regulators, and academics.

Data from FGDs and KIIs were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. This method identified and interpreted recurring patterns and themes to understand key challenges in independent media reporting. Survey data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis identified trends and correlations. Findings were presented through graphs, charts, and tables using %age data to illustrate key issues related to press freedom and independent media.

LIMITATIONS

The survey was conducted between 1 and 31 January 2026 among staff journalists, freelance journalists, and citizen journalists. During the data collection period, several practical challenges were encountered that may have affected both response rates and the overall representativeness of the findings. Notably, journalists in provincial areas faced limited internet connectivity, which hindered their ability to complete the online survey. Low engagement was also reported among some respondents, largely attributed to financial instability and persistent personal safety concerns-factors that, in themselves, reflect the very realities this study seeks to document and address.

These challenges, combined with the broader limitations of the study, should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. The research covers January to December 2025 period and therefore may not capture longer-term trends, and imbalanced geographic representation means that differences in journalists' conditions across regions may not be fully reflected. In addition, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by perception bias or surveyed journalists' willingness to disclose sensitive experiences, particularly in a constrained media environment.

It is also important to note that the challenges reported in this study may have been intensified by significant external events occurring during the research period. These include severe funding cuts in early 2025, which disrupted newsroom operations and accelerated job losses across the sector, and the border conflict later in the year, which introduced additional layers of physical risk, financial instability, and psychological pressure on journalists operating in or near affected areas. These events unfolded on top of already demanding baseline conditions within the profession. As such, findings related to stress levels, mental health, and financial precarity should be interpreted with this context in mind they likely reflect a combination of chronic, sector-wide challenges and acute, crisis-driven impacts specific to the 2025 study timeframe.

MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Cambodia’s media landscape comprises 1,575 outlets, with digital platforms dominating the information sector, according to updated data from 2025 through the first quarter of 2026², including 675 traditional platforms, such as radio, television, print publications, and printing houses, and 900 digital and new media outlets, including websites, online television, OTT services, and satellite-based media.

However, the space for independent media continues to face restrictions. For instance, in 2025, Cambodia ranked 161st out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, down from 151st in 2024. Cambodia was also rated as repressed in terms of civic space, scoring 27 out of 100 in the CIVICUS³ Monitor’s 2025 Global Findings. Freedom House⁴ classified Cambodia as Not Free, with a score of 22 out of 100, while internet freedom was rated as Partly Free at 42 out of 100.

By October 2025, Cambodia had 8,732 registered journalists and media workers. Of the 8,732 journalists, women accounted for only 13%. This marked a 6% increase compared to the previous year.⁵

Despite the many media outlets in Cambodia, and with rise of internet users, digital platforms have become the primary sources of news and information for most Cambodians.⁶ As of early 2025, Cambodia has a total of 10.8 million internet users (60% of the population) and 12.9 million social media users (72% of the population). The digital platforms such as Facebook and TikTok play a central role in how information is produced, distributed, and consumed.

This development has made the information environment become more complex. As highlighted by findings from this study, the spread misinformation and AI-driven content have made verification more difficult and raised concerns about information integrity. Thus, journalists should take advantage of opportunities in AI for news products, such as AI-power text-to-speech tools that allow audiences to listen to articles on websites. However, media outlets should also establish AI newsroom guidelines that align with journalism ethics and professional codes of conduct.

The operating environment has also been shaped by external pressures. The Cambodia–Thailand border situation increased sensitivity around national security reporting, with reports being checked, questioned, or challenged more closely. Reductions in international funding have also affected the sustainability of independent media outlets, creating resource constraints and financial uncertainty.

Consistent with these assessments, this study’s survey findings also indicate a decline in press freedom in 2025. In the CIM 2025 Report, 109 journalists rated press freedom in 2025 at an

² “Cambodia media landscape hits 1,575 outlets as digital platforms dominate sector”, Khmer Times, April 29 2026, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501888736/cambodia-media-landscape-hits-1575-outlets-as-digital-platforms-dominate-sector/>.

³ ‘Monitor Tracking Civic Space’, CIVICUS, 2025, <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/cambodia/>.

⁴ ‘Freedom in the World 2025’, Freedom House, 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/cambodia>.

⁵ Freshnews, ‘As of 2025, Cambodia has 13 percent female journalists out of a total of more than 8,000 journalists for whom the ministry grants credentials’, November 27 2025, <https://m.freshnews.com.kh/localnews/409891-2025-11-27-19-25-10>

⁶ Simon Kemp, ‘Digital 2025: Cambodia’, Datareportal, March 03 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-cambodia>.

average of 4.82 out of 10. This result aligns with the CIM Report (2024)⁷, which found that Cambodia’s media environment remained under tight state control and that journalists were subject to arrest and threat under legal instruments such as the 1995 Press Law and Criminal Code provisions.

However, these findings differ in several aspects from the Ministry of Information’s State of Press Freedom in Cambodia 2026 report⁸, which was based on a broader survey indicating that 85.8% of respondents reported having full freedom to gather information and publish news for the public. In addition, 70.4 % stated they had not experienced threats, harassment, or violence while carrying out their journalistic duties over the past year, while 84.6% indicated they had never faced legal action from citizens or authorities in relation to their reporting.

⁷ “Challenges for Independent Media 2024 (English)”, CCIM, 2024, https://ccimcambodia.org/?page_id=6232.

⁸ “Press Freedom in Cambodia Rate ‘Good’ in 2026 National Survey, Information Ministry Says, AKP, April 29 2026, <https://akp.gov.kh/post/detail/369037>.

I. More Media Regulation and Delayed Access to Information Law, Limits on Obtaining Official Information

In 2025, the government continued to expand regulatory measures that constrain press freedom, reflecting a broader trend of increasing media control. While the **1995 Press Law** formally guarantees press freedom, authorities have often relied on broadly defined provisions of the **Criminal Code (2009)** to take legal action against journalists. Key articles⁹ used against journalists include Article 494 and 495 on incitement. These are commonly used in cases involving reporting on sensitive political, environmental, or social issues.

Journalists have also been charged under the Criminal Code provisions, including Article 305 on defamation, Article 307 on public insult, Article 523 on discrediting judicial decisions, and Article 445 on supplying a foreign state with information harmful to national security. These provisions criminalize harm to reputation, dignity, or judicial independence. These provisions have been linked to selective enforcement and self-censorship, often leading to fines, detention, or imprisonment.

More recent regulatory measures have also affected journalists' ability to obtain official credentials and perform their work freely. In November 2025, the Ministry of Information (MoI) introduced a **Prakas on Qualifications and Journalistic Professionalism**. This measure set stricter requirements for press card registration.¹⁰ These include academic qualifications, criminal background checks, and good conduct letters from local authorities. While intended to professionalize the media sector, a coalition of CSOs and media organizations¹¹ has raised concerns that these requirements could further restrict media freedom. They may also make reporting more difficult for independent, freelance, and citizen journalists seeking official press credentials.

These legal and regulatory developments are reflected in both KIIs and survey findings. Interviews indicate growing concern about the increased use of the **Criminal Code** to prosecute journalists. This often bypasses protections under the **1995 Press Law**, which has not been updated to reflect the rise of digital journalism and online platforms. Informants also noted that the long-anticipated **Draft Law on Access to Information** remains pending, despite the former Prime Minister's promise to adopt it by 2024 or 2025, limiting journalists' ability to obtain official information.

⁹ "The State of Freedom of Expression, Press Freedom, and Access to Information in Cambodia", CCHR, November 2022, https://media.businesshumanrights.org/media/documents/CCHR_Report_on_State_of_Freedom_of_Expression_and_Access_to_Information_FINAL_mxbgkOy.pdf

¹⁰ Khuon Narim, 'New Regulations for Journalists Tighten Grip on Cambodia's Media', *CamboJA News*, December 03 2025, <https://cambojanews.com/new-regulations-for-journalists-tighten-grip-on-cambodias-media/>

¹¹ "New Prakas Lacks Consultation, Further Restricts Media Freedom", LICADHO, December 15 2025, <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/pressrelease.php?perm=552>

This year, the **Sub-Decree on the National Internet Gateway (2021)**¹² has remained a concern legal tool that the government can use to increase surveillance and content control. Also, the International Center for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL) has highlighted regulatory concerns related to the national domain name “.kh”, which places restrictions on individuals, companies, and organizations using .kh domains to share content. These measures may affect freedom of expression and enable greater monitoring, regulation, blocking, or suspension of online content. The sub-decree also allows authorities to reject domain name requests that are already registered, reserved, considered harmful to religious beliefs, contrary to traditions, or not in compliance with the law.¹³

The government's recent open call for civil society inputs on the draft National AI Strategy presents a timely and important opportunity to ensure that the interests and needs of the media sector are adequately reflected in national AI policy. Should the AI strategy be formally adopted, it will be essential that journalists including freelance and citizen journalists are equipped with the knowledge and skills to harness AI as a productive and responsible tool in their professional work, rather than being left vulnerable to its risks and misuse.

