

Thomson Foundation



Annual Review 2023

GETTING IT RIGHT

**“Being a connector
between stakeholders
on the challenges and
opportunities of AI
for media is key to
our future”**

Caro Kriel
Chief Executive
Thomson Foundation

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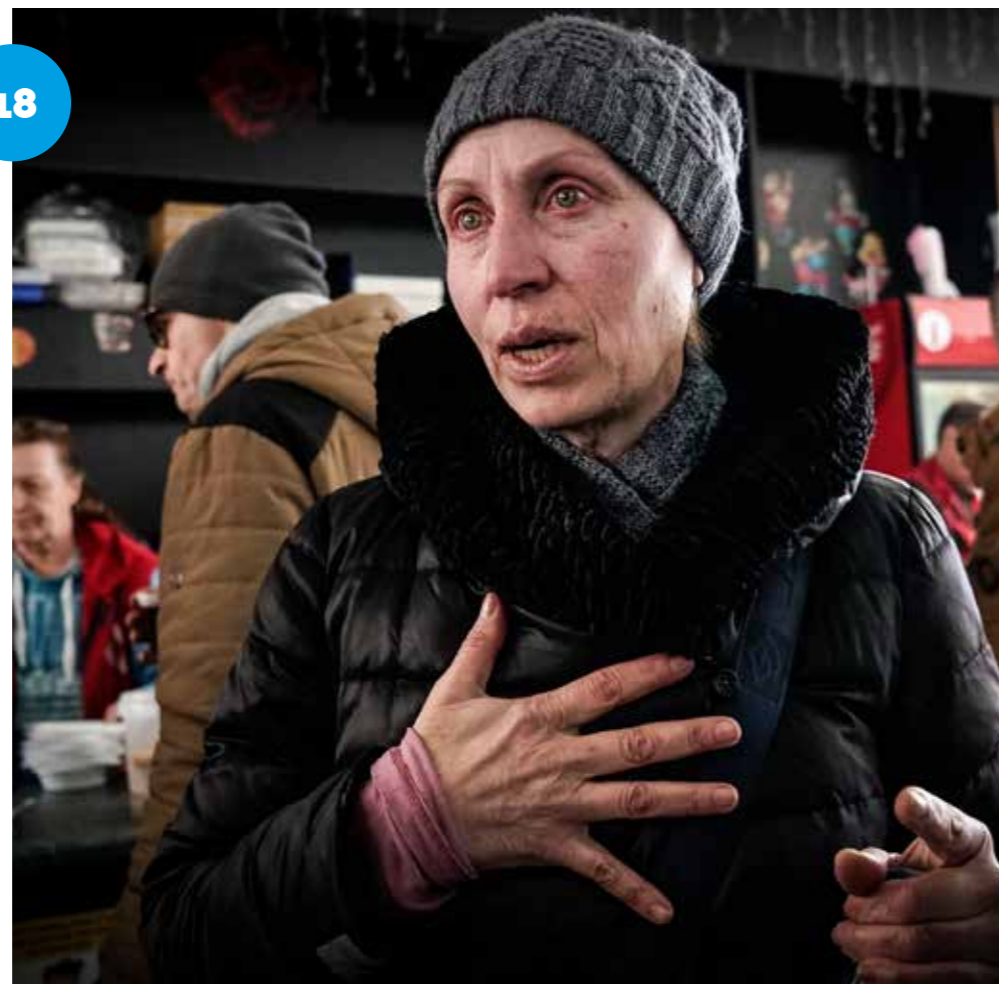
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Image: @Emre Caylak

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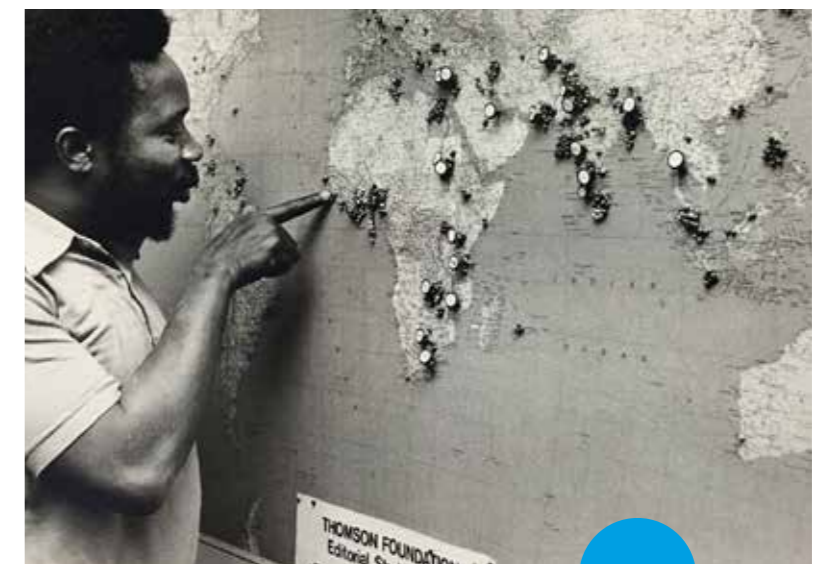
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Foreword

Welcome

To mark Thomson's 60th year of supporting trusted journalism globally, the organisation launched Connect 6, a mentoring programme for young journalists working with experienced and high-profile journalists, for half a year. It's the comments of Pulitzer Prize winner Ewen MacAskill, after mentoring Thomson Foundation's Young Journalist of the Year 2022 Yashraj Sharma, that really sums up the mission of Thomson.

Ewen said: "When you come across someone like Yash operating in very difficult situations, trying to keep a paper going in a conflict zone and doing this for not much money but because he sees a value in journalism, that can only make me feel confident about the future of journalism."

Yashraj has now relocated to Delhi after the website and social media of The Kashmir Walla, where he was interim editor, were blocked by the Indian government.

Though Thomson's original roots were as a pure training organisation, it now does much more: business sustainability consultancy is an equally large part of activities in big programmes in the Western Balkans and Central Europe, as is research, media landscaping work and championing of journalistic excellence in programmes in Pakistan, Sudan, Rwanda and beyond. Working in challenging places where truth is often under threat, to equip media and journalists to combat disinformation has been a feature of Thomson's work for many years. It is the connection of disinformation with generative AI, and the challenges and opportunities that this presents, that is becoming a key feature of the organisation's focus.

"Though Thomson's original roots were as a pure training organisation, it now does much more."

Thomson is on a solid financial footing. Working closely with Thomson's team in Berlin, we were delighted to change the shareholder structure of the German charitable entity to enable it to diversify even more with regards to European institutional funding. I was also thrilled to welcome two excellent new members to our Board of Trustees this year: investment expert, author and former financial journalist, Katharine Campbell and renowned journalist and media editor Pamella Makotsi Sittoni.

As ever, my heartfelt thanks to fellow trustees, the donors and partners who enable Thomson to do the vital work that journalism needs, and the Thomson team of staffers and contractors spread across the world.

Lord Tom Chandos
Chairman
Thomson Foundation

"Partnerships are key to our approach to the challenges and opportunities for media around AI."

It was a delight to gather the Thomson team in person this year to review our strategy and share our enthusiasm for our mission to support trusted journalism around the globe. With democracy under threat in so many parts of the world, it will remain at the heart of our efforts as we expand our current geographic areas of work and funding arenas.

