



Through the Pandemic

State of the Caribbean Media Report 2022



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PREFACE

This State of the Caribbean Media Report comes 17 years since landmark publication of *The Looming Storm* in 2005 – an early milestone in the development and growth of the Association of Caribbean MediaWorkers (ACM) as the premier, umbrella body for regional media and journalism associations.

In 2021, we celebrated 20 years of existence boasting credentials that included publication of a number of journalism aids among which *The Looming Storm* finds pride of place alongside other texts exploring Coverage of Elections, the Rights of the Child, Disaster Reporting and, most recently, Covering the Climate Crisis among others.

This edition also comes at a time when the Caribbean is in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic which has severely tested the viability and resilience of a wide variety of national and regional institutions. The media industry has not been spared.

We have therefore attempted to capture some main elements of this challenge even as we present to readers some principal features of Caribbean media and their contribution to public life.

This is however not meant to be an exhaustive exposition. It has been researched and written by media practitioners in communion with regional colleagues who have presented their views and impressions on a wide variety of issues.

We hope the reports contained herein stimulate greater interest in the future of Caribbean media and their important role as pillars of the democratic process with positive implications for the development of our region.

We thank IFEX for its invaluable support in this venture. Gratitude is also extended to our team including Wesley Gibbings, Hazel Ross-Perot, Rachael Amanda Espinet, Soyini Grey and Naylan Dwarika.

Other support has come from members of our regional network of National Focal Points and Associations and other media professionals interested in this area of concern.

I am personally thankful for the support received from all and hope this publication will play a role in further promotion of the values that have sustained the ACM and regional journalists throughout the years.

Nazima Raghubir
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President/Contributing Editor



Country Reports

Aruba, Bonaire & Curaçao	1
Bahamas	6
Barbados	9
Belize	13
Dominica	16
Dominican Republic	19
Grenada	23
Guyana	25
Haiti	28
Jamaica	32
Saint Lucia	35
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	38
Suriname	41
Trinidad & Tobago	44





Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao

Country Information

Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao are commonly referred to as the “ABC Islands”, and have no press association. The Curaçao Media Association disbanded approximately ten years ago. The Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ) based in the Netherlands assists the ABC journalists, but they cannot become members of the NVJ.

Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao are three islands in the Dutch Caribbean known as the ABC islands. The ABC islands together with Saba, Statia and Sint Maarten (SSS) are formally known as the Netherlands Antilles.

Area

Aruba: 181 km²

Bonaire: 285 km²

Curaçao: 471 km²

Population

Aruba: 106,766

Bonaire: 20,104

Curaçao: 155,014

Aruba: GDP *per capita*: USD 30,253

Bonaire: GDP *per capita*: USD 22,100

Curaçao: GDP *per capita*: USD 16,745

Languages

Dutch, Spanish, English and Papiamentu.

Media Workers

Aruba: 19

Bonaire: 9

Curaçao: 54

Media Houses

Aruba

Aruba has 16 radio stations, three major television outlets, six newspapers, and 12 digital media services.

Bonaire

Bonaire has one newspaper and gets its news from Aruba and Curaçao. It has one television station and seven radio stations.

Curaçao

Curaçao has 34 radio frequencies, three television outlets and six publications, including one tabloid.

There is a Dutch Government sponsored media house called Caribbean Network. It supports local news entities that can use news items for free if they sign a cooperation agreement with Caribbean Network.

Challenges to Media

Commercial Interests

As businesses support the media houses by advertising, there is usually self-censorship on the side of the journalists, editors or media houses to appease advertisers. There is no real separation of the newsroom and the commercial aspect.

Press Ownership

It used to be a practice of media owners to write articles as well as run the operations of the media houses. However, after the UNESCO Media report was published, stricter codes were adapted.

Political Pressure

Politicians often get offended by critical articles in the news and call owners or editors of media houses. During the pandemic the press conferences in Aruba and Curaçao only allowed journalists one question. One journalist in Curaçao got suspended by his employer because he complained about that format during a conference. His suspension was subsequently lifted.

Pandemic Impacts

Virtual press conferences increased access to officials and official information. The press restricted in the beginning of the pandemic. In Aruba in March 2020 Caribbean Network's journalist Sharina Henriquez was arrested for breach of curfew. The Aruban Prime Minister didn't think journalists were part of the essential workforce.



The media were asked to be patient and were told government would provide the information needed during curfew hours. Dutch politicians publicly commented on the suppression of the press in the early days of the lockdown. Media were eventually able to move around freely once accredited.

When they were allowed to work, there was a problem with accreditation because they didn't have a formal accreditation board, and there was a rush for journalists to get press passes. The NVJ had to issue digital press passes to journalists.

Communication with the government was initially one-sided where Government press relations people sent press releases and expected them to be reported without being asked questions. There was a government WhatsApp communications group during the pandemic and journalists left the group when they weren't allowed to ask questions.

Training/Ethics

In Bonaire the press started pursuing the police during lockdown and broadcast the chase live. The police stopped the practice. Journalists frequently blend commentary and news.

Pandemic Impacts

At the beginning of the pandemic the media walked out on a communication person who instructed them that they were allowed to read the facts presented to them rather than ask questions. There was a power struggle between the press and the government communications units.

Several journalists were let go from their jobs because of the pandemic. Two newspapers in Curaçao went bankrupt in the pandemic, and TeleCuraçao laid off 20 workers.

Social Media

The online media landscape on the ABC islands is flourishing. Social media is the preferred medium where younger audiences access news. Facebook is the primary platform used to spread news.

The public loves “juicy gossip.” If someone gets into an accident people are quick to take out their phones and take pictures which spread quickly online.

To fuel the need for content, online media houses want journalists to produce on average five articles per day with two hundred words or two paragraphs. These articles are “fluff” pieces that lack substance.

Respect for Media

There is a low respect for the media in the islands. There is a decrease in the quality of journalism because of the need to populate websites with brief articles rather than in-depth journalism work. Journalists don’t get the respect they deserve because media owners are more focused on making money, rather than making real change, by holding those in power to account.

Needs

Salaries

Journalists are paid very low salaries. It is more profitable to be a freelancer than to be a salaried journalist. It is hard to retain quality journalists. Freelancers are paid approx. \$300 Gilders or \$165.89US per article.

Equipment

Independent contractors use their own smartphones. They are also expected to invest in expensive software to do photo and video editing without adequate compensation for the work.

Training

There is a need for training among journalists, but as the pay is so low, many young people don’t choose to study media. She says there have been attempts to have a journalism school.

Disaster Preparedness

The ABC islands are not in the hurricane belt and hardly experience hurricanes. The last hurricane experienced was in 2008 with Hurricane Omar. The ABC islands have an emergency plan in place and a coordination centre where the press is informed. However, the island media are still ill prepared to execute the plan.





The Bahamas

Country Information

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Area: Island chain of 13,940 km²

Population 400,516

GDP *per capita*: USD 27,197

Media Workers

80-100.

Media Houses

Radio

Approximately 14 frequencies.

Television

Two broadcast outlets.

Newspapers

Eight publications.

Online

Eleven web-based news services.

Media Freedom

Bahamas ranks 41 out of 128 in World Justice Index on Rule of Law released in March 2020.

The Bahamas Press Club was revived in September 2014 after a period of dormancy. The Club pledged to promote and uphold the highest standards of journalism and to offer professional development opportunities.