In this regard, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications have a critical role to play. Both ministries should incorporate journalist AI literacy as a dedicated component within the national AI strategy implementation plan, with clear timelines, allocated resources, and measurable targets. This should include the design and delivery of structured training programs that reach not only staff journalists but also freelance and citizen journalists that are increasingly active in the information ecosystem yet consistently underserved by formal capacity-building initiatives.

The issuance of **Prakas No. 085 on the Implementation of the Journalism Profession Charter**¹⁴ August 2024 has also drawn criticism from journalists and media observers. It was reportedly introduced without proper consultation. Although presented as a tool to promote ethics, its vague language, broad scope, including social media users, and potential for arbitrary enforcement have raised concerns that it may be used for monitoring and control rather than professional development. Given these concerns, the implementation of the charter should not be rushed. Instead, the process must be paused to allow for meaningful, inclusive, and transparent consultation with all relevant stakeholders. This position has been echoed at the international level, with UN experts calling for the suspension of the charter and recommending that any process involving a professional media code be inclusive, participatory, and developed with sufficient time for thorough review and feedback. Moving forward without addressing these fundamental procedural shortcomings risks further undermining trust between the

¹²“Cambodia: Internet Censorship, Control Expanded”, Human Rights Watch, February 18 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/18/cambodia-internet-censorship-control-expanded>.

¹³ “Legal Analysis: Cambodia’s Sub-Decree on National Domain Names”, NGO Education Partnership, 22 June 2022, <https://nepcambodia.org/2022/06/22/legal-analysis-cambodias-sub-decree-on-national-domain-names/>

¹⁴ Seoung Nimol, ‘New Professional Journalism Charter Speedily Implemented Only Days after Input Deadline’, CamboJA News, August 07 2024, <https://cambojanews.com/new-professional-journalism-charter-speedily-implemented-only-days-after-input-deadline/>

government and the media sector at a time when constructive dialogue and mutual accountability are most needed.

Journalists continue to stay alert on the potential risks posed by legal and regulatory mechanisms that affect freedom of expression. Within the regulatory framework, the leading concerns are defamation charges (66%) and delays in passing the Draft Access to Information Law (60%), and the use of broadly defined criminal provisions related to public order and national security (59%).

Journalists are particularly concerned about broadly interpreting some articles of the laws, used with motivation to silence journalists. Informants noted that offences such as incitement and defamation are often applied in ways that expose journalists to severe penalties and contribute to self-censorship. This concern is reinforced by the use of national security provisions, including Article 445 of the Criminal Code “supplying a foreign state with information prejudicial to national defence”, under which two journalists were sentenced to 14 years’ imprisonment in relation to reporting on the Cambodia–Thailand border conflict in December 2025.¹⁵

¹⁵ “Cambodia: Two journalists jailed for 14 years under treason law”, The International Federation of Journalists, 27 February 2026, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/cambodia-two-journalists-jailed-for-14-years-under-treason-law>

II. Key Finding One: Challenges for Independent Journalists

All key findings of this study are based on data gathered through an online survey of journalists, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and desk review. The survey findings indicate that misinformation and disinformation have emerged as central challenges confronting independent media and journalists in 2025. This was followed by concerns about the financial sustainability of news media outlets. Journalists also raised issues related to discrimination by authorities, difficulties in contacting sources for interviews, and increasing political pressure.

Additional challenges include adapting to new technologies, government-led digital censorship framed as efforts to counter fake news, and difficulties in attracting audience engagement while maintaining journalistic integrity. Journalists further reported obstacles in obtaining press cards, increased competition among media outlets and freelance journalists for funding, and difficulties in securing media licenses. Some respondents also noted interference from media owners, which limits their reporting independence.

1.1 Patterns of Pressure and Restriction on Media Practice Continue Happened

In 2025, CCIM documented 34 incidents involving 44 journalists, including both professional and citizen reporters, among them three female citizen journalists. These cases involved a range of violations, including sexual harassment, legal threats, demands for content removal, detention, intimidation, license revocations, and arrests following coverage of the border conflict. Journalists also faced physical safety risks, such as threats and intimidation while reporting in the field.

The use of legal and administrative measures against journalists continued to pose serious challenges, with recorded incidents increasing by nearly 36% compared to figures reported in the CIM 2024 report.¹⁶

For instance, In December 2025, two Cambodian journalists¹⁷ were sentenced to 14 years in prison on treason charges after appearing in a photograph with Cambodian soldiers near the disputed Cambodia–Thailand border. The two, Phorn Sopheap of Battambang Post TV Online and Pheap Pheara of TSP 68 TV Online, were convicted under Article 445 of the Criminal Code for supplying a foreign state with information harmful to national defence. The charges were linked to Facebook posts made while reporting on the border conflict. Both remain in detention in Siem Reap prison. The specific content leading to their arrest remains unclear, although a photograph of them with Cambodian soldiers near Ta Krabey Temple has been linked to the case.

In August 2025, Meas Sara was arrested and charged with incitement after livestreaming interviews in a border village during tensions between Cambodian citizens and the Thai military.¹⁸

¹⁶ “Challenges for Independent Media 2024”, CCIM, https://ccimcambodia.org/?page_id=6232.

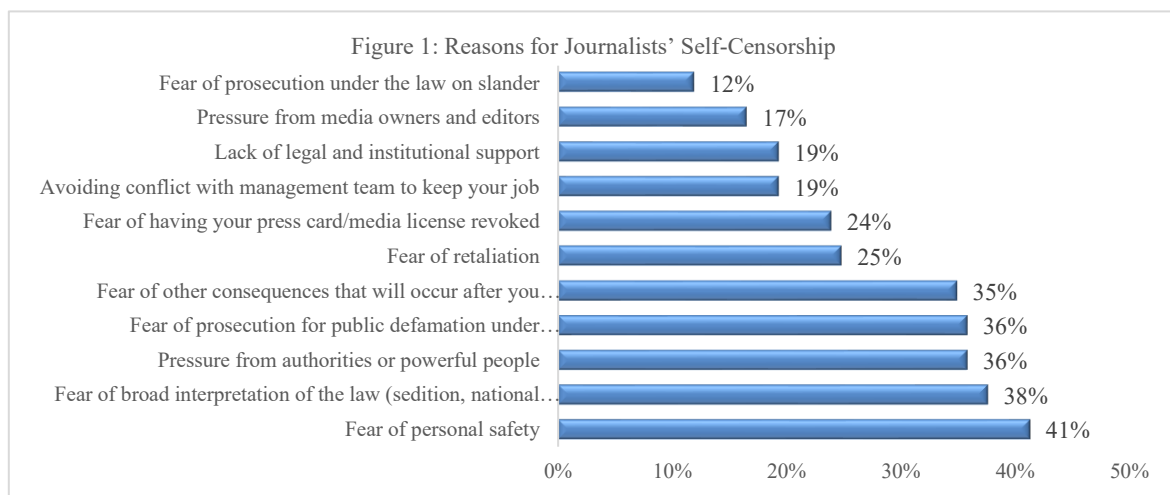
¹⁷ “Appeal Court Upholds 14-Year Convictions for Two Journalists”, LICADHO, March 26 2026, <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/flashnews.php?perm=512>

¹⁸ “Journalist Arrested for Livestreaming at Thai-Cambodia Border”, LICADHO, August 27 2025, <https://www.licadho-cambodia.org/flashnews.php?perm=458>.