Disinformation has been part of our focus for many years including in Sudan, Pakistan, and the Western Balkans. The deep fake audio conversation between a liberal journalist and politician 'discussing' vote rigging before the Slovakian election this year was a reminder of the dangers of powerful generative AI technology. As Rasto Kuzel, Executive Director of Memo 98 in Slovakia told me, whether the deep fake helped the pro-Russian candidate win the election is disputed, but he was certain it 'created a wave of distrust' in the country.

Partnerships are key to our approach to the challenges and opportunities for media around AI. We were excited to join Partnership on AI (PAI), a not-for-profit partnership seeking positive outcomes around the use of AI and to contribute with 16 partner organisations to launch the 'Paris Charter on AI and Journalism', that

defines principles the media can use when adopting AI. Our own 'AI in the newsroom: the ethical approach' online course has been taken by hundreds of journalists.

Being a connector between stakeholders on the challenges and opportunities of AI for media is key to our future. I am pleased to collaborate with Madhav Chinnappa, former director of News Ecosystems at Google, who launched our series of thought leadership events – 'Thomson Talks with Madhav Chinnappa' – in November, gathering journalists, academics and policy makers to consider how AI influences aspects of the media world.

One of the best bits of the job is meeting our beneficiaries. This year it was rather special to see our three Young Journalists of the Year finalists – Yara El Murr, Jamaima Afridi and Zuha Siddiqui – meet the Queen at the awards ceremony in London. Yara, from Lebanon, dedicated her award to the journalists of Gaza, who have paid such a heavy price to tell the world the story of the Israel-Gaza war which erupted after the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023.

As ever, I am deeply indebted to the Thomson team for their commitment, our trustees for their advice, and our donors and partners for their support.

Caro Kriel
Chief Executive.
Thomson Foundation

It's no exaggeration to call 2023 'the year of the generative AI revolution'.

Some of the science that fuelled the imagination of sci-fi writers is now available to anyone with a smartphone. There are profound ethical implications for society and of course journalism.

Thomson Foundation has been at the forefront of the global debate – partnering with 17 other organisations to launch the Paris Charter on AI and Journalism, partnering with Partnership on AI (PAI) and producing a seminal course on the ethical use of AI in newsrooms.

THE ETHICAL APPROACH

We teamed up with industry experts to create the free pioneering course, **AI in the newsroom: The ethical approach**. AI has been present in some form in newsrooms for some time but with the launch of Open AI's ChatGPT at the end of 2022 it became clearer that the implications of large language models were enormous for journalists using AI tools. After all, with a bit of prompting, a chatbot can now write news stories.

At Thomson we recognise that a discussion around the ethical use of these tools should be central to newsroom policies and processes, so the training course, which is available via our Journalism Now platform, offers an interactive guide for senior journalists on the best approach to take to make sure their brand remains a reliable, relevant and trusted source of news.

"The industry experts who gave their time to help create the course know the questions newsrooms need to be asking," says Catherine Mackie, Thomson Foundation's training and communications editor. "AI tools and chatbots will continue

to evolve but we want to create a reference point for journalists; a guide to make sure that when they consider using an AI tool, they also consider the ethical implications and can formulate a newsroom policy around that."

This was the first training course produced for the Journalism Trust Initiative Campus – a virtual learning environment to help support newsrooms hoping to attain the JTI standard. The JTI was launched by Reporters Without Borders in 2019 to promote trustworthy journalism. The 'JTI standard' is now an officially recognised standardisation incorporated into the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation.

AI - The Smart Way

Working together on AI

Partnerships are key to our collaborative approach to supporting journalism and we were delighted to host members of the board and executive team of Partnership on AI (PAI) for a dinner and discussion about AI, regulation and media at the House of Lords, hosted by our Chairman, Lord Chandos.

PAI is a non-profit global collaboration involving more than 110 organisations in 18 countries representing academia, civil society, industry and the media. Working across industries, the partnership promotes the responsible development of Artificial Intelligence as well as its ethical deployment and adoption. PAI were in London for an AI Policy Forum in October where Thomson's Chief Executive Caro Kriel took part in a panel on election integrity in the era of generative AI.

We look forward to collaborating with the partnership on a number of issues including how to use AI to combat disinformation and the role it may have in making media operations more sustainable.



Ethical principles for journalists

Thomson was proud to collaborate with 16 partners on the Paris Charter on AI and Journalism launched in November unveiling 10 principles for newsrooms when using AI.

The charter is the first of its kind in the world. It defines a set of 10 fundamental ethical standards that journalists, newsrooms and media outlets can adopt when using AI in order to protect the integrity of news and information.

The Charter was initiated by Reporters Sans Frontières and written by 32 media specialists from 20 different countries. It was chaired by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning journalist Maria Ressa.



“The charter on AI and journalism is a valuable reference point at a time when everyone is finding their way”

Hosam El Nagar, Director of Innovation and Learning at Thomson Foundation.

AI - The Smart Way

Thomson Talks: Navigating AI's Ethical Maze

In November 2023, Thomson launched 'Thomson Talks with Madhav Chinnappa', a series of thought leadership events in London with the mission to discuss the place of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in newsrooms and the world media operate in. The invite-only series, led by Madhav Chinnappa, the former Director of News Ecosystem Development at Google, brings together top-class news executives, tech whizzes, policy experts and decision-makers for a high-level conversation to learn, share and discuss the challenges and opportunities that developments in generative AI bring to media around the world.

IN NOVEMBER 2023, THOMSON LAUNCHED 'THOMSON TALKS WITH MADHAV CHINNAPPA', A SERIES OF THOUGHT LEADERSHIP EVENTS IN LONDON



Watch the video

Focusing on AI and Disinformation, the first instalment of the quarterly gatherings featured three experts from academia, technology, and publishing. The academic perspective highlighted that while AI is not the primary driver of misinformation, there is a pressing need to strengthen norms and technological solutions to mitigate misinformation risks. The technologist pointed out the potential of AI in creating autonomous systems and data systems, posing new challenges for news organisations, while the publisher underscored the dangers of AI in deepening societal polarisation and muddying the waters of truth and credibility but also the rich potential for media.

"Fighting yesterday's war"

The group agreed that if we are indeed heading towards a landscape increasingly dominated by AI-generated content, human-made content should command a premium. One of the key takeaways was the need for a proactive approach in journalism, moving beyond a defensive stance to an assertive one that champions human-based journalism. "We're always too slow," says Madhav. "And that was actually one of the interesting things that came out of the conversation, is to make sure that we're not "fighting yesterday's war", that actually we need to learn from what's happened before, understand what's happening now, to be able to act going forward."

The discussions also highlighted the need for protecting diversity in journalism, raising concerns over machine learning's role in advancing established biases. However, Artificial Intelligence's potential to cater to forgotten minority audiences in mainstream media was viewed as a chance to ethically broaden the scope of the news ecosystem.

As the global conversation around ethical AI usage in newsrooms continues to evolve and move beyond the theoretical sphere, Thomson will continue to provide a platform for critical and constructive discourse, linking stakeholders from media and tech to consider how this powerful technology can be used for good, as well as be alert to the challenges it poses to providing trusted information to communities.

"WE'RE ALWAYS TOO SLOW"

Madhav Chinnappa, the former Director of News Ecosystem Development at Google



Disarming Disinformation

Restoring

TRUST

In the wake of the conflict in Sudan, the nation's media landscape underwent a dramatic transformation leading to the closure of numerous media outlets and forcing many journalists into exile. The crisis created a void in credible news outlets, filled predominantly by social media platforms. The result was a surge of disinformation propagated by various sources, including foreign actors and falsified imagery, with the aim of sowing fear and deepening societal divisions.