The Press Club pushed the government towards implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) which was adopted in 2017.

In an Eye Witness (ewnews.com) news report on February 11, (2022) Information Commissioner Keith Thompson announced ten government ministries to be the first to facilitate the Freedom of Information Act, as part of it's phased implementation.

Media freedoms are average. Official secrecy acts and criminal libel are still law.

Freedom House in their Freedom of the World 2021 (freedomhouse.org) report noted Press freedom in the Bahamas is constitutionally guaranteed and respected. The country's privately owned newspapers and radio broadcasters freely express a variety of views. Partisanship is also common.

Libel is a criminal offense punishable by up to two years in prison. Though rarely enforced, Gorman Bannister, who ran news and commentary pages on social media, was charged with libel in 2019 for allegedly posting insults and defamatory statements against a former cabinet minister. He was again arraigned in 2020 for a threatening Facebook voice note against another minister. He was released on bail on both occasions. The Supreme Court also upheld a criminal libel charge related to an acrimonious Facebook exchange.

Freedom House gives the Bahamas a three out of four (3/4) rating for having a free and independent media. It gives The Bahamas a score of 91/100 Freedom in The World (2021)

Challenges to Media

Political Pressure

Candia Dames, Managing Editor of the Nassau Guardian complained about the newspaper being victimized by the administration of Dr. Hubert Minnis when he was prime minister.

On 20th September 2021, four days after Dr. Minnis' party lost the general election, Dames wrote an article How the Minnis administration punished The Nassau Guardian, by withholding Government advertising.

Commercial Interests

Conglomerates have their hands on a number of national entities. The Nassau Guardian is owned by two senior executives of Colina Insurance Limited.

Respect for Media

Respect is high to moderate. There is a long-established media space that is highly regarded as an institution of trust. Reporting isn't often disparaged or disbelieved.

Needs

More Employment Opportunities

Bahamian journalists needed more employment opportunities and better salaries. People often leave after a few years for more lucrative careers in Public Relations and Communications. Frequent turnover of journalists means hampers the development of Journalism.

Training

Investigative and Data journalism training is needed. And journalists need to know how to make Freedom of Information (FOI) Applications.

Free Movement of Media Workers

Although the Bahamas is a member of CARICOM, it hasn't signed on to the CARICOM Single Market (CSME) and therefore isn't participating in the free movement of skilled people.

Legal Framework

The Bahamas Freedom of Information Act 2017 is partially enacted, but not operational. Retired Supreme Court Justice Keith Thompson was appointed the nation's first Information Commissioner and retired assistant director of Legal Affairs, Shane Miller, as his deputy in May 2021. Journalists and Media owners are fully exposed to Criminal Defamation.

Other Observations

ACM could lend assistance by helping Bahamian journalists start/ revive an association by offering "technical assistance" by way of workshops, training and mentorship. Internships and work exchange programmes for Bahamian journalists would improve their ability to report on regional relationships.

Disaster Preparedness

In 2019, The Bahamas was hit by Hurricane Dorian, which made landfall as a category five storm, the strongest in the Atlantic Basin. It provided them with "trial by fire" training in Disaster Journalism. "Now we are planning for the unprecedented."

The national broadcaster ZNS, a member of Public Media Alliance (publicmediaalliance.org) broadcast live throughout the storm from August 30- September 4, via terrestrial, online and social media.



Barbados

Country Information

The Republic of Barbados is an Eastern Caribbean Commonwealth country. On November 30, 2021, Barbados became a republic, replacing Queen Elizabeth II as head of state with Dame Sandra Mason as the first President.

Area: 430 km²

Population: 287,371

GDP *per capita* : USD 13,826

Media Workers

Approximately 80.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 22 frequencies.

Television

One broadcast house (State-owned).

Newspapers

Two publications.

Online

Three key web services.

Media Freedom

Media workers feel restricted. Journalists self-censor or are threatened by advertisers and politicians who call the newsrooms to demand stories be shelved.

Challenges to Media

Laws

The country doesn't have a Freedom of Information Act. In 2008 a draft Freedom of Information Act was introduced which never passed. When journalists ask for information, they are sometimes told the information is confidential or could be a national security breach. While the constitution allows for freedom of expression and freedom of association, it doesn't specifically talk about the media.

Journalists can expose stories of public interest and hold people accountable in the stories, but there is a limit to the information they can access.

Commercial Interests

Journalists and heads of news frequently experience pressure from powerful people as they pursue their stories. Over the years journalists would have to put their stories on ice or scrap them all together because some influential person called to complain. Business people threaten to pull their advertising if they are not happy with a story.

Political Pressure

Barbados' media feels restricted and disrespected as they believe they are used as only government mouthpieces when required and "pests" when they try to write about people in power and corruption. As the country is a major tourism destination, many tourism officials don't want journalists to report extensively on crime, but they don't stop the press from publishing the stories.

Pandemic Impacts

Getting access to government officials was easier during the pandemic. Every week or two weeks, they met with the media about the developments of Covid-19. While reporting in the field, journalists must be careful, "You keep your distance and ask questions. Some media houses, have boom mikes so they can record their stories safely at a distance.

Violence

Violent threats towards the media aren't a common occurrence. Threats sometimes come from people who do not want their photograph taken and threaten to take a journalist's equipment.

In June 2020 there was an isolated case of violence against a journalist. Christoff Griffith, 25, a photographer for the Nation News was killed in the line of duty. Griffith was in the field to cover a report of a body found in Bishop's Court, St Michael. He got there before the police arrived and encountered the attacker. Griffith was killed on the scene. Barjam named an award after the photographer.

Insurance

The photographer's murder raised concerns about life insurance and security for media workers. Journalists must take their safety on the job seriously.



Other Obstacles

Fear of victimisation, fear of job loss, lack of courage, lack of passion for the profession, political affiliation or empathy and low pay.

Digital Media

Digital media has both helped and hindered the dissemination of news in the country. Ministers of government have been encouraging people to get their information from experts in the reputable media houses.

Respect for Media

Local media isn't respected in Barbados. One clear indicator is in the treatment of the media during the country's transition to Republic status when local reporters and photographers were pushed back and not allowed to get the right vantage points while international media were given free reign.

The pandemic was the first time the media was referred to as an essential service. When the country's vaccination programme started, media workers were among the first group of people to be given the job inclusive of health care workers and other frontline workers.

Needs

Training of Journalists

Media houses in Barbados don't provide staff training. Usually, journalists must resign from their full-time jobs if they want to pursue their education. Study time is at the discretion of the media managers. Journalists are expected to learn on the job.

Occasionally, media houses may send journalists on training opportunities, but they are one off, and not organised by the media house itself.

The Barbados Community College offers a media degree course. Some graduates have found jobs locally and others must look elsewhere because of limited opportunities.

Salaries

Journalists complain about their paltry salary but stick around because they love their jobs.

Reporters from the Barbados Advocate have had salary delays due to an ongoing court matter.

The Advocate's finances were impacted as of July 2021 following the death of chairman and owner Sir Anthony Bryan in June 2020. A court order was brought by Bryan's son, Allan Richard Bryan against Gail Sherry-Ann Padmore, one of the directors on the Advocate's Board.