On 5 January 2025, Gerald Flynn, former president of the Overseas Press Club of Cambodia (OPCC) and a longtime investigative and environmental reporter, was denied re-entry to Cambodia at Siem Reap International Airport after traveling abroad.¹⁹

This incident signals a possible tightening of control over the international media presence in Cambodia, particularly targeting reporters engaged in investigative and environmental reporting. It also raises concerns about the use of immigration measures to restrict critical reporting. This may have broader implications for information flows, international scrutiny, and the working environment for foreign correspondents.

1.2 Majority of Journalists Practiced Self-Censorship in 2025



Data from online survey illustrated that 63% (69 out of 109) of surveyed journalists practice self-censorship by avoiding certain topics. The main reason for self-censorship is due to the concern for personal safety.

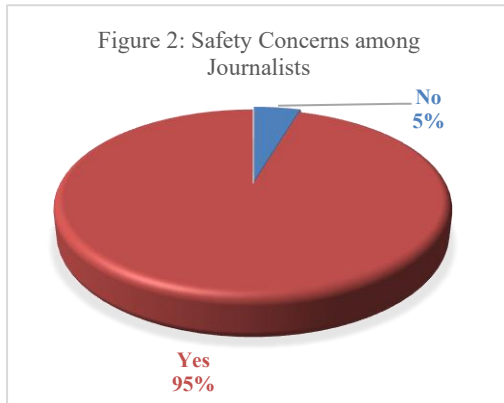
About 41% (45 out of 109) of respondents reported fear for their safety after reporting on sensitive issues. Another 38% cited they do self-censor in their reporting due to the concerns about broad legal interpretations of laws related to sedition, national security, or public order commonly used against journalists when they covered controversial topics. Journalists also reported that the self-censorship also stems from pressure from authorities and government actors (36%, 39 out of 109), and fear of prosecution under defamation laws (36%, 39 out of 109). Other factors for censorship among journalists in their reporting include concerns about retaliation after news publication, the possible loss of press credentials, and pressure from media owners (Figure 1).

KIIs also highlighted that self-censorship is often a way for journalists to manage multiple risks including risks of physical safety, legal consequences associated with their reporting, and digital security threats. In some cases, journalists choose not to publish certain stories when the risks are too high. Informants also noted that freelance and citizen journalists face particular

¹⁹ “Joint Statement: British Environment Journalist Denied Re-entry to Cambodia”, OPCC, February 04 2025, <https://opc-cambodia.org/blog/2025/02/04/joint-statement-british-environmental-journalist-denied-re-entry-to-cambodia/>

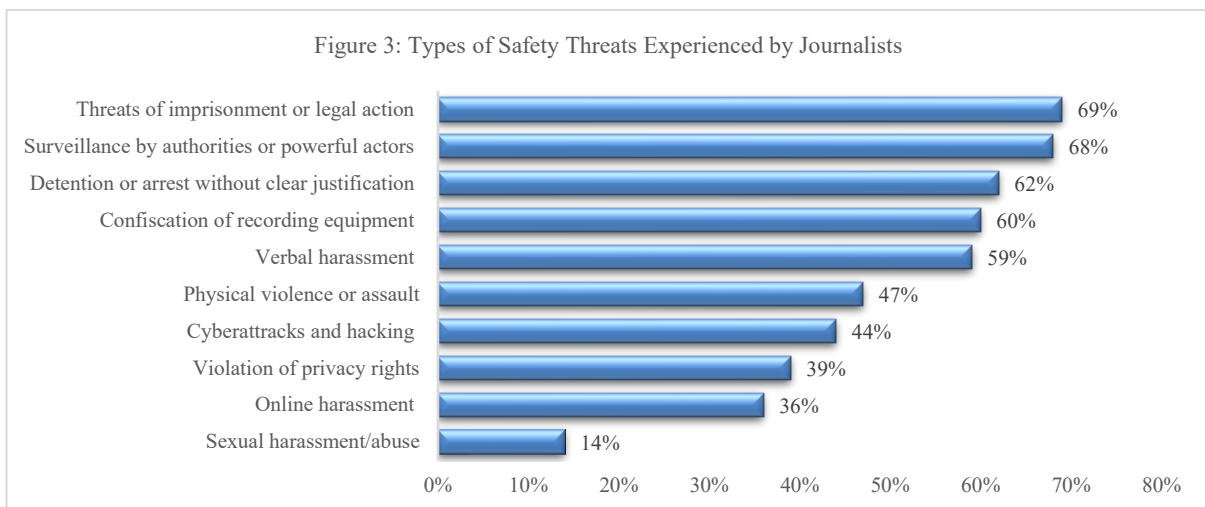
challenges when reporting on politically sensitive issues such as corruption, national security, cross-border disputes, and controversial development projects. During periods of political tension, journalists closely monitor government responses to their reporting, as critical coverage may be interpreted as harmful to national security.

1.3 94% of Journalists Expressed Safety Concerns



94% (104 out of 109) of journalists who took part in online survey reported that they were concerned about their safety while working as an independent journalist (Figure 2). In conclusion, independent journalists express concern for their safety highlights a deeply troubling environment for press freedom in country. This widespread fear not only threatens the well-being of individuals committed to uncovering the truth, but also undermines the public’s right to access reliable and diverse information.

1.4 The Majority of Journalists Expressed Concern about the Risk of Legal Imprisonment and Other Legal Actions



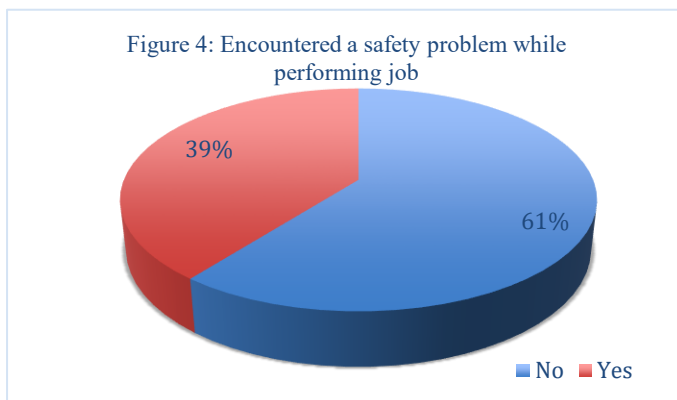
A total of 69% (77 out of 109) of respondents reported concerns about the “threat of imprisonment or legal action”, while 68% (75 out of 109) identified “surveillance by authorities or powerful people, both in person and online”, as a major issue. In addition, detention or arrest without just cause or legal basis was reported by a majority of journalists, highlighting serious concerns about due process and legal protection. Similarly, the risk of confiscation of audio or video recording devices was also reported by more than half of respondents, indicating ongoing challenges to journalists’ ability to gather and preserve information safely. Overall, the data

indicates that journalist safety remains a serious challenge, with legal and administrative measures continuing to constrain press freedom and independent reporting (Figure 3).²⁰

For instance, one case documented by CCIM involved a citizen journalist in Pursat province who reported on a land allocation dispute in Kampong Chhnang near the Tonle Sap area. Villagers claimed that their land had been allocated to migrants from other provinces. After the report was published, the district information office issued a statement claiming the report was inaccurate and biased, without clearly identifying the disputed content. The journalist also received verbal warnings from unidentified individuals to stop reporting on the issue. This case highlights the pressure and risks faced by journalists covering sensitive local issues.

Similarly, findings from the FGDs across both groups reinforce these identified risks. Journalists reported experiences of verbal abuse, as well as surveillance and intimidation by local authorities. Additionally, a key informant- a female citizen journalist reported experiencing sexual harassment while on assignment in the field. Some were asked by powerful actors to delete their news content from online platforms. Others reported being prevented from filming at public space for their reporting and receiving limited support after experiencing the incidents of harassment. A case of sexual harassment was also reported, raising serious concerns about the safety of female citizen journalists reporting in the field.

