

A newly created joint working group of Pakistani digital media workers and journalists has expressed the urgent need for solidarity and critical reform for Pakistan's media and unions to better represent the journalists working in the country's digital economy.

The joint working group of young, digital and women journalists and media development organizations gathered online with IFJ in early September 2021 to assess the outcomes of three independent research projects of the sector and to discuss the challenges and issues they face and solutions that could help overcome them.

The research was conducted by activists from the *Freedom Network*, the *Young Journalists Forum Lahore* and the *Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists*, with the support of the *National Endowment for Democracy (NED)*, under the IFJ and the *Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)* project "Promoting Labour Rights, Gender Equality and Freedom of Association in Pakistan's Media".

Despite a massive growth in the sector in both influence and the numbers of journalists employed, in the new ecosystem of digital media, digital journalists and the platforms which employ them and are practicing journalism digitally are still largely ignored both in terms of their negotiated working conditions and in their participation in unions and media advocacy.

The research also found that the participation of women and young journalists within unions was disproportionately low. Despite unions' acknowledged willingness to increase diversity and representation, this was yet to be reflected in union executives and in membership drives.

Three digital research surveys, independently commissioned by the IFJ found:

- Diversity in representation among unions – especially women, digital and young journalists – is disproportionately low to their numbers in terms of membership and leadership.
- Despite increasing willingness within unions for reforms, lack of initiative, engagement and urgency, the agenda of modernization is being compromised.
- Lack of technical expertise and resources on advocacy for reforms is translating into missed opportunities for modernization of unions.

All three studies corroborate a range of recommendations for key stakeholders that can serve as catalyst for the reform drive. These include the following:

Recommendations for Pakistan's media – unity of purpose:

- A common strategy is needed to jointly fight and defend journalists' rights, facilitated by key international and national media rights and development actors.
- Dialogue is urgently needed between all factions of the journalists' community to unite them on common grounds to develop joint action strategies.
- A charter incorporating post-digital media landscape can be developed and a journalists' rights alliance established for increased engagement, dialogue and action.

Recommendations for young and digital workers – awareness and organization:

- Regular interaction between legacy and digital media is needed to create engagement with young and digital journalists with relevant key stakeholders in the industry to raise awareness of media rights and improve the quality of journalism.
- Capacities of advocacy and collective bargaining for groups of young and digital journalists needs to be created to facilitate better rights' awareness and community participation on joint goals strategies.

Recommendations for unions and press clubs – reforms and representational diversity:

- Union and press club constitutions must be revised so that they more inclusively reflect the diversity of media practitioners and allow easier access of membership to more women, young and digital journalists.
- Training is needed for union and press club leaderships to build membership and create engagement with young and digital journalists and to undertake reforms of charters and constitutions.
- Unions need orientation of how more liberal definitions of journalism are being embraced and how they are being changed in the digital media landscape.
- Reformation of constitutions and a digital media manifesto will further enable the inclusion of young digital and women journalists.
- A comprehensive membership drive should be started for more women, young and digital journalists for fairer representation in unions and press clubs.
- Women journalists must be given adequate representation in unions and press clubs – particularly in leadership positions.
- The participation and leadership of women journalists can support journalist representative organisations become more accessible and more women friendly, but union reform is needed to meaningfully tackle this problem.

Recommendations for media owners / employers – fairer employment environment:

- A fairer system is needed for journalists to ensure salaries are adequate and paid on time. This includes an ongoing dialogue between managements and with unions and workers' associations
- Digital media platforms and employers – a lot of them without previous experience of managing media business – need orientation in creating an enabling employment environment for a sustainable ecosystem of digital media.

Recommendations for women journalists – skilled advocacy:

- Groups of women journalists and their representatives need to be trained in advocacy on rights and representation within unions and press clubs – as well as on employment rights.
- Membership reforms are needed, including leadership positions for women in representative bodies.
- Opportunities and capacities for sustainable dialogue with unions, employers, media regulators and government are urgently needed for safer work environment and functional protection systems and mechanisms for women journalists.

The 'Digital Working Group' included Adnan Rehmat, Iqbal Khattak, Faizah Hassan, Shakeel Ahmed, Rizwan Ahmed Khan, Kanwar Uzair, Waheed Khan, Kamran Khalid, Farhat Fatima, Momina Sheeraz, Salman Yousuf, Sana Khalid and Muhammad Umer Javed as members.