Staff of the Advocate were commended for dedication and commitment to their job as they turned up to work without pay. Barjam issued statements saying it does not intend on getting in the middle of the court case but implored all parties to find a speedy resolution to the issue so the journalists can be paid.

Free Movement of Media Workers

Barjam never received complaints about journalists being unable to move freely. It is quite easy for other Caricom members to enter the country.

Disaster Preparedness

In April 2021, volcanic ash from the recently erupted La Soufrière volcano in St Vincent blew into Barbados, taking the country by surprise. The country and the media weren't ready for that event.

The media is learning from the past events, both the recent ash storm as well as hurricanes. The ministry responsible for disasters did a lot of work to prepare the country for a storm. There is a central place journalists use as a resource called the Operations Control Emergency Management Centre and the media can go there and sit and have press conferences.



Belize

Country Information

Area: 8,867 square miles (22,960 km²)

Population: 412,190

GDP *per capita*: USD 3,967

Media Workers

Difficult to say since journalists are not organised.

Media Houses

Radio

Four radio frequencies.

Television

Four free-to-air broadcasters and four cable stations.

Newspapers

Three publications.

Media Freedom

Belize is ranked 53rd on the World Press Freedom Index. Reporters Without Borders notes, coverage of political developments and criminal cases in Belize is controversial because the media are extremely polarized. Cases of threats, intimidation, and harassment of journalists are occasionally reported.

The small size of the population means that people of note are “not unreachable”. However, this access is a double-edged sword, because journalists may find proximity makes holding people to account difficult.

The American think tank Freedom House gives Belize 87/100 in its Freedom in The World Index, which means it considered Belize free, but flags government corruption as a major problem.

Freedom House says in Belize the constitution guarantees freedom of the press, though it includes exceptions for interests such as national security, public order, and morality. Journalists sometimes face threats, physical harassment or assault in the course of their work.

Challenges to Media

Laws

Belize's Attorney General has announced plans to introduce a new Defamation Bill. The government is rushing the law and hasn't given media workers much time to comment and offer amendments.

Attacks on Journalists

Violence is a threat to press freedom. There are reports of journalists who have left the country for fear of victimisation.

- In May 2021 Love News reporter Vejia Alvarez was assaulted by a security guard while covering a nurses' protest in Orange Walk. In video taken at the protest, the journalist is seen wearing a Love FM jersey.
- In 2018 a Guatemalan photojournalist for Prensa Libre and Guatevision was assaulted by a policeman in Belizean territory. Escobar Lopez says he was taking photos at the border when he was assaulted.

Respect for Media

Respect for media ranges from low to high. People link media houses to political parties, The quality of journalism varies across the varied media landscape. Some media outlets pander to sensationalism. Channel 5 is known to have a strong news foundation laid by its founder Stewart Krohn.

An interview broadcast on January 26 (2022) on Channel 7 caused a lot of public comment. Jules Vasquez of Channel 7 interviewed former leader of the Opposition Patrick Faber. The two got into a heated discussion over the domestic violence charges Faber had faced. The charges were dismissed before the interview. The politician walked out of the interview.

Some viewers felt host Vasquez had derailed the interview with his actions and questioned his motives.

Needs

Better Representation

Many of the issues affecting journalists, including training, and better working conditions could be improved if they were organized and had an association that could advocate for them.

Training

Many of the people who enter the field have raw talent and media managers have been accused of not investing in their training and development.

Investigative journalism needs to be prioritized as well as writing/editing skills. Journalists jump from story to story. They rarely do follow-ups or provide context for their reporting.

The realities of the Covid-19 pandemic have made zoom-interviews and social media a core part of local journalist's toolbox. The pandemic has turned all journalists into multi-media journalists.

Free Movement of Media Workers

Belizean journalists may not be fully aware of this facility within the CARICOM Single Market and are not taking advantage of it. However, Kalilah Reynolds, is a Belizean journalist, who lives and works in Jamaica. Trinidadian Dike Rostant has worked in Belize.

Legal Framework

While the Libel and Defamation Act took effect in 2000, Attorney General Magali Marin-Young announced a new Defamation Bill, as one of three new bills to be taken to Parliament. On January 20th (2021) Belize's Cabinet gave its approval for the repeal and replacement of the Libel and Defamation Act (montor.civicus.org)

These laws will make it difficult for journalists to hold powerful people to account. The government says the new laws will modernize the libel and slander laws.

There is no Belizean association for journalists, and it would be difficult to dispute the areas within the proposed law that threatens their work. Local journalists should organize themselves as a matter of urgency.

Other Observations

ACM and Media Institute of the Caribbean (MIC) could help establish an association in Belize.

Disaster Preparedness

Love FM has the best facilities and infrastructure for staying on-air during natural disasters. Many media houses are impeded by poor infrastructure and poor contacts.

Few journalists or media outlets have the capacity to survive strong storms or hurricanes. Few have generators, and the only one that has the capacity is Love FM. There is no protection or insurance for the journalists who cover natural disasters.



Dominica

Country Information

Area: 751 km²

Population: 67,408 as at 2017

GDP *per capita*: USD 6,328

Media Workers

60

Media Houses

Radio

Eight frequencies.

Television

Three broadcast services.

Newspapers

Two publications.

Online

Five web services.

Independent

Emerline Anselm - EmoNews.

Media Freedom

The Dominican press is free.

Challenges to Media

Salaries

There are frequent complaints about low remuneration packages for journalists. Media houses have difficulty retaining staff because of low salaries.

Training

A lot of the journalists come straight from college into the field with no real experience. Training for the journalists is something that needs to be addressed urgently.

Retaining new journalists is also difficult. Although college graduates take jobs in the media, salaries are not attractive. They will stay for a year or two years, build a bank account and then leave. There are also people who get qualifications in mass communication, leave journalism and don't return to the field because they can get a better paying job in corporate communications.

The Dominican media has a lot of journalists with years of experience but no formalised qualifications or university degrees. Journalists who have both experience and training are in the minority.

Pandemic Impacts

Rising cases caused a lot of media houses to be under-staffed as people either contracted the virus or had to go into quarantine. In December 2021, veteran journalist and publisher Parry Bellot, who was in his 70s, died in the hospital from health problems linked to covid-19.

A lot of stations were forced to make cut backs because revenue from advertising was impacted. One radio station restructured during the pandemic and removed its sports department. Government Information Services was one of the institutions that closed temporarily during the pandemic.

Access to Officials

As the pandemic caused events to go virtual, more journalists than ever before had access to information. A lot of the journalists can stay in one location or in the office and freely get the information.

The government provides weekly updates on the Covid-19 situation. The Prime Minister gives weekly updates.

Respect for media

People trust and respect the mainstream media more than social media. Some young people enter the journalism field and leave in a relatively short period because they get a better paying job.

Free Movement of Media Workers

Dominican media are free to work in Caricom countries, and others are free to work in Dominica.

Legal Framework

There are no laws hindering press freedom

Disaster Preparedness

Dominica was hit by category five Hurricane Maria in September 2017 and tropical storms in 2015 and 2013 all bringing physical and economic destruction to the country.

After Hurricane Maria, the media had training in reporting during a disaster by the Office of Disaster Management and the Met Office. Twenty members of the media attended. This was a one-off training session and there needs to be more, especially since most journalists learn the profession on the job.