In collaboration with a tech partner, Thomson's research has revealed the evolution of disinformation in Sudan, showing the emergence of a manipulative communication tactic called Coordinated

Inauthentic Behaviour (CIB) when multiple fake accounts are created and disinformation is pumped out, feeding or promoting a specific false narrative against a particular person or group. Initially characterised by crude tactics, these campaigns have grown more sophisticated, prompting the need for expert scrutiny to decipher narratives for decision-makers. Notably, interference from other nations has played a prominent role, contributing to the complex disinformation landscape.

Conspiracy theories and fluctuating perceptions

At the grassroots level, social media is inundated with fabricated stories, eroding trust. As a result, people's perceptions fluctuate, with sentiments toward key figures in Sudan shifting rapidly, underscoring the necessity for

vigilant monitoring. The prevalence of conspiracy theories further complicates the information landscape, revealing manipulations originating from other nations in the Arab world.

To combat the negative impact of disinformation amid the conflict, Thomson launched a six-month initiative in partnership with Valent Projects, a London-based tech business specialising in detecting and tracking digital networks and Beam Reports, a trusted news platform with people based in Sudan. The project aimed to foster a more informed and resilient Sudanese society by making accurate and trusted information more accessible, reducing polarisation and encouraging the dialogue towards peace.

The initiative lays the foundations for local media organisations to improve their ability to identify and counter

disinformation, empower civil society organisations (CSOs) to challenge false narratives, and provide the people of Sudan with access to verified information.

Already, the programme has also provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of countering disinformation in Sudan. Lessons learned emphasised the fragmented nature of disinformation work.

The extension of the programme in 2024 will aim to reach a broader audience and incorporate more in-depth investigations.

In a separate project, Thomson has been supporting the many Sudanese journalists displaced by the conflict, helping them to predict and prepare for how the media will operate once the war is over. Other priorities include understanding how to combat hate speech and assisting media organisations in exile.

Thomson Foundation continues to collaborate and coordinate with key parties in Sudan, integrating lessons learned into project development to ensure its programming remains agile and pertinent to evolving needs on the ground.

“The Thomson Foundation has been doing pioneering work with Valent and Beam Reports during the war in Sudan to counter disinformation, set the record straight and distribute that material. At a time when the warring parties and former regime supporters are all trying to control the popular narrative, these reports are a valuable resource for Sudanese civilians, policymakers, and all Sudan watchers.”

Dame Rosalind Marsden, former British Ambassador to Sudan and Thomson Foundation Trustee

Disarming Disinformation

Piloting new provenance technology

As disinformation becomes more widespread and more sophisticated, compounded by the explosion in use of generative AI, Thomson has joined a community of the world's leading media and tech companies, NGOs and academics working together to create an open industry standard for content authenticity and provenance.

The Content Authenticity Initiative (CAI), whose members also include Adobe, Nikon, Microsoft, The New York Times and the BBC, is collaborating to fight mis and disinformation by adding a layer of tamper-evident provenance to all types of digital content, starting with photos, video, and documents.

The system adds "content credentials" (cr) or metadata at every point of content creation from an image taken on a camera or smartphone through editing, including the addition of AI generated content, to publication. These crs can be checked to verify the provenance of the content. It is being road tested in a series of workshops for journalists led by Thomson.

The system works to specifications created by the Coalition for Content Provenance Authenticity (C2PA), a coalition formed by leading media and tech companies.

It is already available via the ProofMode App created by Guardian Project, a global collective of software developers and designers and in several digital cameras.

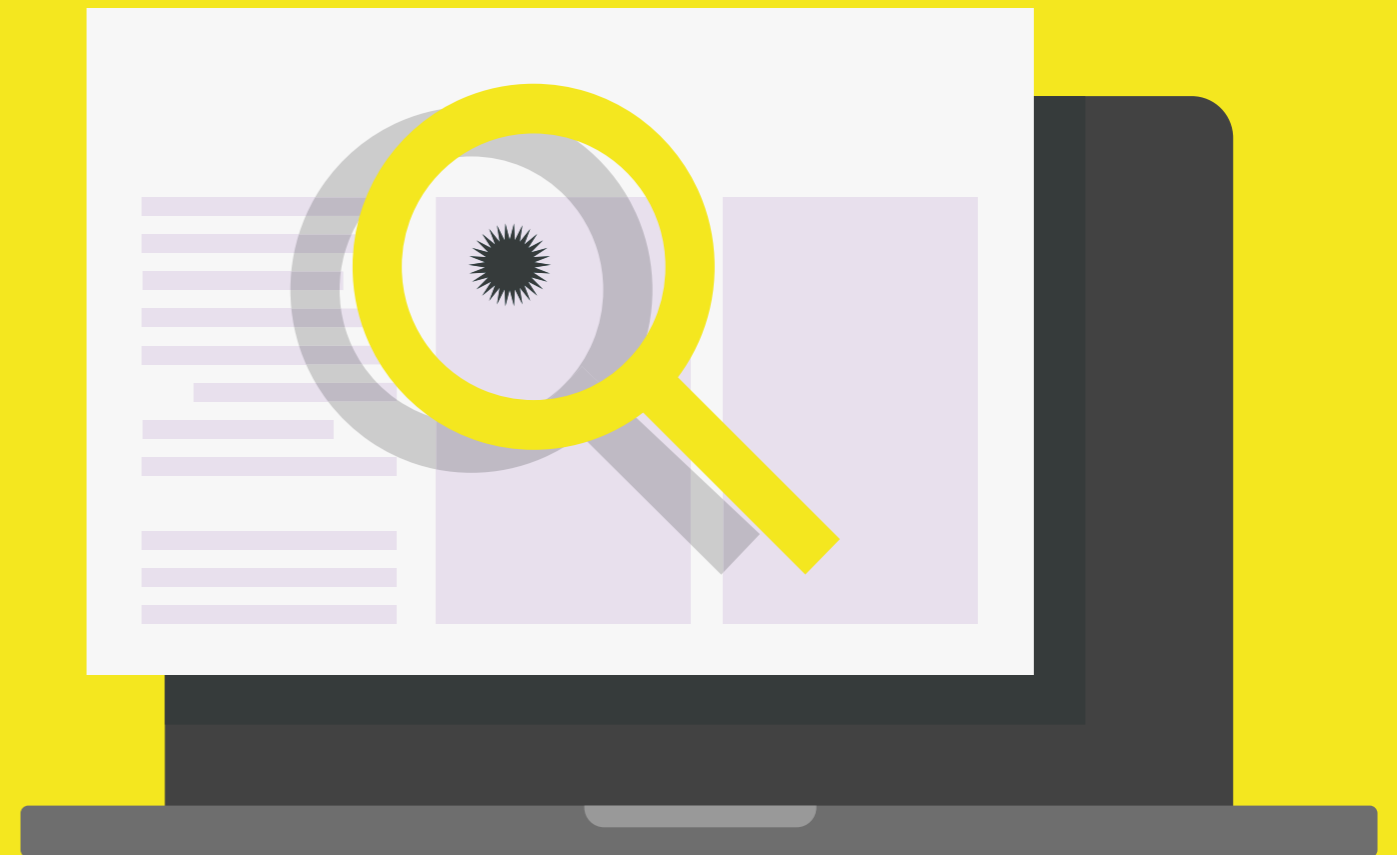
When it comes to editing, credentials can be added via open-source browser-based systems as well as paid-for products such as Adobe's Photoshop.

Thomson's first workshops were held for journalists working in the Western Balkans and Central Europe regions that have seen an increase in disinformation from people based locally.

