


The
Guardian Foundation

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Incubator for Independent Media Evaluation

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The Guardian Foundation

Our purpose is to promote global press freedom and access to liberal journalism.

By engaging with audiences and educators, in schools and communities, our media literacy work tackles disinformation, enhancing people's ability to critically evaluate news. Through training, mentorship, bursaries and career guidance, we facilitate opportunities for people from underrepresented backgrounds to use their voice and agency and be included in the media. By collaborating with fellow journalists and news organisations on areas that challenge their viability, we foster their capacity to engage people with fact-based journalism.

NewsLabTurkey

We are committed to empowering journalists, media organizations, and aspiring media professionals through tailored training, mentorship, and resources designed to meet the evolving needs of the media industry.

Our programs support innovative media projects with hands-on workshops, expert guidance, and micro-grants, enabling impactful ideas to thrive. Through our research initiatives, we address the challenges faced by newsrooms, bridging the gap between academic insights and practical solutions. Additionally, we foster the growth of audio storytelling by organizing workshops and supporting the development of quality podcasts. By focusing on collaboration, innovation, and resilience, we strive to build a stronger and more inclusive future for journalism everywhere.

Key findings and recommendations

Key findings

- 1 | The programme was successful in building the capacity and skills of independent journalists in Turkey
- 2 | It provided long-term, relationship-based support rather than short-term interventions
- 3 | The partnership contributed to the development of NewsLabTurkey, strengthening its ability to support independent media in Turkey
- 4 | Training effectively equipped participating journalists with a diverse set of skills, enabling them to succeed in a changing media landscape
- 5 | Journalists launched new initiatives, secured further grant funding, improved quality of their content and increased audience engagement
- 6 | Mentorship was a key component of the support, helping participants secure funding, increase their visibility and achieve project milestones
- 7 | Outcomes for those who received Training of Trainers included improved lesson planning and increased engagement from trainees
- 8 | Knowledge Exchange Week participants were equipped with applicable strategies, practical knowledge and renewed sense of purpose in their work
- 9 | Incubator project implementation rates increased over the three years but independent media still face barriers to reaching financial sustainability

Key recommendations

- 1 | More attention on sustainability, revenue diversification and strategic planning, throughout all aspects of the programme
- 2 | Build on bespoke delivery through co-creation with participants and developing resources for specific groups
- 3 | Increase accessibility of support through travel grants, translation and online delivery
- 4 | Strengthen networks and opportunities for peer support

Executive Summary

This independent impact assessment evaluates the first three years of a four-year partnership between [The Guardian Foundation](#) and [NewsLabTurkey \(NLTR\)](#), supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), which aimed to upskill and secure the future of independent journalism in Turkey from January 2021 to December 2023.

The programme addressed critical challenges faced by Turkish media, including government control, censorship, economic difficulties, and the lack of independent voices in journalism.

The goal of the programme was to build the capacity of high-quality independent Turkish media. In doing so, The Guardian Foundation and NLTR sought to contribute to the development of a strong and just democracy, where the media have the power to inform, influence, and hold power to account, while civil society is better informed and feels empowered to actively participate in the democratic process.

Overview

Through the partnership, the following opportunities were offered:





This evaluation report assesses the programme run by The Guardian Foundation and NLTR between January 2021 to December 2023 supporting independent journalism in Turkey.

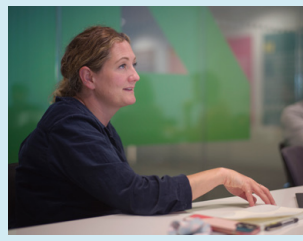
The report covers:



Incubator



Regional Academies



Training of Trainers (ToT)



Digital Content Creation

The Incubator effectively equipped participating journalists with a diverse set of skills. The content adapted to the evolving needs of the profession, ensuring journalists have the tools to succeed in a changing media landscape. In the group of workshops targeting ‘Technical Skills’, participants learned and applied skills in areas like video editing, podcast production, social media management, and content creation. This resulted in journalists creating podcasts, managing websites, and improving their social media presence.

The Incubator content evolved over time, with sessions on AI tools like Chat GPT being introduced in 2023. In workshops on topics centred around ‘Developing Resources and Readers’ journalists learned project writing, management, and revenue model development. This led to successful grant applications, creation of sustainable business models, and launching new initiatives. Project writing workshops were the most popular.