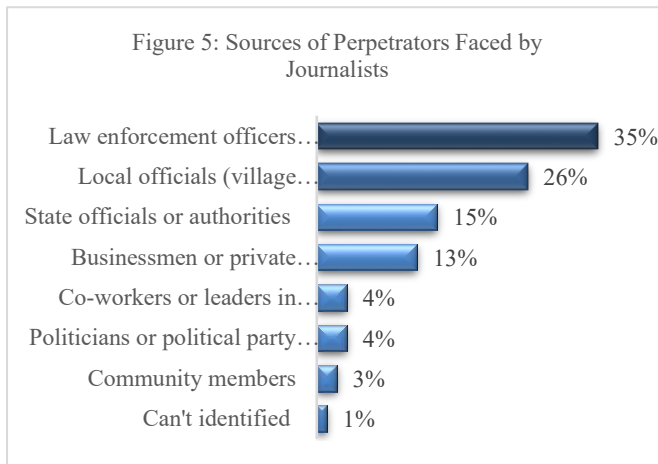
1.5 Experiences Encountered a Safety Problem



Of the 109 surveyed journalists, approximately 39% reported experiencing safety issues while working in the field (see Figure 4). The most common challenges include verbal harassment, surveillance by authorities or powerful actors, threats of imprisonment or legal action, confiscation of equipment, and violations of privacy.

²⁰ Respondents were asked, “In 2025, what safety issues have you encountered while performing your job?” with multiple selections allowed.

1.6 Institutional and Local-Level Interactions in Journalists' Field Work



Law enforcement actors (police, soldiers, security personnel) are the most frequently reported perpetrators by 35% (28 out of 80), followed by local officials such as village and commune chiefs by 26% (21 out of 80), reveals a deeply concerning pattern of state-linked or authority-based intimidation against journalists. This reveals that the most significant threats come not from non-state actors, but from institutions legally obligated to protect, rather than endanger, public safety and rights.

CASE STUDY 1: Freelance Journalists at the Frontline Facing Legal Risks and Restricted Access

This case study draws on FGDs with four freelance journalists. Freelance journalists in Cambodia operate on the frontlines of reporting while navigating growing legal pressures and minimal institutional protection, exposing them to unique and often overlooked risks. Access to press credentials remains a major barrier. Freelance journalists described the press card application process as unclear and difficult to navigate. Requirements such as exclusive bylines can exclude freelance journalists and local fixers who frequently contribute to reporting without formal credit. Temporary press cards issued during the border conflict came with the condition of prior review of articles before publication. Journalists expressed concern that such conditions limit editorial independence.

Legal vulnerability is another persistent challenge. Some freelance journalists described experiences of detention or prolonged questioning while reporting on issues such as illegal logging or environmental crimes. Access to official information is also restricted. Freelance journalists reported difficulties obtaining interviews with government officials and noted that authorities often directed journalists to rely on official statements rather than allowing direct interviews. In many cases, freelance journalists are excluded from press conferences, further limiting access to timely information. The psychological impact of covering distressing events also emerged as an important issue. Freelance journalists described experiencing trauma after witnessing violent incidents, evacuations, or interviewing victims of abuse in scam compounds.

Freelance journalists therefore called for clearer accreditation procedures, stronger legal protections, and improved access to safety and mental health support to ensure they can continue reporting independently.

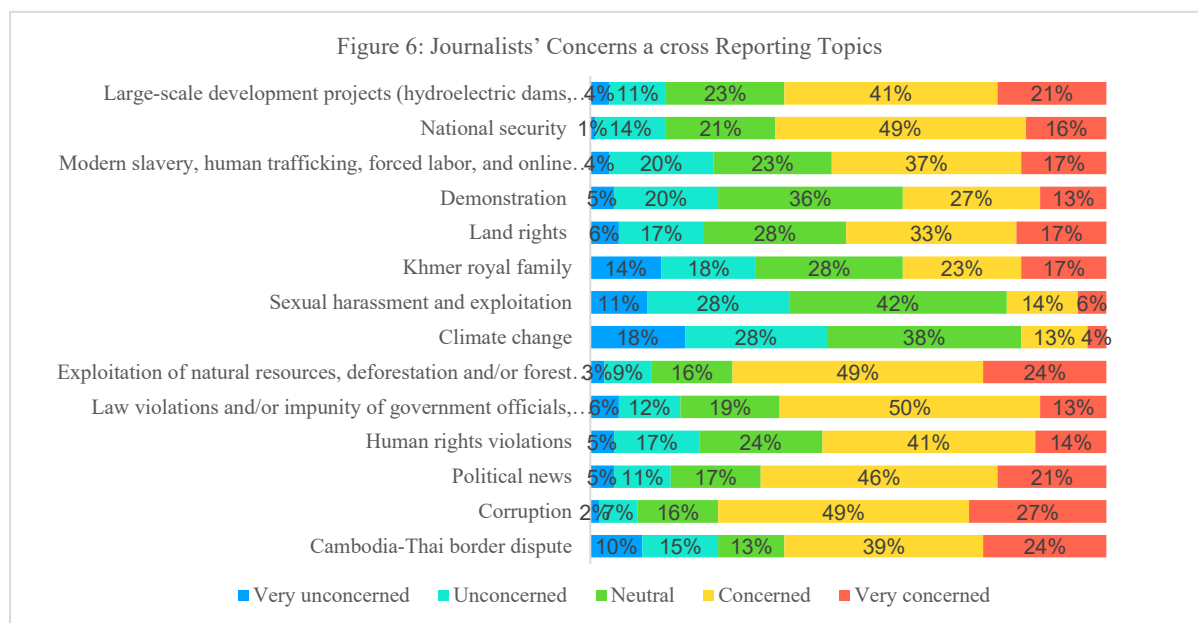
CASE STUDY 2: Citizen Journalists Facing Harassment and Legal Risks

The findings in this case study are based on FGDs with five citizen journalists. Citizen journalists across Cambodia report growing risks while documenting community issues and local governance concerns. Interviews with citizen reporters revealed patterns of intimidation, harassment, and legal threats linked to their work. Some citizen journalists described being prevented by authorities from filming or documenting events in the field. In certain cases, reporters reported experiencing verbal abuse or physical intimidation while attempting to gather information.

Female citizen journalists also reported facing sexual harassment while reporting in the field. Although some incidents were reported to organizations or authorities, responses were often slow or ineffective, citizen journalists often lack officially recognized press cards, making it difficult to conduct interviews or access certain locations. Some reporters said they were required to present credentials that they did not have, limiting their ability to report on community issues.

In some cases, citizen journalists described receiving threats of arrest or pressure to delete published articles covering sensitive topics such as rice price deductions, corruption, or environmental issues. They also refused to remove their reporting despite the risks. Others mentioned experiencing surveillance or pressure after publishing articles related to governance issues or environmental concerns. Despite these challenges, many citizen reporters remain committed to documenting local realities. They emphasized the importance of journalism in reflecting community concerns and called for stronger protection mechanisms, improved collaboration with authorities, and access to professional training to support their work.

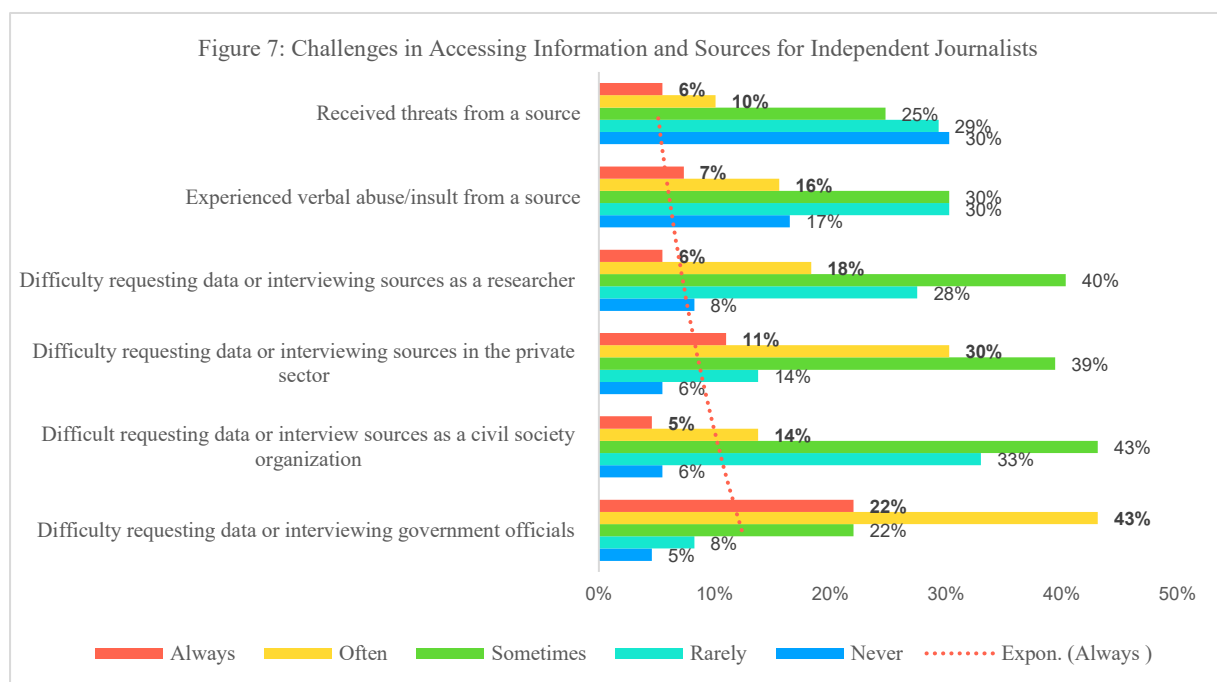
III. Key Finding Two: Sensitive Topics Drive Higher Levels of Concern among Journalists