In one, Serbian journalist Victor Markovic highlighted the verification problems experienced by journalists with an image that appeared to show the country's President paying his respects at a school in Belgrade where a mass shooting had taken place.

"A lot of professional forensics [people] came to help and determined that it was fabricated but we still do not have official proof," he said. "I still do not know if this photo was manipulated or not."

Through the Thomson workshops, the CAI community hope to gain more of an understanding of the challenges facing journalists around disinformation and how technology can be used to protect and create trusted content and become part of a journalist's daily workflow.



THE SYSTEM ADDS "CONTENT CREDENTIALS" (CR) OR METADATA AT EVERY POINT OF CONTENT CREATION FROM AN IMAGE TAKEN ON A CAMERA OR SMARTPHONE THROUGH EDITING, INCLUDING THE ADDITION OF AI GENERATED CONTENT, TO PUBLICATION



The New York Times

Nikon



For the record

Getting it right from a war zone

2023 marked the first anniversary of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine with no let-up in the frontline reports exposing the horror, heartache and hardship for the people living there. As with so many conflicts and wars, journalists work hard to establish the facts of what happened and when – a difficult and dangerous task in a war zone. To assist journalists in this difficult task, Thomson in collaboration with the Eurovision News Exchange designed a series of training courses on best practice for journalists who find themselves covering possible war crimes.

Ole Solvang the senior human rights officer for the UN's Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and Dr Anna Neistat, an international human rights lawyer from the Clooney Foundation join leading foreign correspondents to offer expert advice in "For the record: how to document stories from a war zone".

The groundbreaking courses are designed to guide journalists in the field and in newsrooms on how to document and archive possible war crimes.

The Eurovision News Exchange which is part of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), wants material to be flagged to its Ukraine War Archive which it hopes will provide the definitive account of the war.

BBC correspondent Quentin Sommerville who has covered wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Ukraine advises journalists to "take notes, record everything and keep all your transcripts."

The courses provide a pathway through what can be a fine line for journalists covering war: the distinction between journalism and judicial investigation when it comes to possible war crimes.

Cristina Ghita, a journalist from Romania's public television company TVR, shared her experience of the course, underscoring its practical impact: "I think it is awesome! A lot of useful information, well-structured and in a very dynamic format. I am looking forward to joining other projects like this one. I believe you do help journalists to be more professional!"

A shorter version of the course is also available via the Telegram messaging app.

Halyna, Mariupol evacuee during the interview in the registration centre in Zaporizhzhia, March 17, 2022

Image: @Emre Caylak

EBU

**EURIOVISION
NEWS**



Powerful Journalism

Echoes of the Lost: Young Journalist Award Winner 2023

Journalism, at its core, is a defiant act. It shines a stark light on the cracks in the system, amplifies the voices of those silenced, and holds power accountable – a responsibility that burns brighter when the human cost is high. In 2023, the Thomson Foundation Young Journalist Award found its champion in Yara El Murr, a Lebanese reporter whose unflinching investigation into the dark underbelly of migration policies exposed the devastating human costs of border control and its tragic consequences for one family.

“I feel an urgency to uncover the wrongdoings around us, to hold power to account, and to give a platform to marginalised voices,” said the 25-year-old. Her winning submission, “Intercepted at Sea”, tells the harrowing tale of Hashem Methlej, a young artist who vanished when his boat, carrying dreams of a better life, was intercepted and sank in the Mediterranean. “The stories I like to tell most are human driven and show human impact. For example, in the story I submitted, I explored how European migration policies changed the daily life of a family in Tripoli forever.”

Forty people died on the night Hashem's boat was stopped by the Lebanese army. Dedicating her award to the families of migrants who lost their lives, Yara delivered an impassioned speech to the audience at the Foreign Press Association Media Awards ceremony in London.

'Deadliest conflict for journalists'

Yara joined many winners on the night of the awards who paid tribute to the journalists risking their lives in Gaza. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says as of Jan 2024 at least 85 journalists and media workers have been killed since the Israel-Gaza war erupted after the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023.

“I would like to honour the memory of all journalists who have been killed or injured in what the Committee to Protect Journalists called the deadliest conflict for journalists since the group began tracking deaths 30 years ago,” she told the audience, which included some of the world's leading journalists as well as Her Majesty The Queen, who was the guest of honour at the gala event.



Local Journalism: the link between larger politics and our daily lives

Yara and the two other finalists of the Young Journalist Award Jamaima Afridi and Zuha Siddiqui, both from Pakistan, have a strong commitment to local journalism. “This journalism in my opinion really helps people understand how larger politics affect their daily lives. And in parallel, it can help us show the consequences of what governments and big corporations do and hold them accountable based on that,” says Yara.



Watch the video



“I dedicate this award to the families whose loved ones lie at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea.”

Yara El Murr, Young Journalist of the Year 2023

The young reporter has also contributed to the world of documentary filmmaking. She was an assistant producer for ‘The Soil and the Sea’, a poignant documentary that delves into the unresolved mysteries of Lebanon's civil war, uncovering the stories behind mass graves and former detention centres. The film, directed by Daniele Rugo, premiered at Curzon Soho (London) on February 19th and has garnered attention for its sensitive portrayal of a nation's unhealed wounds. “I've watched documentaries that have made me cry and learn and change my mind and want to advocate for a cause. And I only hope that my work can do the same,” she says.

Offering audiences a compelling cinematic journey into Lebanon's complex history, ‘The Soil and the Sea’ is available for viewing on **Curzon Home Cinema** until February 2025.



Powerful Journalism

Meet the other finalists



Zuha

Zuha Siddiqui

Zuha Siddiqui made her mark in journalism through her coverage of environmental pollution. Her work has been instrumental in bringing attention to the detrimental effects of macroeconomic policies on the lives of the population.

“These aren’t stories I necessarily like to tell because reporting them is a deeply uncomfortable experience, both for me and for the sources that I end up interviewing. But these are stories I have to tell because it is my responsibility as a journalist to do so.” says Zuha.



Watch the video

“These aren’t stories I necessarily like to tell because reporting them is a deeply uncomfortable experience, both for me and for the sources that I end up interviewing. But these are stories I have to tell because it is my responsibility as a journalist to do so.”



Jamaima



Jamaima Afridi

Jamaima Afridi’s work primarily focuses on women’s rights, a topic that is often sidelined in mainstream media. Through her journalism, she has brought attention to the struggles and triumphs of women, particularly in regions where their voices are often silenced.

Jamaima says she faces lots of challenges as a woman journalist ‘in a patriarchal environment’, but sometimes it works in her favour. “The biggest advantage is that I have access to both men and women in our society,” she says. “Women often do not want to give interviews to men, so it became very easy for me to gain their trust.”

A case in point is her second story about tribal women pursuing their inheritance rights which was published by Voicepk.net.



Watch the video

“The biggest advantage is that I have access to both men and women in our society.”

The Award

Thomson has been supporting fresh talent through its annual Young Journalist Award since 2013. The competition is open to journalists aged 30 and under from countries with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of less than USD20,000, giving a boost to some brilliant newcomers over the years and demonstrating a rich tapestry of investigative journalism, exposing social issues and holding power to account.



London



Calling

Powerful Journalism

Inspiration, Learning and Networking



Making headlines

The three journalists were able to experience first-hand how UK newsrooms are coping with the enormous pressures of trying to comprehensively cover international events like the Israel-Gaza war and the conflict in Ukraine as well as the British domestic agenda.