In the group of workshops supporting ‘Journalism Skills’ participants honed their skills in areas like verification techniques, storytelling, research, and critical reporting. This resulted in journalists producing more accurate news, conducting better

research, and creating engaging content. The Climate Crisis Journalism workshop was particularly impactful due to its timely and relevant content.

The Incubator also successfully supported journalists in implementing digital projects - nearly all participants completed a digital project with the support of mentors and small grants, while project implementation rates in the Incubator increased over the three years. Digital projects enabled journalists to apply their newly learned skills, improve their content quality, and expand their networks. However, it is also worth noting that some participants faced challenges in securing long-term funding and support for their projects, leading some to have to prematurely stop. Financial constraints and lack of sustainable business models hinder project longevity.

The Incubator’s mentorship component played a crucial role in supporting participants’ project implementation and professional development. Mentors provided valuable guidance and support throughout the project implementation phase as they facilitated networking and collaboration with industry professionals and helped participants secure funding, increase visibility, and achieve

Incubator projects completed

23 projects

2021

21 projects

2022

24 projects

2023

62 projects

Total

project milestones. Mentorship helped participants develop skills like video editing and social media management, boosting their confidence and enabling them to tackle challenges independently.

The Regional Academies provided an opportunity for journalists from specific regions of Turkey to enhance their skills and knowledge. The Academies offered a range of workshops covering technical skills (social media, podcasting, video production), resource development (business models, project writing), and journalism skills (investigative journalism, data journalism, climate crisis journalism). Participants applied the learned skills to their projects, such as launching podcasts and improving social media presence. The Regional Academies also facilitated networking among journalists from the same region, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. Some participants of the Academies suggested a stronger focus on practical application of skills and better integration of courses to enhance the overall learning experience. Overall, however, the Regional Academies were successful in providing targeted training and support to journalists, contributing to the growth and development of the media ecosystem in Turkey.

The Training of Trainers (ToT) initiative was designed to equip trainers with the skills to create and structure courses, enhance learning environments, and implement interactive teaching practices. Participants reported applying the skills multiple times, indicating high relevance and utility. The key outcomes included improved lesson planning, enhanced classroom engagement through interactive segments, and the use of ice-breakers and reflective practices. Participants applied these techniques in teaching technology journalism, climate journalism workshops, and other media topics, both in traditional classrooms and alternative formats like podcasts. Some challenges included rigid templates and difficulties in localising methods to different learning environments. Participants

expressed plans to integrate these methods into future work, focusing on engagement, structured session flow, and supportive learning atmospheres. Adaptations included new course topics, such as climate change education, and various audience types, highlighting the training's versatility.

The Knowledge Exchange Week visits to the Guardian offices aimed to enhance the skills and knowledge of senior journalists from Turkey and the UK, allowing these international colleagues to recognise learnings and opportunities for development, and preparing them for future training roles. These visits provided a mix of theoretical and practical insights and allowed participants to step out of their usual work environments, fostering creativity and receptiveness to new ideas. Journalists from Turkey benefited significantly from firsthand exposure to the Guardian's approach, particularly in climate journalism. They observed how climate-focused content was integrated across different levels of the organisation, from editorial teams to business strategies. This experience inspired participants to adopt similar practices in their own work, influencing articles and workshops they led, and demonstrating the Guardian's model as a successful example of integrating climate journalism with revenue generation.



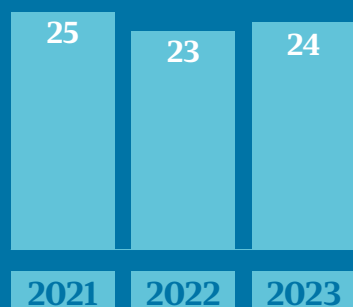
Key lessons included using data to engage audiences and ethically manage reader revenue, insights into podcasting, social media strategies, and video production, and understanding financial and advertising models. These practical takeaways were especially valuable for participants from regions where such structured practices are not common.

The visit also provided inspiration for community journalism and sustainable revenue models,

which participants planned to implement in future projects. Overall, the experience was transformative, equipping participants with applicable strategies, practical knowledge, and a renewed sense of purpose for their work. The visits underscored the importance of innovative practices in journalism and opened avenues for strengthening the sustainability and impact of media initiatives in Turkey.

