ILS RISK FOCUS >>

THE MEDIA SERIES



Freelancers:
Who carries the risk?

Safety and responsibility in freelance journalism

Freelance journalists play a vital role in an evolving media landscape.

Growing barriers to access, reporting and verification mean newsrooms increasingly rely on freelance and local journalists to report from places, and on stories, their own staff cannot reach.

Historically, freelance journalists have not benefitted from the same protections and resources as staff colleagues, even when working for major news organisations.

Local journalists may face additional risks because they continue living in the environments they report on, long after a story has moved on and international teams have left.

Exiled journalists may also face threats linked to their work, including through their association with international media.

Their work is essential to independent and reliable journalism, but it depends on a relationship of trust between the individual and the commissioning organisation.

News organisations should recognise both the contribution freelancers make and the risks they may face before, during and after an assignment.

Before commissioning a freelance journalist, consider…

- Have the assignment, responsibilities and expectations of both parties been clearly agreed?
- What resources, training and practical support will help the freelancer work safely?
- Have you agreed what level of support would be available if the freelance were detained, injured, abducted or otherwise unable to complete the assignment?
- In the most serious circumstances, is there a plan to support their next of kin?

- Does support begin at the planning stage and continue after publication where necessary?
- Have physical, digital, legal, financial, insurance and psychological risks all been considered?
- Have you discussed the freelancer's individual risk profile, concerns and appetite for risk before the assignment?

- Does the risk assignment consider potential implications for the freelancer's family, contacts and sources, particularly when covering a sensitive story?

- Are emergency contacts and next-of-kin details accurate, securely held and accessible to those who may need them?

- Could appropriate information-shared between trusted news organisations improve safety where freelancers work across several outlets?

- Are freelancers paid fairly and on time, with advance funds provided where necessary for transport, equipment and other safety costs?

- Do freelancers have access to appropriate safety equipment, information and training?

- Do they have the same right to refuse or withdraw from a high-risk assignment as staff colleagues?

There are various networks committed to promoting the safety of freelance journalists and ensuring news organisations recognise their responsibilities.

Several organisations provide guidance, resources and support for freelance journalists and the news organisations that commission them. These include:

- ACOS Alliance
- Rory Peck Trust
- Committee to Protect Journalists
- International News Safety Institute
- PEN America
- International Women's Media Foundation

Responsibility **does not end** when the story is aired.

Freelance journalists play a vital role in reporting from some of the world's most challenging environments. They should not have to carry the risks alone.

At ILS, we help media organisations strengthen the policies, risk assessments and arrangements that support journalists working in challenging environments.

👉 **Let's talk.** If your organization is reviewing how it commissions and supports freelance journalists, we'd love to hear from you.