"I hope this trip paves the way for future opportunities and collaboration." Zuha Siddiqui

Senior journalists, presenters and producers generously gave their time to talk through the news processes including story selection and verification. "I particularly enjoyed learning about Channel 4's editorial process and the conversation we had with editors at The Guardian," says Zuha. "I hope this trip paves the way for future opportunities and collaboration."

The three finalists for the Thomson Foundation Young Journalist of the Year 2023 enjoyed an action-packed trip to London which included meeting the Queen, visits to the BBC, Channel 4 and The Guardian and the chance to sample some British pub grub.

Runner-up in the competition, Jamaima Afridi from Pakistan described the trip as 'the most productive days ever'. Along with her fellow runner-up, Zuha Siddiqui from Pakistan and winner Yara El Murr from Lebanon, the trio got inside tips on how to pitch stories, made some invaluable contacts and in the process became firm friends.



"I really enjoyed and felt inspired by our conversation with Zahra," says Yara. "Her strength and perseverance are phenomenal."

Thomson Foundation prides itself on nurturing and supporting young journalists and providing practical skills training. The trio were treated to a masterclass in data visualisation led by Jola Piesakowska, one of Thomson's training experts.

It was the first visit to London for both Yara and Jamaima. Time was made in the busy schedule for fun and sightseeing. Thankfully the temperamental November weather was kind and Yara thought the capital looked 'beautiful'.

"I loved my trip to the UK," she says. "Everyone at the Thomson Foundation was so friendly and helpful."

She adds her favourite part was getting to know Zuha and Jamaima.

"[They] are both incredible and I feel so lucky that I can now count on these brilliant women to support each other in our journey," says Yara.



Powerful Journalism

Bold Investigations, Brave Journalists

2023 marked a pivotal year for investigative journalism in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, as showcased by the EU Awards for Investigative Journalism. The awards highlighted a remarkable blend of talent and diversity, with over 200 journalists and 35 media teams participating. The entries reflected a significant shift in storytelling, broadening their scope to topics that resonate with wider audiences.

Evolving Trends

Investigative journalism, traditionally centred in this region on criminal and political scandals, is slowly shifting towards other issues. An analysis of the top 70 investigative stories revealed:

- 25% focused on political power and corruption
- 23% delved into health and environmental issues
- 19% covered high-level criminal activities
- 16% addressed discrimination in various sectors

The 2023 Investigative Journalism Awards also spotlighted crucial issues across healthcare, environment, discrimination, and education. In healthcare, documentaries and reports from North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania exposed systemic failures, leading to public debates and policy reforms. Environmental investigations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia raised awareness about ecological threats and illegal practices, prompting

governmental action. In the fields of education and discrimination, stories from Kosovo and Türkiye highlighted the challenges of segregation and religious indoctrination, advocating for inclusivity and understanding.

These investigative efforts highlight the inherent risks faced by investigative journalists, who often confront powerful adversaries and navigate challenging environments to bring crucial stories to the public eye. By pursuing subjects that matter, reporters across the Western Balkans and Türkiye exemplified the essence of journalism as a force for accountability, transparency, and progress, reaffirming its indispensable place in healthy democracies.

The EU Award for Investigative Journalism is part of the project **Strengthening Quality Journalism in Western Balkans and Türkiye II**, funded by the European Union and implemented by a consortium composed of Balkan Investigative Reporting Network – BIRN Hub, Central European University (CEU) – Hungary, Shtip (UGD) – North Macedonia, The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM) – North Macedonia, Media Association of South-East Europe (MASE) – Montenegro, and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Kosovo (BIRN Kosovo).

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Powerful Journalism

Exposing Corruption

In-Depth Look at the Award-Winning Entries

Serbia's Dark Underworld

The investigative team at KRIK, the crime and corruption reporting network in Serbia, produced a detailed four-part series on the Darko Šarić clan. Combining traditional investigative methods with cutting-edge technology, their work peeled back layers of alleged criminal activities, revealing the clan's extensive influence and operations. Going beyond informing the public, the series also pressured authorities to act against organised crime.



Kosovo's Corruption Web

Kreshnik Gashi's two-year investigation in Kosovo exposed a deep-rooted corruption scandal involving local businessmen and prosecutors. Despite potential risks, his pursuit of the truth shed light on the intricate connections between business and law enforcement, prompting a public outcry and calls for accountability.



Türkiye's Drug Trafficking Exposé

Murat Ağirel's investigative piece, 'Türkiye in the Grip of Drugs', was a gripping narrative that unveiled a sprawling drug network from Türkiye to Europe. His work highlighted the complexities of international drug trafficking and its ramifications, sparking discussions on national and international drug policies.



The Right Connections

The Audio Renaissance



Who would have thought that in an era bursting with digital innovations, audio would not only cling to life but flourish? Offering convenience and versatility, audio proved its enduring appeal in times of crisis, with Ukrainian communities at home and abroad tuning in to radio stations and podcasts for content that will speak directly to them.

The resurgence of the medium was the subject of the Thomson Foundation's panel at the International Journalism Festival 2023 in Perugia, Italy. Industry experts, Nicole Jackson from The Guardian, John Shields from The Economist and James Smart from the Nation Media Group highlighted the booming popularity of podcasts and shed light on the critical role these platforms play in delivering news and stories that resonate on a human level.

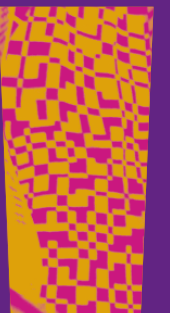
In Ukraine, where the war has disrupted everyday life, podcasts have become an essential tool for



disseminating news and information. The power outages and internet disruptions, consequences of the conflict, have made traditional and digital media consumption challenging. Audio content, easily downloadable and consumable in offline settings, has emerged as a practical solution. "When people are sitting in bunkers with no signal, they need something to do; something to listen to," said Ukrainian podcaster Andriy Chemes. "Downloading podcasts to your cell phone – that's a very accessible thing to do."

But this shift towards audio is not just about convenience. By allowing longer narratives and analyses that go beyond the surface, audio offers a different quality of audience engagement, fostering a sense of community and connection that according to Nicole Jackson, is "very satisfying for journalists and editors too."

Thomson Foundation is hosting a panel at the 2024 International Journalism Festival in Perugia. "Digital resilience for journalists in a year of elections" considers how to build resilience and immunity to the growing sophistication of disinformation.



"A good podcast interview is like a CT scan of the soul."

John Shields Director of
The Economist's Podcast
Innovation Lab

The Right Connections

Transformative Technology in challenging media landscapes

Thomson's work in captive, closed and repressive media landscapes has long been about making sure we get the best possible idea of what people really need from the free media. By investing in technology and providing training, we continually find innovative and secure ways for media businesses to understand the topics, the platforms and the long-term agendas that can drive traffic from closed to open societies, keeping communities connected.

"Whether it's in Central or Eastern Europe, Sudan or the MENA region, we're working with key tech and research partners to get real time data on how repressive regimes are monitoring social and free media outputs and how innovation and rapid adaptations can help independent media companies keep the content coming whilst also making sure we can advise on sensible editorial choices on topics and security" says David Quin, Thomson's Managing Director - Development.

WE'RE WORKING WITH KEY TECH AND RESEARCH PARTNERS TO GET REAL TIME DATA ON HOW REPRESSIVE REGIMES ARE MONITORING SOCIAL AND FREE MEDIA OUTPUTS

Deciphering Engagement

But how should media companies interpret audience behaviour? An underlying concern among communities in challenging countries is the fear of openly showing support, especially in a digital space. With tensions running high, 'liking' or 'following' certain profiles could invite unwanted scrutiny or repercussions. This fear creates a digital climate cautiousness and silent observation as opposed to overt endorsement.