Number of participants for each activity

Incubator attendee



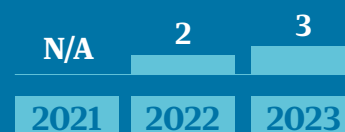
72 participants in total

Knowledge Exchange week attendee



30 participants in total

Master trainer



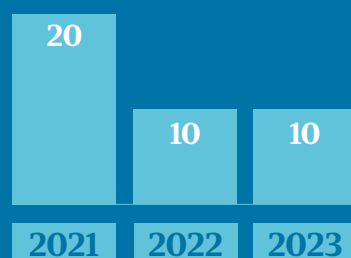
5 participants in total

Organisational coaching recipient



13 participants in total

Regional Academy attendee



40 participants in total

Training of Trainers attendee



24 participants in total

184 total number of participants across all activities

161 total number of unique participants



Overall impact

The partnership and its programme was successful in their primary objective of building the capacity and skills of independent journalists in Turkey. It filled a significant gap in the media support landscape by providing long-term, relationship-based support rather than short-term interventions. However, the challenges of sustaining projects and the need for ongoing financial and strategic support remain.

The partnership also contributed to the development of NLTR itself, enabling it to position itself as a critical support organisation for independent media in a challenging environment. The partnership has empowered a talent pool of journalists who continue to use the skills acquired, contributing to the resilience and diversity of Turkey's media landscape.

In conclusion, while the partnership has made significant strides in supporting independent journalism in Turkey, ongoing support and adaptation to emerging challenges and opportunities will be essential for sustaining and building on these gains.

"Just the chance to meet and ask questions to journalists and editors who are actively working at the Guardian was amazing. They were all open to keeping in touch which will be helpful in case I have any questions during the Incubator or later."

*Knowledge Exchange
Week participant*

Key Recommendations

The insights from participant interviews and feedback highlight several key themes and key recommendations that, if implemented, could enhance future programme activities.



1 | Building organisational resilience

Independent media organisations face significant financial and operational challenges. Many participants identified a need for more focused training on sustainability, revenue diversification, and strategic planning. Workshops could help media organisations reflect on their internal competencies and develop actionable strategies to ensure long-term resilience. Partnerships with academic institutions, such as private universities, could be a way to access technical infrastructure, office space, and expert support. Tools such as competency mapping exercises, workshops on strategic planning, and mentorship in business development can equip organisations to better navigate external pressures. Empowering organisations with such resources would enable them to plan effectively, invest in themselves, and develop innovative revenue streams.



2 | Opportunities and emerging trends

Independent media in Turkey operates within a challenging environment, marked by restrictions on freedom of speech and economic instability. However, emerging digital opportunities provide a counterbalance. With over 71 million internet users and a shift to digital news platforms, independent outlets have a chance to innovate. Programmes should focus on capitalising on these trends by enhancing participants' digital skills and fostering a growth mindset that emphasises opportunities over obstacles.

Participants highlighted the importance of small grants, material support, and financial assistance for travel and accommodation to enable broader participation.

Addressing economic challenges through training in income diversification, revenue generation, AI integration, and sustainable business practices, supported by insights from entrepreneurs and external experts, could empower media outlets to secure more stable funding. Providing resources for modern equipment and technical support was also seen as essential for improving content quality and competitiveness.

3 | Personalised support and inclusive programme design

The success of the mentorship approach, where mentors were matched to participants based on their individual needs and backgrounds, demonstrates the value of customised guidance. Ensuring participants receive support tailored to their backgrounds and demographics, including regional and linguistic differences, could enhance engagement and learning outcomes. Expanding access to expertise from varied regions beyond Istanbul and developing region-specific networks could foster stronger local collaboration. Co-creation of programme content, driven by alumni insights, can further ensure relevance while cultivating a sense of ownership among participants.



4 | Enhancing networking and collaboration

Strengthening networks and facilitating collaborations were consistently highlighted as priorities, with participants valuing the opportunity to connect with peers, stakeholders, and sponsors.

Expanding opportunities for networking and interaction could catalyse partnerships across sectors. Leveraging peer support networks and alumni communities can sustain the morale and professional growth of participants, whilst building trust and fostering collaboration that could amplify the collective impact of this programme. This approach might also support community-driven journalism and projects that combine media expertise with civil society needs.

In conclusion, by building on the existing successes of the programme and its past implementation, whilst addressing financial and operational challenges, capitalising on emerging digital opportunities, offering personalised support, and fostering collaboration through strengthened networks, future programme activities can significantly enhance the resilience and sustainability of independent media organisations in Turkey, empowering them to navigate complex environments and thrive in an evolving media landscape.

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