Dominican Republic

Country Information

The Dominican Republic shares Hispaniola with Haiti to the west.

Area: 48,730 km²

Population: 10,847,904

GDP *per capita*: USD 7,678

Press Associations

The Colegio of Dominican Journalists (College of Dominican Journalists) and National Union of Press Workers (SNTP) are two press groups in the country.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 233 FM broadcasters, and 146 AM stations.

Television

There are 46 channels and 90 cable companies.

Newspapers

There are eight daily publications and one weekly paper.

Online

There are 471 digital news services and 544 blogs.

Media Freedom

In 2017 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) regional office for Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean in collaboration with media associations in the Dominican Republic published an analysis of media development in the Dominican Republic, Analisis del Desarrollo Mediatico en Republica Dominicana.

The UNESCO report describes the Dominican Republic as a country marked by long-lasting dictatorial regimes. The country didn't have a stable democratic political system until 1978. The report said the dictatorial presidents were able to stay in power by repressing their opponents and manipulating the press.

Dominican Republic still has laws on its books that can censor the press. One law addresses word crimes, another law has a criminal code that establishes a prison sentence for press offences.

These laws, the report says, restrict access to information, censor the press and cause discrimination to journalists. However, newer laws, such as Law No. 200, on free access to Public Information, passed on July 28, 2004, allows journalists access to public information.

Challenges to Media

Pandemic Impacts

Journalists adapted well in the pandemic. Journalists were among the groups of people the government allowed to move freely. In the beginning there were restrictions of movement for journalists. Many TV shows went digital and recorded their shows via Zoom.

Most of the newspapers were able to make the transition to provide people with digital content. Journalists did a good job considering the pandemic limitations.

Commercial Interests

The country has media oligopolies where 98% of media ownership is private and 2% is owned by state and religious interests. The oligopolies limit the media's ability to have a plural, democratic practice of journalism. Corripio Communication Group and the Telemicro group are the main oligopolies.

Salaries and Unprofessional Conduct

Journalists in the country are poorly paid. Members of the media often have second jobs. These jobs include freelancing for another media house, public relations; government or corporate communications, selling advertising and owning their own media entity.

Few people believe that journalists in the country are independent. Because of low wages, there is a high turnover of reporters as people leave the profession to seek better salaries in other fields.

Ethics

One national newspaper has a code of ethics. The UNESCO report found the Dominican media did not have an awareness of its shortcomings and difficulty in self-regulating its newsrooms.

Respect for Media

A national survey investigating the credibility and importance of the media and journalism in the DR, UNESCO-CDP, 2015 noted a high level of trust but concerns were raised about the ethical practice of journalism.

Needs

Training

Most journalists don't have formal training in the profession. Dominican universities offer degrees in Social Communication. None of them focus on postgraduate training in journalism. At least three Dominican universities offer master's degrees in Public Relations and Corporate Communication.

There is a need for more journalists to be trained in the country. A lot of young people are not interested in becoming journalists because they have believe being a journalist means working hard for little money. Universities are offering options to do journalism classes rather than programmes. Jobs like public relations and communications have more attractive salaries.

Salaries and Employment

The UNESCO report recognised characteristics of journalism jobs in the Dominican Republic including low wages, long working hours, dangerous work and lack of protection.



Legal Framework

The right to freedom of expression and information was only gained in 2010 when it was included in the constitution.

Existing laws can limit press freedom: Law No. 6,132, (Dominican Republic | Defamation Laws, 2016) contains provisions that limit freedom of expression and contradict international standards on the matter.

Law No. 6,132, article 31, establishes prison for those who commit “word crimes”. Articles 368 to 372 of the Criminal Code establish a prison regime for press offences.

Newer laws, such as Law No. 200, on free access to Public Information, passed on July 28, 2004, allow journalists access to public information.

Other Observations

New Media

Young people are the driving force behind the development of digital media in the country. There are a lot of interesting projects coming up and young people who are bringing fresh perspectives to media.



Grenada

Country Information

Area: 348.5 km²

Population: 112,523

GDP *per capita* USD 9,051

Media Workers

65.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 21 frequencies.

Television

Five broadcast outlets.

Newspapers

Three daily and one weekly publication.

Online

There are three main sources of digital news.

Media Freedom

While there were no major press freedom issues reported in Grenada, the Covid-19 pandemic did cause some disruptions to the newsrooms and saw challenges to access the courts.

While Grenada had abolished criminal defamation in 2017, its new Electronic Crimes Act remains of concern. Between 2021 and early 2022, there are some five lawsuits involving journalists before the court. One of those cases involved a sitting government minister and a media house.

Additionally, while there have been no reports of violence against media workers, online harassment by known and unknown politically aligned persons continues to be an issue. Media Workers fear that in the run up to the general elections in 2023, the harassment against media workers would increase.

Challenges to Media

Pandemic Impacts

Media workers especially journalists continue to use phones, described as “the best tool” during the pandemic to access government and other officials. Interviews must be conducted via phones since government officials continue to use the pandemic to remain inaccessible.

It has been noted that government officials are more open to speaking to the press on issues they favour. This form of self-censorship would see government officials only granting interviews on issues they cannot be challenged on. It has been reported that one minister of government wouldn't speak to any reporters he claims is unvaccinated.

Access to Parliament has not been problematic during this period. Parliamentary sittings remain online, and media workers can access the chamber if necessary. However, the coverage of the courts has been affected by the pandemic. Media Houses are still not getting access to the online court matters. The court remains largely under-reported because of this lack of access. Reporters are also at the mercy of police press releases and information from lawyers. These are often unreliable.

Salaries and Employment

Several Media workers have been “sent home” during the two-year period due to the pandemic. While there are no numbers on this, some media workers have been back on the job, but many are back with reduced salaries.

There is a call for media workers' salaries to be addressed. The low salaries have seen trained media workers leaving the field for better paid positions in public relations. Many media workers recognise that low salaries are an issue that has to be addressed by media owners. Only two media houses are represented by the Trade Unions.

Advertising

Revenue continues to be affected during the period of the pandemic. While the private advertising pie is shrinking, the government has not provided any support to media houses. There continues to be requests for media houses to carry government programming, Public Service Announcements etc, free of cost.

Needs

Training

There is a call for more training. Some feel that the training can be organised by media houses as well as the national and regional associations.



Guyana

Country Information

Area: 214,969 km²

Population: 782,766

GDP *per capita*: USD 9,250

Media Workers

Approximately 120.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 21 radio frequencies.

Television

There are 21 broadcasters.

Newspapers

There are four dailys newspapers, one weekly and one monthly publication.

Online

There are five difital news services.

Media Freedom

The press in Guyana remains fairly free and open. However, the media is often reflective of the political division in the country and media houses often show a political bias or slant in their reports. While there are exceptions to this, media workers continue to face challenges in accessing information from government and officials. Since the new government was elected in 2020, there has been no post cabinet press engagements despite promises by the Head of State. President Mohamed Ali has held few press conferences and has resorted to briefings or statements in the state media.

Interviews with key national issues are often granted to social media commentators and media houses that are government friendly. These include interviews done by the Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo. While Leader of the Opposition, Jagdeo held weekly press engagements. Press engagements are now less frequent and in many cases are granted to government friendly media houses.