Here's where Thomson's data-driven methodology comes into play. Through partnerships, we are developing systems that accurately measure engagement without putting users at risk. Our approach factors in 'passive' engagement parameters, such as view counts, time spent on pages, and anonymous interaction data, along with 'active' measures, like shares or comments. This multi-pronged approach prioritises privacy and user safety while shedding light on audience responses and trends.

Unprecedented insights

In Moldova, a groundbreaking project spearheaded by Thomson has been making waves across the local media landscape.

One of the beneficiaries, a legacy media outlet which found itself struggling to navigate the complexities of accessing information in a restrictive environment, received tailored mentorship on audience engagement strategies and gained access to our measurement dashboards. The unprecedented insights into their audience's behaviours across multiple platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube led to a significant transformation in their digital strategy, particularly on Facebook, where they witnessed a staggering 137.9% increase in outreach and a 64.9% rise in new page likes within just 28 days of active mentorship. The introduction of diverse content formats, such as reels, and a proactive comment moderation strategy, not only enhanced engagement by 44.4% but also skyrocketed video views, with a notable 1224% increase in one-minute views.

A remarkable turnaround, underscoring the project's efficacy in empowering local media with the tools and knowledge to navigate the digital landscape effectively, ensuring their content reaches a wider audience, contributing to a more informed and engaged community.

IN MOLDOVA, A GROUNDBREAKING PROJECT SPEARHEADED BY THOMSON HAS BEEN MAKING WAVES ACROSS THE LOCAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE.

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Human Rights

Elections – making minorities count



How to make marginalised groups in Pakistan’s electoral process more visible, was the focus of a project called “Enhancing Minority Representation in the Run-up to the Next General Elections in Pakistan”. In collaboration with local partner Pakistan Press International (PPI), the initiative rolled out a series of workshops, focusing on the inclusion of ethnic, religious and gender minorities in election coverage.

“Communicating these topics is very sensitive in Pakistan,” said project coordinator Amjad Qammar, who emphasised the delicate balance trainers maintained to foster an environment where journalists could freely engage with and report on minority issues.

The outcomes of these efforts are noteworthy: Over 120 stories focusing

on minority inclusion were produced as a direct result of the training. Particularly impactful were the stories on the transgender community, highlighting their voting challenges and influencing policy changes, such as the introduction of a third line for transgender individuals at polling stations in one province.

Security issues

According to unesco*, 17 journalists have died doing their jobs in Pakistan since 2020. Acknowledging these concerning numbers, Amjad believes that journalists are practising self-censorship due to the fear of state backlash. “That was one of the reasons why it was very important for the workshops to sensitise journalists about their safety and security.”

The training addressed these issues considering both physical and digital threats. According to Amjad, journalists often found themselves in perilous situations without adequate protection.

In addition to physical safety, the training delved into digital safety, a growing concern given the surveillance from state and non-state actors. “A lot of people don’t have strong passwords or care about their devices, so they share passwords with each other,” he said. “These kinds of small things can make their work difficult.”

Laying the groundwork

The project has not only focused on immediate election-related reporting but has also laid the groundwork for sustained improvement in journalistic practices related to minority issues.

“There is always a need for building capacity in journalism,” said Amjad, advocating for continued education and training to adapt to the booming Pakistani media landscape and its challenges. “Before 2002, we only had printed media. Then, after 2003, we got three or four television channels. With the privatisation of the media in 2009, there was an explosion in the television industry. Now, I think we have around 140 television channels and 260 radio stations.”

Looking ahead, the project plans to conduct post-election focus groups to assess the inclusion of minority groups in the electoral process and evaluate the impact of the stories produced.

“Enhancing Minority Representation in the Run-up to the Next General Elections in Pakistan” is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office through ifa (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations).

“...JOURNALISTS ARE PRACTISING SELF-CENSORSHIP DUE TO THE FEAR OF STATE BACKLASH”

* To access UNESCOs statistics on killed journalists around the world, please visit <https://bit.ly/3unSXcV>

SALMA JEHANGIR: NO VOTES FOR ALL

“THE MAIN THING THAT I OBSERVED IS THAT OUR MARGINALISED GROUPS HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED IN PAST ELECTIONS AND IN THE RECENT ONE AS WELL”

Out of an estimated 20,000 journalists in Pakistan, less than one thousand are women according to a recent **Gender Disparity Report** published by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). Salma Jehangir, a freelance journalist with the Tribal News Network (TNN), is one of them.

Working as an investigative journalist, Salma covers gender-sensitive issues faced by women in the northwestern region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one of the most traditional areas in the country.

Reporting on the challenges women faced taking part in the recent elections in this region, Salma explained why journalists should respect the wishes of some women voters who want to remain anonymous whilst casting their votes.

“We should not unveil the women who don’t want to show their faces or want to hide their identity,” she said. “I have seen many women in recent elections that came to cast their votes without their husband’s permission. I even met one lady who told me she wanted to vote for change, her husband supported another party, so she had to make an excuse of going to the doctor to cast her vote.”

Salma was one of the journalists attending our pre-election workshops.

“The main thing that I observed is that our marginalised groups have been deprived in past elections and in the recent one as well,” she said.

It’s not a new story. Underlining how little exposure is given to marginalised groups, Salma recalls that a past candidate from a Hindu background received no votes in her home constituency which is predominantly Muslim.

In the most recent general election, one of her colleagues from TNN, Sobia Khan, a transgender woman, failed to obtain the required number of votes for a seat in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly.

“She is a very strong human being and was a strong contestant,” she said. “But didn’t get the required votes because of her position as a trans person.”

Since 2020, Thomson has been working with the Tribal News Network (TNN), a radio and internet news agency based in Peshawar, on ways to give minorities a voice. You can read Salma Jehangir’s articles on [TNN here](#).



Human Rights

“...A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY”

Umar Bacha, a dedicated journalist from Northern Pakistan with a long history of reporting on human rights, joined our pre-election workshops to brush up his reporting skills. “I have been a voice for the minority communities in Pakistan and produced several stories about them and their plight,” he said. “I wanted to participate in the workshops to improve my skills, particularly on reporting about minority representation in the elections.”