‘Corruption’ was the most prominent topic of concern among journalists, with 75% (82 out of 109)²¹ reporting it as a key issue. This was followed by ‘exploitation of natural resources, deforestation, and forest destruction,’ cited by 72% (79 out of 109)²². In contrast, topics such as ‘climate change’ (46%, 50 out of 109) and ‘sexual harassment and exploitation’ (39%, 42 out of 109) were among the least reported concerns. These findings suggest that journalists tend to focus more on sensitive topics that may carry a higher risk of backlash (Figure 6).

Consistently with KIIs, informants reported that journalists working on sensitive topics often face pressure in the field. Some have been threatened by authorities. Others have been summoned by police after publishing sensitive reports. In certain cases, journalists have been asked to remove their content from online platforms. These experiences create a climate of pressure that shapes how journalists approach their reporting.

IV. Key Finding Three: Access to Information



Data gathered from the online survey reveals that ‘difficulty requesting data or interviewing government officials’ was the main barrier, reported by 69% (71 out of 109) of respondents as something they ‘always’ or ‘often’ face. This was followed by 41% (45 out of 109) of respondents who reported ‘always’ or ‘often’ experiencing difficulty in requesting data or interviewing sources in the private sector (Figure 7). These findings indicate that accessing information particularly from government officials remains a major challenge for journalists.

KIIs among media experts confirm these patterns. Journalists frequently face obstacles when engaging with official sources, especially when requesting government data, documents, or interviews. In some cases, even when journalists present press cards or institutional identification, sources still refuse to respond. These practices limit access to information and may discourage reporting on sensitive or critical issues. These findings are consistent with

²¹ A total of 75% of respondents reported being concerned and very concerned about reporting on corruption.

²² A total of 72% of respondents reported being concerned and very concerned about reporting on exploitation of national resources, deforestation, and forest destruction.

reports from CCIM. One case involved an online journalist from AK News who was covering a protest over a land dispute near National Road 6A. While attempting to interview the deputy governor of Kandal province, the journalist faced hostile behaviour. A video shared on Facebook showed the deputy governor pushing and verbally intimidating the reporter as he sought official comment.²³

CASE STUDY 3: Newsrooms Facing Intimidation and Unresponsive from Spokespersons

Media professionals in Cambodia are experiencing increasing pressure, including post-publication interventions, limited access to official information, and unresponsive government spokespersons. Drawing on insights from FGDs, a recurring concern raised by reporters is the growing number of requests from authorities to remove articles after they have already been published.

Journalists highlighted cases where government representatives contacted newsrooms shortly after publication to demand the removal of stories related to sensitive topics. In several instances during 2025, articles were withdrawn following direct requests from authorities. Reporters explained that spokespersons often did not respond to requests for comment during the reporting process but later demanded that the article be removed entirely once it had been published. These requests were rarely framed as corrections or factual clarifications. Instead, journalists said they were often asked to remove entire articles. In some cases, participants reported that reporters were warned that failure to comply could result in legal action, with authorities often justifying such requests by claiming the reporting could harm the reputation of Cambodia or the government.

Access to official sources was also described as increasingly limited. Many journalists reported that spokespersons did not respond to interview requests or said they were too busy to provide exclusive comments. Instead, reporters were sometimes instructed to rely on official statements or voice messages circulated through government Telegram channels. Some journalists also reported being blocked on messaging platforms after repeatedly requesting clarification or asking critical questions. FGD participants also raised concerns about the Ministry of Information's new qualification requirements for journalists, describing them as overly demanding and not fully aligned with the realities of today's media landscape. Combined with post-publication pressure, these regulatory developments were seen as contributing to greater caution in reporting. Journalists suggested that stronger institutional backing from news organizations when facing removal demands, expanded legal support from CSOs, and more responsive communication from government spokespersons would help ensure more transparent and professional engagement between authorities and the media.

V. Key Finding Four: Work Related Stress and Mental Health for Journalists

The study examined work related stress among journalists. Findings show that most surveyed journalists experience significant psychological pressure. Many reported concerns about financial constraints and personal safety. About half also reported pressure from powerful actors and trauma linked to reporting on sensitive topics.

²³ "Quarterly Monitoring on Incidents Against Journalists in Cambodia", CCIM, December 2025, <https://ccimcambodia.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Eng-Incidents-Report-Against-Journalists-in-Cambodia.pdf>.

To cope with these challenges, journalists mainly rely on informal support. Many seek help from friends and colleagues. Personal coping strategies are also widely used. Access to formal support remains limited. Fewer than 30% reported using counselling or therapy services, health programs from professional organizations, or workplace mental health support. Notably, 18% of journalists said they have no support system at all.

KIIs further highlight these pressures. Journalists often experience emotional exhaustion due to heavy workloads and understaffed newsrooms. Exposure to blame, insults, and threats also contributes to ongoing stress and mental health challenges.

VI. Key Finding Five: Journalists Experienced Sexual Harassment While Performing Their Work, yet Only 35% Reported That Their Newsrooms Have Support Mechanisms



The study also examined incidents of sexual harassment affecting journalists in the workplace and in the field. Among 109 surveyed journalists, 09 cases of sexual harassment were reported. These included 07 female and 02 male journalists. The findings show that female journalists are more vulnerable to sexual harassment in both settings.

Of the 09 cases, 06 was formally reported to supervisors or human resources, while 03 cases were not reported. The incidents involved perpetrators such as sources, co-workers, other journalists, and members of local communities.

KIIs highlighted that workplace discrimination and sexual harassment remain ongoing issues in the journalism sector, especially for women. Only 38 out of 109 (35%) surveyed journalists reported that their newsroom has a mechanism to address bullying and harassment.

To build safer and more inclusive working environments, newsrooms are strongly encouraged to develop and implement comprehensive anti-harassment policies, establish confidential and accessible reporting channels, and ensure that all staff receive regular training on workplace rights and conduct. Leadership must also demonstrate a visible and consistent commitment to fostering a culture that is respectful, gender-responsive, and free from harassment in all its forms.