The main Parliamentary Opposition members are also known for providing interviews to opposition friendly media houses. They are also known to provide recorded statements leaving little room for clarification. In early 2022 Leader of the PNC Aubrey Norton sought to chastise media workers for not asking questions based on the party's statement.

Impact of Covid-19 on the media

Media houses were already battling a shrinking advertising pie prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic. With the granting of more radio and television licenses under the APNU/AFC Coalition government, that pie became smaller as many tried to secure whatever business advertising was there to share. The pandemic brought with its many challenges to the work of the media and the first couple months saw media houses stretched as they covered the 5 months long General and Regional Elections while straddling the effects of the pandemic.

While there were no reports of loss of jobs or salary cuts due to the pandemic, media houses cited the lack of adequate state advertising as among their concerns. Some raised concerns about favoured media houses and social media commentators who continue to receive state advertising through government ministries for favourable coverage. The pandemic did initially affect the coverage of both the Parliament and the courts. While Parliament is often streamed live, Covid-19 guidelines were in effect and reporters were limited in the Parliamentary space. However, reporters were allowed to view the proceedings from another part of the building.

Coverage of the lower courts remains an issue as only one reporter is allowed in one courtroom. That reporter must share information with the rest of the reporting staff. This continues to be problematic as sometimes for varying reasons, the reporter may be barred from entering the courtroom. There are only a few virtual hearings in the lower courts and only on the request of the Guyana Press Association were reporters allowed access to an election related matter.

Meanwhile, access to the High Court and the Court of Appeal is unhindered. Journalists can join hearings and view rulings in those courts without any issue.

Challenges to Media

There were no immediate physical or violent threats to the media or media workers in the recent past. However, the 5-month long election in 2020 saw media workers being harassed on the streets and online while providing coverage. Journalists were also singled out by politicians during that period for ridicule. This is often the case, as a few politicians



single out media houses and reporters. There are online forums including Facebook pages that are operated by known politicians that also target media workers.

There is a clear attempt to divide the media using state resources. Some media houses and journalists are given unprecedented access to state resources to provide coverage favourable to the government.

Legal Framework

The Cybercrime legislation in its current form remains an issue still to be addressed. There are sections in the bill that criminalises methods journalists use to gather information. Despite several calls for this to be addressed, the Act remains the same. Since its passage in 2018, there have been criticisms of its use by governments. Several persons in and out of politics have accused the police and government of misusing the law to target their freedom of expression.

In 2022, the government reappointed Charles Ramson Snr as Commissioner of Information, signaling its intention of activating the processes for providing access to information. Ramson who is a former Attorney General was integral in the passage of the Access to Information law after which he was appointed Commissioner of Information, a post he held for many years.

Needs

Training

Continuous training for media workers is among the demands of media workers. There is a high level of training already undertaken by the Guyana Press Association. Media workers have lamented that with training comes the need for support, financial and otherwise to pursue more investigative pieces. This they feel would make them less dependent on their media houses to support pieces that take longer to work on.



Haiti

Country Information

Haiti faces massive poverty characterized by glaring social inequalities, severe economic and food insecurity for the majority of the population, says the Association of Haitian Journalists (AJH).

Area: 27,750 km²

Population: 11.4 million

GDP *per capita*: USD 2,925

Number of Media Workers

To date, no survey has been conducted to determine the number of working journalists across the country.

Media Houses

Since the end of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti in 1986, the Haitian media landscape has expanded from a handful of media outlets to hundreds. This expansion has certainly led to greater freedom of speech, but also to a proliferation of media that do not always have the means to operate, cannot produce original content, do not always respect the rules of ethics, and are not always aware of the information needs of their audience.

Radio

According to a study commissioned by the UNESCO office in Port-au-Prince in 2017 and carried out by the Department of Communication of the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Haiti State University, there were approximately 697 radio stations.

Television

In 2016, the National Telecommunications Council (CONATEL) reported there were approximately 116 TV stations across the country.

Newspapers

No verifiable data.

Online

There are at least 15 key digital news services.

Media Freedom

Freedom of the press in Haiti is not necessarily threatened by the current Executive. The press can be subject to strong pressure from the political sector (government and opposition) and from criminal gangs.

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) says journalists operate within a dangerous and precarious work environment.

RWB says despite recent changes in Haiti's media freedom laws, journalists continue to suffer from a cruel lack of financial resources, an absence of institutional support and difficulty in accessing information. The privately-owned media are heavily influenced by the interests of their owners and tend to censor themselves.

Journalists would be exposed to heavy penalties under a proposed defamation law that was approved by the senate in 2017." AJH says the law would impose severe penalties on journalists.

The press in Haiti is represented by six media associations or organizations. AJH (Haitian Journalist Association), SOS Journalist, ANMH (Haitian Media National Association), AMI (Association of Independent Media).

Three codes of ethics have been developed. There is still a lack of consensus on whether the journalists themselves should create their code of conduct or if there should be a law voted by the parliament (most journalists are against this idea). AJH

The Columbia Journalism Review (<https://www.cjr.org/watchdog/haiti-uprising-jovenel-moise.php>) says that many journalists are working in dangerous and life-threatening conditions and that the public perception of journalism has deteriorated.

Challenges to Media

Haiti is a dangerous place to be a journalist. Two journalists were killed January 7th, 2022.

Haiti is ranked 87th in the World Press Freedom Index. UNESCO has recorded the deaths of 12 journalists since 2000 with the murder of Jean Léopald Dominique in March of that year.

Haiti also experiences a high level of impunity. Most of the murders of journalists go unpunished, even when suspects have been identified. In the 12 murders listed by UNESCO, only one was solved.

The June 2021 killing of Diego Charles and Antoinette Duclaire were shared widely via social media. Both victims' families told Amnesty international they had received threats and intimidation before they were killed. The families also said the intimidation continued after the killings.

Following the murders, Audrey Azouley, Director General of UNESCO called on the authorities to ensure the killers are brought to justice because "Society cannot thrive when criminals prevent journalists from exercising their professional duty to keep us informed."

The Committee to Protect Journalists has written to the Haitian Authorities detailing a pattern of aborted investigations despite, in many cases, the early identification of suspects.

Violence

In 2019, the Haitian Press Federation announced that 50 Haitian journalists have been victims of acts of violence, assassinations and death threats. Among them, one journalist was wounded by bullets in the Haitian Parliament, three journalists were assassinated (Néhémie Joseph, Rospide Pétion, Bernard Belle-Fleur) and another has been reported missing since March 14, 2018 (Vladimir Legagneur).

That same year, Télé Zénith and Radio Télé Ginen were attacked by armed groups during violent demonstrations in Port-au-Prince against the government.

In 2020, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that eight journalists were attacked while covering the coronavirus pandemic in Port-au-Prince.

Attacks on Journalists

- January 22, 2021. During a demonstration Réginald Rémy of Radio Caraïbes was hit by several rubber bullets fired by the police. Reporter Daniel Lamartinière was shot in the left eye on the road to the airport. According to him, the incident occurred while a police officer was shooting in the air to deter activists who were blocking the road.
- June 30, 2021. The journalist of radio Vision 2000 and online media La Repiblik Diego Charles, 33, and Antoinette Duclaire, also 33, radio show host, political activist, spokesperson for the structure Matris Liberasyon, were by armed individuals, at Acacia Street, Christ-Roi.
- January 2022. Two journalists Wilguens Louissaint and Amady John Wesley were murdered by gang members in a Port-au-Prince shantytown on Thursday (7th January 2022)

Needs

Safety

Safety conditions are precarious for journalists in Haiti, who are often subjected to serious attacks. Some are murdered in the exercise of their profession. Under family pressure, many have even had to flee the country. Under the threat of gangs, some stations have even been attacked.