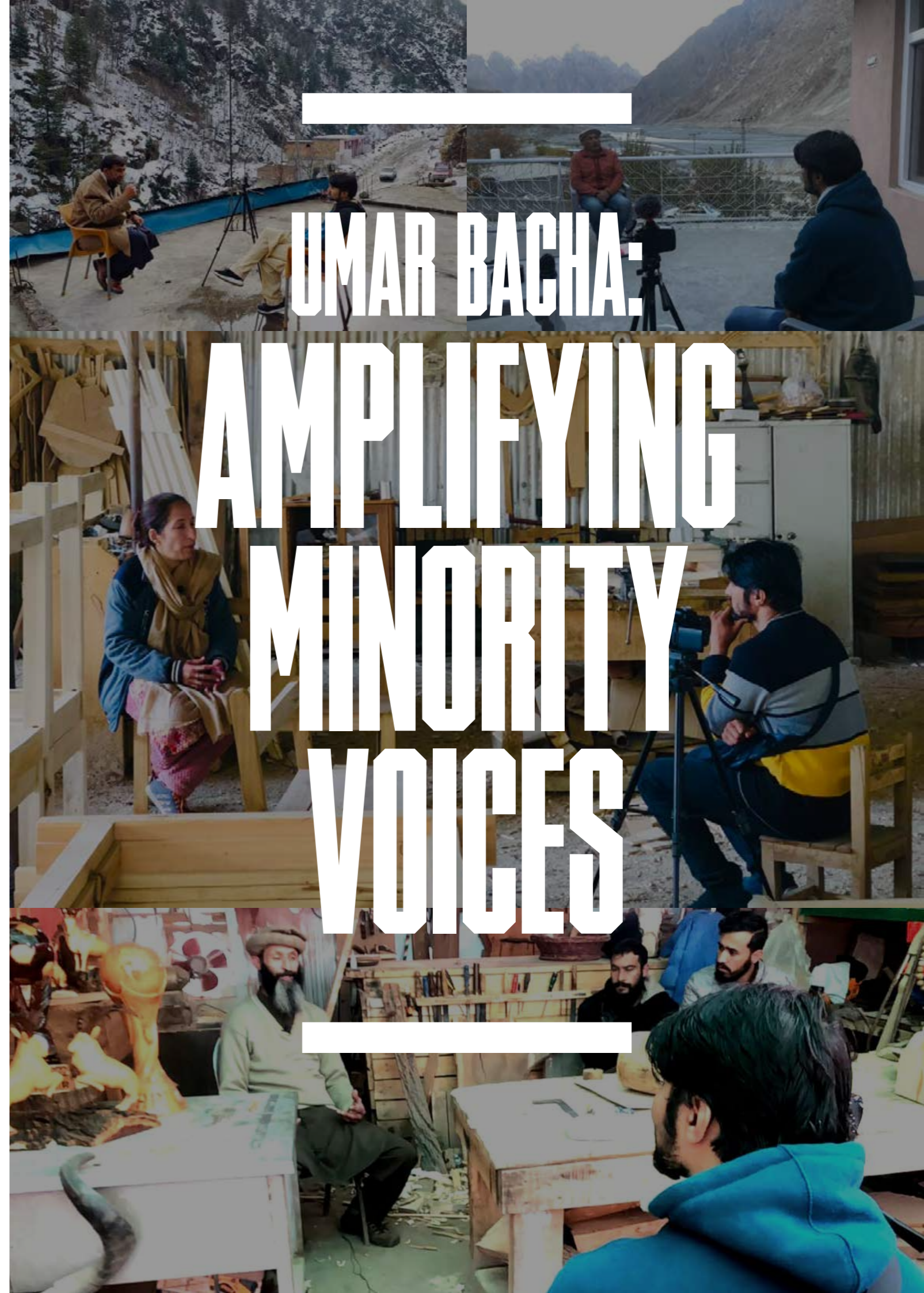
The training significantly impacted his journalistic approach, enriching his understanding of minority rights and electoral processes. “It was a golden opportunity. Learning about finding data about minorities, their constitutional rights and how to approach them were key pieces of knowledge I have gained from the programme.”

Umar applied these skills effectively in **stories for Dawn EOS weekly magazine**, focusing on the representation of religious minorities standing for election to the National Assembly.

However, covering these issues in a country like Pakistan is fraught with challenges, from clerical opposition to outright threats. Umar navigated these dangers with the training’s emphasis on security. “Safety is indeed a key concern for journalists in Pakistan as there are always threats due to local customs as well as terrorism activities, however the workshops helped us how to cope with security challenges both physically and digitally,” he said.

He would like to see more projects designed to enhance the representation of marginalised communities, particularly in areas overlooked by national and international media. “It is more important in the rural areas,” he said. “Story grants and fellowship opportunities would also open ways for local working journalists to dig up issues and report them thoroughly.”

“STORY GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES WOULD ALSO OPEN WAYS FOR LOCAL WORKING JOURNALISTS TO DIG UP ISSUES AND REPORT THEM THOROUGHLY.”



Human Rights

The changing face of repression

The 2023 World Press Freedom Day debate hosted by the Thomson Foundation painted a stark picture of the media landscape for journalists. While threats like imprisonment and violence persist, the on-line panel discussion “Media Under Siege: How the Tools of Repression Have Changed” highlighted the rise of more insidious methods aiming to silence critical voices.

Disinformation as a Weapon

For Thomson mentor and Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) coach Mohammed Komani the onslaught of false news against real news is unprecedented and there’s a growing trend of misinformation used to discredit journalists and sow confusion among the public. The panellist noted that this tactic required journalists to double down on fact-checking and verification, even if it slows their work. “It’s a challenge but they have to take their time to verify information to escape these kinds of rumours against journalists publishing fake news,” he said.

While media freedom can be achieved through the enforcement of laws, legislation is being increasingly used to try to silence journalists.

Legal Crackdowns Disguised as Security

While media freedom can be achieved through the enforcement of laws, legislation is being increasingly used to try to silence journalists, with a worrying trend of governments using charges such as irresponsible breaches of national security. This departure from the traditional libel and defamation suits means that journalists can now face the threat of lengthy detentions without clear charges.

“There is something called pre-trial detention law, which allows authorities to hold journalists before arraignment them before court every 15 days,” said Mohammed. “Resulting in some journalists spending 4 years without knowing what is going on.”

A practice employed worldwide, pre-trial detention consists of holding an individual on remand, behind bars while awaiting trial, often due to concerns about the risk of flight or further criminal activity.

Artificial intelligence was also mentioned as a concerning new tool for repression. While its potential benefits for journalism were acknowledged, fellow panellists Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Ewen MacAskill and Rebecca Vincent, Director of Programmes and Campaigns for Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), stressed the need for safeguards against the misuse of technology as means of surveillance. During the debate, Ewan recalled an encounter with US National Security Agency contractor and former CIA official Edward Snowden, who advised the journalist to turn off his smartphone and lock it in the fridge in his hotel room.

“I wasn’t aware at that point a mobile phone was basically a speaker, and anyone could easily activate it and listen,” he said.

The debate concluded with a call to action for journalists to prioritise transparency, share their sources openly, and collaborate to combat disinformation. There was also the acknowledgment of the growing need to help financially support journalists under threat, including those living in exile.

Throughout the year, the Thomson Foundation hosts on-line discussions on some of the biggest challenges facing journalism today. You can find “Media Under Siege: How the Tools of Repression Have Changed” and all of our in-depth panels by visiting our [YouTube Channel](#).



“I wasn’t aware at that point a mobile phone was basically a speaker, and anyone could easily activate it and listen.”

Ewen MacAskill

“It’s a challenge but they have to take their time to verify information to escape these kinds of rumours against journalists publishing fake news.”

Mohammed Komani



“The industry needs to find solutions fast to ensure the protection of quality and independent ethical journalism.”

Rebecca Vincent



Thomson at 60



"The summer course opened a whole world of journalism and opportunity to me that I never knew existed."

Robin-Lee Francke, Journalist, IOL News, South Africa



"I got the chance to build a network of journalists because I joined the summer course in London. Thomson Foundation has made a huge impact in my career."

Gisella Rojas Rodriguez, Journalist, Ecuavisa Noticias, Ecuador



"In 2014, I received the Investigative Inquirer Journalism Award. The award was a life-changing event to me. It has developed my leadership and networking capacity."

Mosabber Hossain, Journalist, Prothom Alo, Bangladesh

In our 60th anniversary year, we caught up with some of our alumni who have achieved success helped by the skills and knowledge gained through our training and mentoring. Here are their reflections on the role Thomson played in shaping their careers.