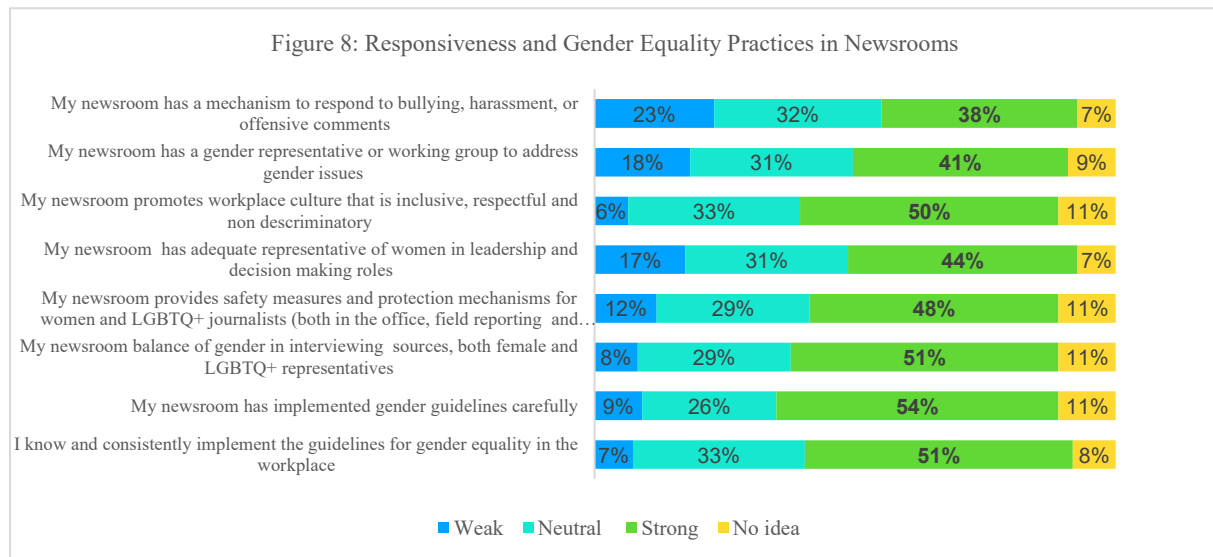
VII. Key Finding Six: Gender Responsive and Equality in the Newsrooms

Beyond the common challenges of censorship, harassment, and violence, women journalists encounter additional gender-specific risks that shape their professional experiences.²⁴ Government official source reported that, by October 2025, the proportion of women journalists had increased to 13% of the country's 8,732 journalists, marking a gradual rise in women's representation in the media sector from 8.7%²⁵ in 2023 and a 6% increase from the previous year in 2024.

²⁴ Lay Sopheavotey and Teng Yalirozy, 'Cambodian Women Journalists on the Rise', *Cambodianess*, April 12 2022, <https://cambodianess.com/article/cambodian-women-journalists-on-the-rise>.

²⁵ "Report on the State of Press Freedom in Cambodia", Ministry of Information, April 30 2025, <https://www.information.gov.kh/articles/>.

KIIs confirm these findings. Female journalists face overlapping structural, professional, and gender-based challenges. Their representation remains limited, especially in frontline reporting roles. Many are concentrated in production or presenter positions, which restricts access to key opportunities. While many women are willing to take on demanding assignments, barriers such as safety concerns, limited roles, and family expectations continue to affect their participation. Women’s voices are underrepresented in expert commentary and decision-making spaces, and workplace bias can limit career advancement. These factors create a difficult environment for women to enter, remain in, and progress within the profession.



Among the surveyed journalists, more than half reported that their organizations have adopted such practices. These include maintaining gender balance among interview sources and fostering an inclusive and respectful working environment.

Over 40% of respondents indicated that their newsrooms provide safety measures for women and LGBTQ+ journalists, ensure representation of women in leadership roles, and have designated gender focal points or committees (Figure 8). KIIs suggest that these practices are more common in organizations where women hold leadership positions or where outlets receive support from CSOs or donor-funded programs. This suggests that gender responsive policies are often driven by both leadership commitment and external support.

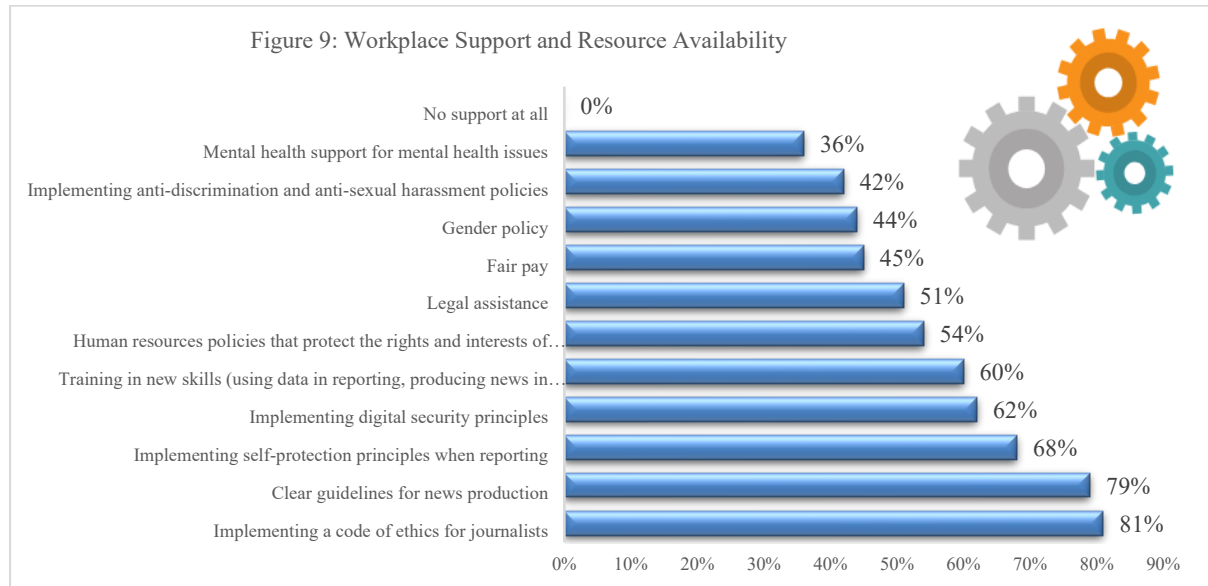
CASE STUDY 4: Female Journalists Navigating Bias and Structural Barriers

FGDs with three female journalists indicate that in Cambodia continue to face subtle but persistent bias in newsroom assignments, with high-risk or sensitive stories often being directed to male reporters under the guise of safety. While intended as a protective measure, this practice can limit women’s opportunities and reinforce perceptions that question their capabilities. Beyond story assignments, everyday workplace culture presents additional challenges. Sexist jokes and dismissive comments, both within newsrooms and from external sources, remain common experiences. Some journalists said they felt comfortable raising concerns with trusted senior staff or formally reporting incidents. Others described coping quietly by seeking informal support from experienced female colleagues or choosing to ignore inappropriate

behaviour to avoid being labelled overly sensitive. While experience often helps women journalists develop resilience, many described the early stages of their careers as particularly difficult. Support structures also vary between organizations. NGO-based media outlets were described as offering stronger psychosocial and gender-sensitive support compared with some commercial newsrooms.

Envisioning a gender-responsive newsroom, female journalists called for safer team-based reporting for sensitive and investigative stories and the integration of gender awareness into story pitching and editorial approval processes. They also described the need for practical workplace reforms, such as allowing period leave, providing free menstrual products, and fostering greater empathy from management regarding menstrual health.

VIII. Key Finding Seven: Supporting Mechanisms for Journalists



The study also assesses the support provided by media outlets to the journalists. The findings show that many journalists reported strong implementation of formal codes of ethics and news production guidelines.²⁶ Self-protection practices during field reporting, digital security training, and opportunities for skills development are available to support journalists. However, only just over half (54%, 59 out of 109) of journalists said their organizations provided human resource policies that protect employee rights and offer access to legal assistance. Fewer journalists reported receiving support related to adequate pay, gender policies, or anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment measures.

Mental health support remains limited. Only 36% (39 out of 109) of surveyed journalists reported access to such support, despite many experiencing significant psychological pressure and challenges (Figure 9).

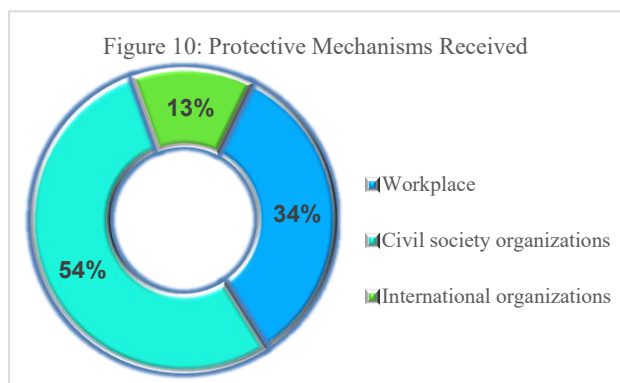
KIIs suggest that newsroom support mainly focuses on editorial standards and reporting safety. This reflects a strong emphasis on professional competence and risk management. However,

²⁶ Respondents were asked, “What support does your workplace provide?” with multiple selections allowed.

gaps remain in areas such as mental health services, gender-sensitive policies, and protection against harassment.