Salaries and Employment

Very few media outlets pay overtime, especially for journalists covering parliamentary activities. Efforts have been made by some media to provide transportation for journalists only during working hours.

With the explosion of the radio and television universe in Haiti, many media jobs have certainly been created in the field: technicians, camera operators and others. However, the salaries are not enough to make ends meet.

Representation

There are several associations of unions that are trying to structure themselves but without much economic means. Dues are not necessarily paid.

Training

The training of Haitian journalists remains a big challenge. Very few journalists work in specialized areas. The courses offered in most schools is basic, and there is no established curriculum.

Training in the following areas should be prioritized:

- Political science and interviewing (to better understand the trends)
- Journalism Ethics & Standards
- Training in new technology

Free Movement of Media Workers

Haitian Media workers are doubtful of CARICOM members respecting the provisions of the CSME free movement of labour, when it applies to them.

Legal Framework

Publication in June 2020 of a new Haitian Penal Code.

Disaster Preparedness

Not prepared. There should be more training programmes for coverage of natural disasters, especially earthquakes.



Jamaica

Country Information

Size: 10,991 km²

Population: 2,980,326

GDP *per capita*: USD 4,650 USD

Number of Media Workers

Approximately 230.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 92 FM frequencies broadcast by 24 separate media houses.

Television

There are eight television outlets.

Newspapers

There are two major national publications.

Online

The country has at least three dedicated digital news services, in addition to regularly updated websites owned by traditional media houses.

Media Freedom

Jamaica has no impediments that would prevent a journalist from reporting the news. While there are certain rules that dictate how sensitive topics be reported, they operate without hampering media freedom.

However, there have been concerns raised by certain legislation including The Protected Disclosures Act 2011 (Whistle Blower Act) and the Data Protection Act 2020. The Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ) is reviewing both to pinpoint areas of concern. They intend to make submissions to the government to have troublesome elements removed or amended.

As it related to the Data Protection Act, the association did get some amendments made. Concerns were raised about the powers given to the Information Commissioner. It was adjusted and is currently considered a workable option.

Challenges to Media

Post-Cabinet Press Briefing

In May 2018, the PAJ was forced to issue a statement to resume post-Cabinet media briefings as a matter of urgency. Prior to that the last briefing was held in November 2017. They have since resumed.

Government ministers who attend briefings are sometimes unable or unwilling to answer the media's questions fully. The government can thus limit information shared.

Attacks on Journalists

Elections in Jamaica can spark social instability. Journalists covering elections sometimes need armed security.

- In the September 2020 general elections, a camera man was assaulted by a policeman outside a polling station on nomination day. The camera man was charged with assault. The PAJ has taken up his case and has provided him with an attorney to challenge the charges in court.

Ethics

Social Media channels have democratized media creation, and journalists are lumped with everybody else. This is an increasing concern. There is also the secondary concern of broadcasters inserting opinion into their reporting, blurring the lines in a dangerous way.

Prime Minister Andrew Holness referred to this in a way that was denounced as discrediting the press by Reporters Without Borders. At a political party conference in 2019 he said "They can take whatever stance they want to take because it's free media, it doesn't have to be the truth. It doesn't have to relate to the facts, it's their opinion..."

Respect for Media

Trust levels are high. When people are criticizing a media outlet, they do so from the position that the reporting was below the outlets' own high standards.

Needs

Training

General weakness in reporting business stories. Journalists need to be better able to take business data/ information and to translate for the general public to understand.

There is a similar issue with court reporting. The volume, sensitivity and the significance of court matters can be overwhelming, and the learning curve steep. Jamaican journalists require specialized training to give it the treatment it requires.

Free Movement of Media Workers

Generally, media workers don't find much resistance from colleagues or government systems to their presence in the country. Authorities could do a better job of managing work permits.

There is a lot of opportunity for local journalists. And there is little concern that people are coming in to take away their jobs. Barbadian Kaymar Jordan is the editor-in-chief at the Jamaica Gleaner.

Jamaican journalists have complained of being targeted at immigration or by colleagues for occupying scarce media jobs outside of Jamaica.

Other Observations

Local and regional media associations need to consider the treatment of news content on social media channels. Facebook, YouTube, Google benefit financially from the content created by Caribbean media and those content creators aren't given a share of the funds. This is a threat to Caribbean journalism.

Google, Facebook especially, should pay for our news that people access through their portals. Regional and local associations need to make urgent representation to CARICOM to address this matter as soon as possible.

Disaster Preparedness

All media can only be "somewhat prepared" for natural disasters which by their very nature tend to have unforeseen elements to them. No complaints about the level of preparation.



Saint Lucia

Country Information

Area: 617 km²

Population: 182,790

GDP *per capita*: USD 8,804

Media Houses

Radio

There are 10 radio frequencies in operation.

Television

There are none television broadcast outlets.

Newspapers

There are no daily publications, but a small number of weekly short sheets.

Online

There are five key sources of digital news.

Media Freedom

Freedom House in their Freedom in the World 2021 survey ranked Freedom of Expression and Belief in St Lucia 3 out of 4. That report noted that St Lucia's constitution guarantees freedom of expression and communication, and press freedom are largely upheld. It noted too that several independent and private news outlets carry a range of issues.

The Freedom in the World report also stated. "Criminal libel laws remain on the books, with convictions drawing heavy fines and a jail sentence of up to five years, though civil suits are more common. Overall, the media in St Lucia is free from direct or noticeable state interference. Over the past three years and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, a depressed advertising market as well as shrinking advertising pie have affected the viability of media houses.

During the pandemic in particular, media houses largely depended on Public Service announcements and government sponsored programmes. It has been reported that because of this dependence, some media owners may "inappropriately and unduly influence the editorial process in the newsroom because of those financial considerations."

Media Associations

There is no active press body or association in St Lucia. The last such body went defunct about five years ago. The lack of a functioning press association is seen as both a “symptom and contributor” to some of the media related issues in the country.

Among some of the issues raised is the lack of representation on a variety of issues and lack of media training at the national level. Lack of formal training in media creates low barriers for entry into the media. It has also been noted that the lack of such training has seen changes in the quality of writing and reporting while fact checking and other aspects of news gathering have either diminished or decreased.

Challenges to Media

Pandemic Impacts

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been mixed. There is a threat to the economic viability of media houses with reduced advertising revenue. There are also suggestions that news stories as well as production have been “slanted” to ensure government revenues in the form of Public Service Announcements and programming.

Without much needed revenue and a shrinking advertising pie, the pandemic saw salary reductions for media workers as well as persons being furloughed. There are no direct numbers to suggest how many people were affected by pay cuts or were asked to take a leave of absence.

The pandemic saw understaffed media operations and newsrooms, which made gathering and disseminating information even more difficult.

It has been noted that media workers remained the “unacknowledged frontline workers,” with little focus on how the pandemic affected them personally and their mental health. This is of particular concern, since media workers are constantly reporting on COVID-19 related deaths as well as dealing with work concerns.