THOMSON



"[Thomson's course] inspired me and also reinforced what I was trying to do before, because there was no structured training for journalists and media organisations in Nigeria. We learned that kind of training with the Thomson Foundation. That's what I do now."

Lekan Otufodunrin, Executive Director, Media Career Development Network, Nigeria



"A few months after the fall of the first Taliban regime in 2002, it was the first time that I came to Thomson Foundation. Up until then, we had not seen the outside world."

Shoab Sharifi, Afghanistan Country Director, BBC Media Action



Sixty years of innovation and excellence in training: **Watch the film**

Thomson at 60

Alumni stories: KC Saranga's journey from trainee to trainer

KC Saranga is an award-winning journalist and the General Manager of News and Current Affairs at TV Derana in Sri Lanka. He first came to Thomson's attention when he entered our Mobile Journalism (MoJo) competition and joined our five-week summer course. Since then, he has trained more than 1,000 journalists, students and people in marginalised communities in Sri Lanka on how to tell stories using their mobile phones.

"My link with Thomson Foundation made me a Mojo trainer and it opened a new avenue for me in journalism," says KC, who started his career as an assistant TV producer and first heard about mobile journalism whilst studying for a master's degree.

"There wasn't much information on the internet," he says. "But I found out about a mobile competition that was done by the Thomson Foundation."

He tried his luck in the competition in both 2016 and 2017 but failed to make an impression. His persistence and practise paid off. He re-entered in 2019 with a submission telling the story of Sri Lanka's human-elephant conflict, which was highly praised and placed him in the top six out of 154 entries from 55 countries.

"This remains an unresolved issue in Sri Lanka," explained KC, who shot his video using a Huawei Nova 3. "[It] demands an urgent and sustainable solution through government intervention and my video was made to raise more awareness."



Ada Derana Mojo Force

After the competition, KC built on his affiliation with Sri Lanka's TV channel Ada Derana to create the station's own 'Mojo Force'. This was a pioneering initiative that sought to transform the way news was reported and consumed in the country.

"We showed journalists how to provide reliable information to the public using their mobile phones," he says. "We even provided the phones for them. Two hundred provincial journalists were transformed into mobile journalists."

In the 2019 presidential election, they had a Mojo reporter at every polling station. Since then, he has trained more than 1,000 journalists, students, and people in marginalised communities in Sri Lanka on how to tell stories using their mobile phones.

Alongside his role as a MoJo trainer, Saranga also helped establish the Mojo Lanka Academy, a virtual training centre for mobile storytellers. With over 55 instructional videos on their Youtube channel, the Academy team covers all topics, from 'How to develop your script' to 'How to frame a video' with content in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

Empowerment

2023 saw the culmination of KC's work in the form of the MojoLanka Festival, Sri Lanka's first mobile journalism event. Providing a vibrant outlet for mobile storytelling and emerging talent in the country, the festival offered captivating discussions and hands-on workshops to the participants.

"The community has been empowered," says KC. "When we go to the communities they are now equipped with a great tool and should be able to operate within the ethical framework in their work." What he modestly fails to say is that this extraordinary turnaround is largely thanks to him.

"We showed journalists how to provide reliable information to the public using their mobile phones."



Thomson at 60

Connect 6: Mentorship and Resilience



In 2023, the Thomson Foundation commemorated its 60th anniversary with Connect 6, a pioneering mentorship programme designed to bridge the gap between emerging journalists and seasoned professionals. By pairing six up-and-coming journalists with six experienced mentors, the programme provided a rare opportunity for personalised guidance, developing the skills and confidence of young media professionals.

One such pairing was Mohammed Komani, a senior data editor and coach for Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) and his Yemeni mentee, Najm Aldain Qasem. The time spent together brought unique insights and created a lasting impact on them.

Mohammed said Connect 6 pushed him to keep his own skills up to date.

“One of the things I got from the programme is the knowledge that I needed to learn new things that could help Najm,” he said.

Brushing up on new tools and offering guidance on data security and safety, Mohammed tailored his mentorship to Najm’s circumstances: “Najm is a special case. Most journalists you coach stay in their own countries and have a steady job. That’s not the case with Najm.”

The hurdles of exile

Mohammed’s tutelage went beyond lessons on pitching an article or improving storytelling techniques. He helped him with techniques for contacting people securely and protecting his sources and, as Najm is now working as

a journalist in exile, he helped him source grants to support his work.

Najm was forced to leave Yemen when he was threatened because of his work documenting the violations committed by the warring parties.

“I went through a very tough period, which coincided with my participation in the Connect 6 programme,” he said. “Mohammed supported me in overcoming some of the psychological problems and crises I was going through.” Najm cites data analysis and its integration with investigative journalism as one of his main takeaways from the mentorship.

The bond between mentor and mentee grew strong and they remain in touch.

“He’s my role model in the field of journalism. We have a strong friendship,” said Najm.

Having trained hundreds of journalists in the last 12 years, Mohammed has advice for people new to mentoring. “Don’t force anyone into a mentoring template,” he said. “You are just guiding the journalist into what is the right way for him/her. Be patient. Listen more and speak less.”

As for Najm, who is currently working as a freelance journalist in Egypt, it’s all about practising his newly acquired skills while looking for a stable job so he can continue his investigative work.

“One of the things I got from the programme is the knowledge that I needed to learn new things that could help Najm.”

Connect 6 mentorship programme



Ewen MacAskill
veteran journalist, mentor

Yashraj Sharma
winner, Young Journalist of the Year 2022, mentee



Julie Shapiro
consulting audio executive, mentor

Carlos Raúl Kestler (mentee)
finalist, YJ award, mentee



Saptarshi Ray
freelance journalist, mentor

Jyoti Yadav (mentee)
finalist, YJ award, mentee



Amber Rahim Shamsi
director Centre of Excellence in Journalism, Karachi and mentor

Jamaima Afridi
mentee, Pakistan



Patrick Greenfield
biodiversity and climate reporter, mentor

Choon Chyuan Low
mentee, Malaysia

Looking ahead

Getting it right – The Future

In 2024, Thomson is tackling the year's biggest themes head-on, with a focus on elections, generative AI, and disinformation.

It is a crucial time for democracy. Globally, more voters than ever in history will head to the polls: 64 countries – plus the European Union – are to hold national elections. With training initiatives across the world, we're equipping journalists to cover the news with precision and insight.

'Thomson Talks', our pioneering thought-leadership event series centred on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in journalism, will also continue in 2024. Reflecting our dedication to exploring the intersection of technology and media, we aim to foster a dialogue on the ethical use of AI, ensuring that the voices of journalists are heard in the shaping of the ever-changing media landscape.

Generative AI will not only challenge media by making the creation and distribution of disinformation easier and more targeted, but powerful gen-AI tools also presents opportunities for media to find audiences better, create more unique content and to use this technology as a key pillar of long-term-financial sustainability.

In addition to our course on the ethical use of AI in newsrooms, Thomson will launch a comprehensive e-learning course on disinformation in 2024, exploring the psychology behind why people believe and share disinformation and teaching the latest techniques to expose false information.

"Championing the work of journalists who work in the toughest places in the world, where their lives and livelihoods are often under threat, will remain our focus," says Thomson Chief Executive Caro Kriel. "Our belief in the power of trusted information for communities and the role that plays in democracy is firmly in our sights, whatever projects we take on".

"Championing the work of journalists who work in the toughest places in the world, where their lives and livelihoods are often under threat, will remain our focus."

Caro Kriel, Chief Executive, Thomson Foundation



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