This gap underscores the urgent need for media organizations to adopt a more comprehensive and people-centered approach to journalist welfare that extends well beyond editorial concerns.

Less than half of journalists have access to legal, safety, and psychological support



The findings reveal significant gaps in journalists’ awareness of and access to legal and psychological support. Overall, only 45% (49 out of 109) had received any form of support. Among those who did receive support (71 respondents), the majority 54% (38 out of 71) reported receiving assistance from civil society organizations (CSOs), while 34% (24 out of 71) received support through their workplaces (Figure 10).

Although support mechanisms are available, many journalists indicated that access to legal and psychological assistance remains limited.

Between 2025 and March 2026,²⁷ the authorities handled and resolved 37 complaints involving media outlets, as well as 11 cases related to online publications. The Ministry of Information provided support to journalists facing legal issues, including legal consultations and, in some instances, defense lawyers. During the same period, the ministry also supported seven court cases involving 12 media organizations by facilitating legal representation. According to Tep Asnarith, these efforts are part of a broader initiative to protect journalists’ rights while ensuring accountability.

IX. Key Finding Eight: The Rise of AI-Driven Misinformation and Disinformation

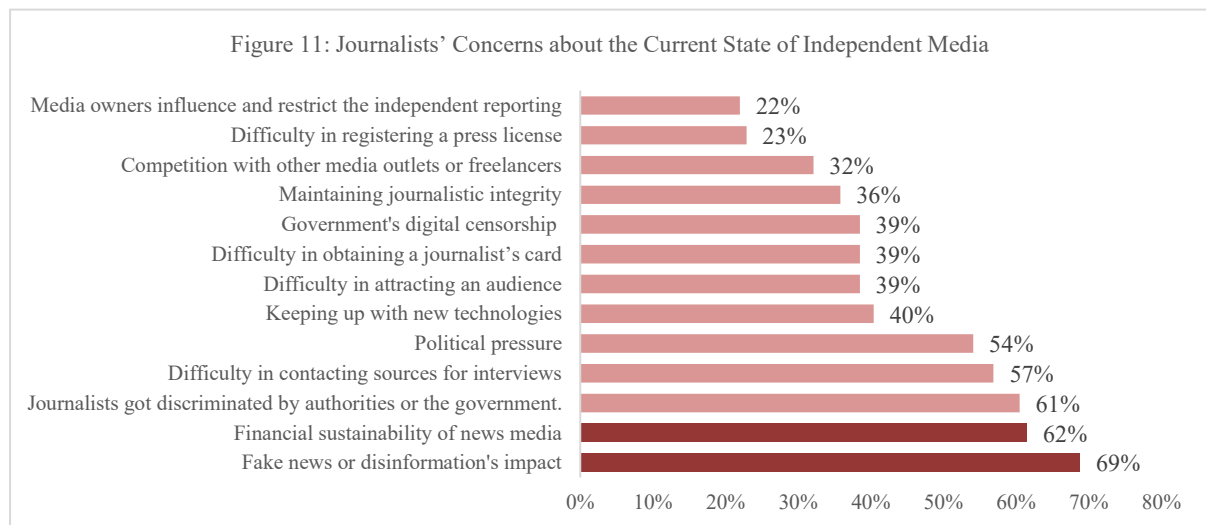
Insights shared by experts during the KIIs indicate that there is no comprehensive policy framework to guide the use of AI in the media sector. Many newsrooms also lack the technical capacity to verify AI-generated or manipulated content. Informants highlighted risks such as AI hallucinations, algorithmic bias, and the growing role of platform driven content distribution.²⁸ These factors could further limit access to diverse and reliable information.

Survey findings reinforce these concerns. A total of 74% (81 out of 109) of journalists expressed the need for training on AI integration, along with clearer operational guidelines

²⁷ Hong Raksmeay, ‘Ministry defends legal process in journalists’ treason case, pledges support for ethical reporters’, The Phnom Penh Post, March 30 2026, <https://phnompenhpost.com/national/ministry-defends-legal-process-in-journalists-treason-case-pledges-support-for-ethical-reporters/>

²⁸ “Draft National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2025-2030”, MPTC, June 2025, <https://data.opendevdevelopmentcambodia.net/en/dataset/5524b0b4-bb31-4cad-abf4-a36f8e82073d/resource/a35e29b9-3dbf-4a5d-92a9-4d3558ed3c03/download/nais-v5-en-for-consultation-clean.pdf>

among newsrooms and journalists in using AI to support their reporting. Strengthening AI literacy is essential. This includes skills in content verification, ethical use, and digital safety. Limited capacity to assess AI-generated content increases the risk of misinformation and public confusion. The Minister of Information Neth Pheaktra has also warned that AI-generated misinformation could pose risks to social stability, especially as technological developments move faster than existing regulations. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach.²⁹ This should combine technical training with the development of standards and safeguards to support accurate, ethical, and accountable journalism, particularly in a context where, in 2025, the Anti-Fake News Committee of the Ministry of Information identified and recorded 1,053 cases of fake news, including 854 cases related to the Cambodia–Thailand border dispute created by extremist individuals and through the use of AI technology.³⁰



A total of 69% (75 out of 109) of journalists identified fake news and misinformation or disinformation as a major challenge. 39% (42 out of 109) expressed concern about increased government digital censorship under the justification of combating misinformation (Figure 11). Press freedom advocates hold mixed views on the government’s approach.³¹ They stress the need to address misinformation while also calling for careful and professional investigation before taking legal action. This is important to avoid undermining legitimate or constructive criticism.

The rise of digital and AI technologies is creating new challenges for newsrooms. These include adapting to new tools, addressing ethical concerns, and developing clear newsroom policies. Digital technologies, especially AI, can support development by improving access to information and strengthening journalistic practices. These include fact-checking, data visualization, and multiplatform content production. In this study, more than 60% (67 out of 109) of surveyed journalists reported difficulties in using digital and AI technologies. From

²⁹ “Cambodia Reports Over 3,600 Cases of Fake News in 2024”, The Cambodia Daily, July 22 2025,

<https://english.cambodiadaily.com/2025/07/22/cambodia-reports-over-3600-cases-of-fake-news-in-2024/>

³⁰ Bros Ann, ‘Ministry of information documented 1053 cases related to Fake News’, tvk, October 09 2025,

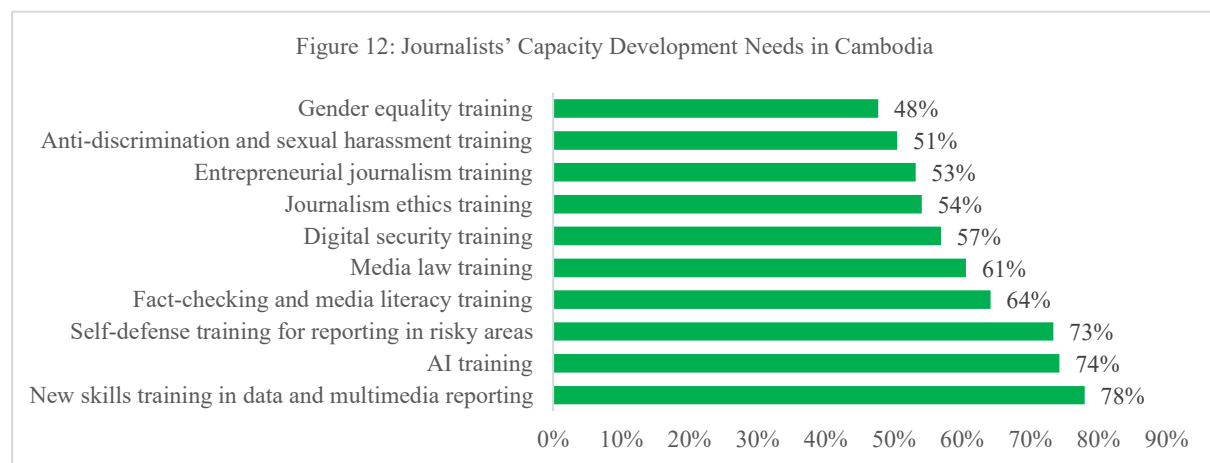
<https://tinyurl.com/bydbcf42>

³¹ Khuon Narim, ‘Government Launches to Anti-Fake News Campaign, Opponents Fear Suppression of Freedom of Expression’, CamboJA News, April 01 2025, <https://cambojanews.com/government-launches-to-anti-fake-news-campaign-opponents-fear-suppression-of-freedom-of-expression/>

these emerging concerns related to the rise of AI-generated content, should a national AI strategy be formally adopted, it will be essential that journalists including freelance and citizen journalists are equipped with the knowledge and skills to harness AI as a productive and responsible tool in their professional work. In this regard, the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications bear primary responsibility for ensuring that AI literacy training is integrated into the national AI strategy implementation plan with clear timelines, dedicated resources, and measurable targets. Critically, these training efforts must not be limited to journalists based in the capital. Provincial journalists, freelancers, and citizen journalists who already face significant barriers including limited internet connectivity and inadequate institutional support must be equally prioritized in the design and delivery of any national training program.