The pandemic has allowed for creative ways to get information out and access interviews. While the physical process of getting information has been affected, some media houses embraced the virtual ways to get interviews done and disseminate information.

The COVID-19 guidelines placed an even greater distance between politicians and media workers. Politicians used the pandemic to avoid press engagements. Access to government officials remains “problematic” and while some press engagements have been

transformed into virtual ones, it has been noted that with government communications officers-controlled engagements, it is easier to “ignore a raised hand on zoom press conference,” than it is to ignore a journalist in a room.

Additionally, the St Lucian government has used the pandemic to have a tighter control on information coming out. The government uses its Government Information Services to put out recorded statements and releases with no room for questions or challenges.

It has also been noted that access to Parliament remains a challenge. Prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, only the Government Information Services was allowed to broadcast from Parliament, this continued. During the pandemic, there were restrictions to visitors and the broadcasts from debates and parliamentary presentations were cut off at critical times.

Needs

There remains a call for:

- Freedom of Information or Access to Information legislation. This is deemed “Critical to the developing and strengthening the press and democracy.”
- The resuscitation of the press body/association that caters only for media workers and promotes better representation of issues raised by media workers.
- Access to regular training for all levels of media workers.



Saint Vincent & the Grenadines

Country Information

Area: 389 km²

Population: 110,947

GDP *per capita*: USD 7,297

Number of Media Workers

Approximately 40.

Media houses

Radio

There are two national broadcast frequencies.

Television

There is one national broadcaster.

Newspapers

There are no daily newspapers, but two weekly publications.

Online

There are three main sources of digital news.

Media Freedom

St Vincent and the Grenadines scored 3 out of 4 for Freedom and Expression in the Freedom House 2021 Freedom in the World Report.

“The constitution guarantees the freedoms of expression and communication, and these rights are generally upheld in practice,” the report said as noted the state owns the main local broadcaster and several private newspapers operate consistently. Consumers also have access to foreign and online media.

“Journalists remain subject to criminal and civil defamation laws and the 2016 Cybercrime Act broadened the definition and scope of defamation to include online publications; violations of its often vaguely worded provisions can carry a fine of as much as US \$185,000 and up to seven years imprisonment.”

There are no reports of violence against media workers. The 2021 World Press Freedom Index lists poor training among the issues facing media workers in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

Challenges to Media

Media workers were already adjusting to the COVID-19 Pandemic when the La Soufriere Volcano erupted causing disruption to life and threatening the livelihood of many.

Among the issues raised was the economic hardships brought on by both the pandemic and natural disasters. Media workers listed the prevailing economic situation as one of the reasons they would become more susceptible to unethical enticements.

Pandemic Impacts

Accessing interviews with government officials as well as public servants “has become extremely difficult.” To compound this, press conferences are infrequent and the government including the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament are known to “call into” the radio station owned by the state or those perceived to be friendly to the government to grant interviews. This results in “one-sided conversations” or an interview in which the government is usually praised for its work.

There are no reports of layoffs of media workers during the pandemic. However, there are reports of salary cuts at some media houses. The extent of the salary cuts is unknown.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has significantly affected the country’s economy, including businesses and their ability to advertise. In the first six months of the pandemic, some media houses lost as much as one-third of their long-term clients, which are yet to resume advertising. This has had serious implications on the ability of media houses to pay their staff.

Natural Disaster

Even as the media remained challenged by the COVID-19 Pandemic, it had to spring into providing effective and much needed coverage when the La Soufriere Volcano erupted in April 2021. The media had already been affected by loss of revenue but had to mobilize resources to ensure that it maintained communication to the rest of the citizens as evacuations and disaster management kicked in.



Much needed supplies were organized by the Association of Caribbean Media Workers and the Media Institute of the Caribbean. With no flights to the island, ACM founding member Wesley Gibbings was able to secure a boat to take the supplies to the island. These were received and later distributed to media workers.

Needs

Training tops the list of needs being requested by media workers. This ranges from basic journalism training to that of ethics as well as reporting on issues including natural disasters.

There is also a call for assistance to provide media workers with tools and equipment.



Suriname

Country Information

Area: 163,820 km²

Population: 596, 831

GDP *per capita*: USD 7,656

Number of Media Workers

55.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 27 radio frequencies.

Television

There are 28 broadcasters.

Newspapers

There are four newspapers and two journals.

Online

There are nine major sources of digital news.

Media Freedom

Freedom of the press is guaranteed in the constitution. However, the assault on Surinamese journalist, Jason Pinas in December 2021 cast a shadow on this freedom. Pinas was assaulted during the performance of his duties outside the National Assembly on December 14 and few days later hand grenades were found under a car parked at his home.

He was attempting to take photos of Vice President Ronnie Brunswijk's car and was thrown to the ground by Brunswijk's security guards, the Association of Surinamese Journalists (ASJ) reported. That body was swift in its condemnation of the assault. The Association of Caribbean Media Workers (ACM) expressed solidarity with their colleagues in Suriname. Several international press bodies were informed, and Surinamese media workers took to the streets demanding an investigation into the matter.

Generally, when it comes to media freedom, there are no legal restrictions for the media and journalists.

“The press frequently publishes stories that are critical of the government,” the report said, “though some journalists engage in self-censorship in response to pressure and intimidation from authorities.” It also stated that in former “Bouterse administration officials regularly used state media to verbally attack journalists whose work they found objectionable.”

Challenges to Media

Pandemic Impacts

The government continues to use the COVID-19 Pandemic to limit its interaction with members of the media. Due to measures in place, government activities would see either no invitation to the press or when there are invitations, there are limitations on the numbers of journalists attending.

With the pandemic, there have been fewer press conferences. While some are done virtually, challenges remain. These include the limited time for questions from journalists. Additionally, many government ministers remain inaccessible as they use the pandemic as a reason not to engage with the media. The COVID-19 measures “make it more difficult to visit offices and meet or interview individuals in person.”

There were no noticeable effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic viability of media houses. There were no reports of cuts to advertisements as well as sponsorship as a result of the pandemic. There were also no reported layoffs of media workers.

It was noted that media owners are influenced by state advertising, this was described as a “major problem.” That issue affects what journalists cover and write. Additionally, members of the state-owned media cannot participate in certain activities. In the case of the protest organised by the Association of Surinamese Journalists in support of Jason Pinas, state media workers could not participate.

Attacks on Journalists

The physical threat to journalist Jason Pinas has been recorded as a threat to the free press. Among other incidents which were noted as threats are: An incident during a government press conference in which Vice President Brunswijk told reporters not to ask him silly questions when asked about the behavior of his daughter who had abused privileges granted to him, because of his position.

Respect for media

While there is a general respect for the media, Surinamese have “a pretty good idea” of what the work of the media entails. However, the

media can be subjected to abuse online as some citizens believe that the press is not reporting enough abuses that happen within the government and not enough about suspected corruption that occurs. Despite this trust in the media remains relatively high with most people believing what is published by the media.



Legal Framework

A major challenge remains, the so-called 'muzzle laws' under which libel and defamation can be prosecuted under criminal law.

On the legislative front, there is an urgent need to repeal the criminal defamation laws. While these laws have not been used recently, the fact that they remain on the law books is a threat to freedom of the press.