KIIs show that rapid technological change is reshaping the news industry. Digital platforms are changing how audiences access information. Many users now rely on new tools, including AI driven search, to find news. There is also a shift toward AI audio formats, which is changing news consumption habits. This shift is affecting how media organizations compete for audience attention. Informants noted several key challenges. These include the need to adopt AI technologies, the lack of clear digital and AI guidelines in newsrooms, and difficulties in verifying AI-generated content. In response, media organizations need to adapt their strategies to remain relevant. While core journalistic skills such as accurate reporting and strong writing remain essential, newsrooms also need to strengthen audience engagement and improve how content is distributed online.

V. Key Finding Nine: Needs for Future Journalism Training



This study also identified capacity gaps and emerging skill needs among journalists, including freelance and citizen journalists. Findings show a strong demand for capacity development among journalists. A large majority of surveyed journalists expressed interest in training on data-driven and multimedia reporting by 78% (85 out of 109), followed by AI related skills 74% (81 out of 109), and self-defence for physical security when reporting in high-risk environments at 73% (80 out of 109) (Figure 12). It is worth noting that half of the surveyed journalists mentioned the need for capacity building in entrepreneurial journalism.

The study also highlights the growing importance of skills in audience engagement and content strategy for journalists to stay relevant and maintain audience attention in a fast-changing digital media environment, these include the professional use of AI in news production and the development of clear guidelines to support ethical journalism. Findings suggest that journalists can benefit from adopting selected practices used by content creators, who are now part of Cambodia's media ecosystem.³² It includes audience focused storytelling, platform specific content tailored to different digital channels, and the use of engaging but credible headlines and visuals.

These approaches could help journalists to gather audiences to generate income through advertisement and in turn will in support their financial sustainability. Through this, media organizations could develop more viable business models via diversified revenue streams, such as subscriptions, audience donations, sponsored content, brand partnerships, and platform-based monetization, while maintaining core journalistic standards and principles.³³

³² Ben Reininga and Ryan Y. Kellett, 'What Legacy Newsrooms Can Learn from Social Media Creators', Nieman Reports, July 15 2025, <https://niemanreports.org/news-influencers-content-creators-social-media-journalism/>

³³ Dawn M. Deguzman, 'Unlocking Revenue Streams: How Video Content Drives Monetization for News Media Companies', AP, September 23 2024, <https://www.ap.org/insights/unlocking-revenue-streams-how-video-content-drives-monetization-for-news-media-companies/>

CONCLUSION

This study offers a comprehensive and grounded assessment of the state of journalism and the realities faced by media professionals working under increasingly difficult conditions.

Across nine key findings, a consistent and concerning pattern emerges one in which journalists, particularly independent practitioners, continue to work under significant pressure, with inadequate institutional support, shrinking access to information, and growing exposure to legal, physical, and psychological risks.

The findings make clear that the challenges facing journalism are not isolated or incidental. They are deeply structural. From the persistent use of intimidation by law enforcement officers and local officials. The absence of formal workplace protections against harassment and discrimination, to the widening gap in gender equality within newsrooms-these issues reflect systemic failures that require deliberate and coordinated responses from both civil society organizations and government.

At the same time, the rapid rise of AI-driven misinformation and disinformation introduces a new and urgent layer of complexity to an already demanding profession. Without adequate training, clear guidelines, and institutional investment in AI literacy, the media sector risks falling further behind in its ability to serve the public with accurate and trustworthy information.

Perhaps most critically, this study finds that the support mechanisms currently available to journalists-whether in the areas of mental health, fair pay, safety, or professional development - remain insufficient and unevenly distributed. Freelance and citizen journalists, in particular, continue to be overlooked despite their growing contribution to the modern media landscape.

The path forward requires more than awareness. It demands accountability, sustained investment, and meaningful policy reform-including the replacement of criminal legal provisions used against journalists with a fair and protective Press Law framework. Addressing these challenges is not simply a matter of professional welfare; it is a fundamental prerequisite for a free, independent, and resilient press that can effectively serve the public interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, CCIM suggests that the Royal Government of Cambodia, media organizations, CSOs, and journalists should work collectively to improve the current state of the media landscape in Cambodia. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from all stakeholders and relevant parties, supported by proper consultation and official information-sharing, to ensure that issues are resolved in a manner that respects press freedom and freedom of expression. Accordingly, CCIM suggests the following recommendations:

A. Royal Government of Cambodia

- Ensure that cases involving journalism and press freedom are addressed under the 1995 Press Law rather than the Criminal Code in line with protections for freedom of expression.
- Update the Press Law to reflect the evolving digital media landscape, including provisions on the responsible use of AI in journalism, while safeguarding press freedom and freedom of expression and fruitful consultation with all stakeholders.
- Adopt legal reforms by expediting the passage of an Access to Information Law aligned with international standards and reviewing the application of relevant Criminal Code provisions-particularly those related to defamation, incitement, public insult, national security, and discrediting judicial decisions-to prevent misuse against journalists.
- Review and revise the Prakas on Qualifications and Journalistic Professionalism, the Charter for Professional Journalism, and press card requirements (2025–2026) through transparent and inclusive consultation to ensure they do not create undue barriers or restrict press freedom.
- Enhance transparency and responsiveness of public institutions by improving access to official information, interviews, and data for journalists.
- Simplify the press card registration process, particularly for freelance and citizen journalists. Ensure that the use of the national domain “.kh” remains non-restrictive and free from censorship, and does not enable arbitrary monitoring, blocking, or denial of domain registration.

B. Media Organizations and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Support the responsible adoption of AI in journalism by encouraging its use in fact-checking, data analysis, and content production, while establishing clear ethical guidelines and newsroom policies to mitigate risks such as misinformation, hate speech, and manipulation.
- Promote media sustainability by diversifying revenue streams (e.g., subscriptions, memberships, audience donations, sponsored content, and platform monetization) and exploring transparent public funding mechanisms to strengthen long-term resilience.
- Extend institutional protections, training, safety resources, mental health and well-being resources to freelance and citizen journalists, and provide targeted training programs on investigative reporting, verification techniques, digital security, and emerging technologies.

- Advance gender equality and increase women’s representation in leadership, enforce anti-harassment measures, ensure inclusive newsroom environments, and establish support mechanisms to address sexual harassment.
- Prioritize mental health support as a core service, providing journalists with access to confidential counselling, peer support networks, and emergency financial assistance to address stress driven by safety risks and financial insecurity.
- Establish legal assistance funds and rapid response mechanisms for journalists facing harassment or detention. Government must end the use of intimidation by law enforcement officers and local officials against media practitioners and ensure accountability for perpetrators.

C. Journalists

- Proactively engage in available training opportunities on digital security, AI literacy, investigative reporting, and verification techniques to strengthen professional capacity and resilience.
- Actively participate in consultative processes related to press law reform, the journalism charter, and AI policy development to ensure that the voices and needs of the media community are represented in policy decisions.
- Report incidents of harassment, intimidation, and legal threats through available legal assistance mechanisms and document cases to contribute to evidence-based advocacy for press freedom.

Challenges

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2025

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cambodian center for independent media