There has been a demand for Freedom of Information laws, the inaccessibility/unreachability of some government officials and the fact that getting information is needed now more than ever, makes this law, a workable one even more important. Last year, several parliamentarians submitted a draft Freedom of Information bill to Parliament, this is while the government has also drafted a draft Freedom of Information bill. That bill should have been presented to parliament for approval.

Needs

Overall, there is a need for access to training for all levels of media workers on several issues including basic journalism training, ethics and on specialized issues.

There have also been calls for better working conditions, especially considering the pandemic and for access to insurance and social and health care.



Trinidad & Tobago

Country Information

Population: 1,367,558

Area: 5,128 (Trinidad: 4,828 km² | Tobago: 300 km²)

GDP *per capita*: USD 14,876

Number of Media Workers

Approximately 250.

Media Houses

Radio

There are 36 FM broadcast frequencies.

Television

There are five free-to-air television stations, and eleven cable/OTT service providers.

Newspapers

There are three daily national newspapers, with a smaller number of weekly publications. There are also a few community-based publications that are produced monthly.

Online

There are three dedicated digital news services, in addition to the web presences of the traditional mass media newsrooms.

Media Freedom

Freedom of the press is strong in Trinidad and Tobago as journalists can easily access government officials.

Challenges to Media

Attacks on Journalists

- In September 2021 Guardian Media Limited (GML) journalist Sharlene Rampersad was cyber-bullied and doxxed by Trinidadian-born hip hop star Nicki Minaj when she was following a story about the rapper. Minaj insulted the reporter on Twitter. Fans harassed Rampersad. Minaj's Tweet was later deleted by Twitter.
- On March 12, 2020 the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service raided the office of the Express newspaper's Editor-in-Chief, Omatie Lyder, in

relation to a story by Denyse Renne about Acting Police Commissioner Irwin Hackshaw , who was flagged for suspicious financial activity.

One Caribbean Media, the Trinidad Express and Lyder all took legal action against the Commissioner of Police, the Office of the Attorney General and Superintendent Wendell Lucas of the Financial Investigations Bureau who signed off on the search warrant.

Renne, an investigative political reporter, frequently came under scrutiny by then Commissioner of Police Gary Griffith. He constantly questioned her journalistic integrity on public forums such as Facebook.

- In September 2017 GML photojournalist Kristian De Silva was beaten by two men while taking photos of the A&V Oil and Gas compound in Penal. His camera and glasses were destroyed in the incident. The criminal charges laid against A&V Oil and Gas' chief executive officer Hanif Nazim Baksh and his son-in-law, Police Sgt Billy Ramsundar, were dismissed by a Siparia Magistrate because the police prosecutor did not show up to court.

- In May 2014 investigative journalist Mark Bassant , at the time a senior reporter at TV6 News, fled the country because he was informed that a hit was made against his life. In July 2014 he returned and has been unharmed since. He is now an editor at Guardian Media Limited.

Political Pressure

Because Trinidad and Tobago is a small country with a population of approximately 1.4 million, and the government employs approximately 70



per cent of the population, it is difficult for journalists to find people willing to speak truth to power. It makes it difficult for journalists to hold people accountable.

No media accreditation board

There is no media accreditation board in the country that registers and certifies journalists. Mass communications degrees are offered locally.

Impacts of the Pandemic

The Ministry of Health holds weekly press conferences for the media to ask about the state of the nation regarding the Covid-19 situation. Journalists from institutional media houses were initially the ones with the access to the press conferences. This excluded independent and freelance journalists. Now, the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MATT) submits questions from the freelance journalists to be asked on the Wednesday edition of the press conference.

Covid-19 has been problematic for press access to events, particularly government hosted events. The first day after the new MATT executive took office, they wrote to the Speaker of the House to get a media pool photographer into Parliament to cover the Budget, giving the media improved access.

- On December 10, 2021 members of the media weren't allowed to enter any of the swearings-in or the sitting of the new Tobago House of Assembly. MATT wrote to the President's House describing it as a "dramatic limitation placed on the media," particularly for the photographers who couldn't do their job effectively if not allowed inside.

- In May 2020, three months into the country's lockdown, Daily News Limited, the company that publishes Trinidad and Tobago Newsday temporarily laid off senior journalists Seeta Persad, Carol Matroo and Marlene Augustine citing revenue issues caused by the pandemic.

The human resource manager Debra Sutton said in the retrenchment letter if their economic circumstances changed between June 8 to August 31, 2020, they would be brought back on staff. They never were and were let go from the company later that year.

Mental Health

MATT is concerned for the physical and mental health of the media fraternity. Journalism is a high stress vocation with many receiving low pay. To cope with stress, many journalists smoke and drink alcohol too much, some abuse substances and some journalists have died in their 50s because of inadequate self-care.

Respect for media

The media isn't respected in the country as much as it should be because of a lack of institutional support. The country's media workers don't recognise how powerful they are, nor do they have the tools to self-regulate themselves and their institution.

Media workers must do their research, learn how to disagree with people respectfully and civilly. Once the media stand together and feel they are being represented by a strong institution, the position of journalists will improve.

Needs

Training

There are institutions that offer tertiary education in journalism, but the cost is usually incurred by the student. The onus must be on the publishing house to provide training to their journalists if the quality of journalism is to improve. Training should be extended to reporters and to managers who need to learn how to run a team.

Salaries

Journalists pay is quite low and many who want to progress in their career or earn a better salary leave journalism for a job in communications or public relations. There needs to be more technical, emotional, financial and training support for journalists.

Insurance

Most journalists in the industry do the job for the vocation, not the salary. Journalists never say no to a story and prioritise the news over themselves. Journalists need to learn how to improve their physical and mental health. The Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago (MATT) is trying to organise health insurance and a pension plan for its members, particularly for the freelance journalists who do not have institutional support.

Digital Media

Technology, particularly WhatsApp, has helped journalists connect with politicians and other public figures with greater ease. A lot of journalists can WhatsApp government officials such as the health minister or the Prime Minister. Politicians, embassies, high commissions and diplomats are a lot more accessible

Public figures are now on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and they are much easier to contact now. However, a politician or public figure can still block a journalist if they do not wish to speak with them.

There are legitimate people in digital media who are doing good journalistic work. MATT extended its membership to those people. There are vloggers, people who are working in human rights, people who have started up their own websites because the whole definition of media has changed who are now members of MATT.

Free Movement of Media Workers

Partially. There are some countries where the administrative arrangements do not fit with the Treaty of Chaguaramas provisions. In T&T, there are several Caribbean media workers who work under those arrangements without significant challenges.

Legal framework

The country has a Freedom of Information Act which makes government information accessible to journalists on demand. Legislation that has been deemed a threat to the freedom of press has been shelved, and the media association keeps a close eye on government's consideration of any laws that could restrict journalists from doing their jobs. These laws are the Cybercrime Bill, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Data Protection Act and the Broadcast Code.

Other Observations

Absence of reliable statistical information is a problem in the country, and often journalists resort to using international data to talk about local issues.

Disaster Preparedness

The country experiences frequent flooding during the rainy season. When it floods, journalists go into the flood water and are often expected to provide their own equipment such as raincoats and boots. Many media workers use their own cars while on assignment. They aren't compensated adequately for using their cars or personal equipment. Disaster Coverage training would assist journalists. There are no adequate training programmes for disaster journalism.





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