

A photograph of a severely damaged building with rubble and a person in the foreground. The building has a stone facade and a window with broken panes. A person wearing a dark helmet and vest is running through the debris in the foreground. The scene is one of destruction and conflict.

SYRIAN REFUGEE JOURNALISTS LEAVING... TO TELL THE TALE

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A REPORT BY MANSOUR OMARI, RSF CORRESPONDENT FOR SYRIA

UNFREE TO CHOOSE

Starting in 2011, Syrian media underwent a quantitative, qualitative and geographical evolution. Some of the causes have been unfortunate, compelling and fatal.

After the Syrian uprising morphed into an armed struggle, the Syrian government increasingly lost control over vast areas of territory. With the loss of State control, its imposed rule on media faded, enabling media to flourish in those areas. In territories it still controlled, its grip became even tighter consequently forcing many reporters out. By the end of 2013, media workers began to flee their new acquired space, too, after the extremist group called ISIS - "the Islamic State" - showed its might and other military groups also deprived media from the freedom it desired. In addition to the Syrian government-emptied territories, this dire situation in the opposition areas led to the migration of Syrian media to other countries, mainly to neighboring Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon.

Like other refugees, journalists had to start a new life there. They found themselves in different sets of circumstances than they had experienced at home, especially in terms of regulations and living and working conditions, and they faced threats coming both from inside and outside their host country.

RSF tried to dig deeper in the situation of exiled Syrian journalists and shed more light on the humanitarian, living and working conditions of media workers, exiled in their new shelter-countries, and on the dark side of Syrian journalists' lives when reporting on their fellow citizens' living conditions.

RSF interviewed a total of 24 journalists in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Their names are not mentioned. Most of them asked to remain anonymous, fearing retaliation against themselves or their family members still in Syria. The source of fear was the Assad regime, ISIS, other groups in Syria, the authorities of their host country as well as the media organization where they used to work or are still working.

CONTENTS

Turkey	
Fleeing insecurity	5
Limitations to freedom of movement	6
Undercover work	8
Threats and Security constraints	9
<hr/>	
Jordan	
Under the UNHCR's care	10
One-way ticket out of the Kingdom	11
Working without legal status	11
Relative security	13
<hr/>	
Lebanon	
A voiceless community	14
No entry without justification	15
No status without a sponsor	15
Threats and self-censorship	16
<hr/>	
Human rights and the right to inform	17

Bashar al-Assad's war on journalists

With the start of the Syrian uprising in March 2011, the Syrian government launched an offensive targeting various sectors of Syrian society, one of which was the media.

The only source for news in Syria was to be the official stance, provided by dictations from Syrian intelligence agents who had their hands on the media. Any other element was considered "fabrication" and "against the State" by the Syrian regime and its head, the Syrian president and media predator Bashar al-Assad. Bashar took after his father Hafez al-Assad in considering media a threat and journalism a crime and imitated him by running a ruthless dictatorship. In a speech at Damascus University delivered June 20, 2011, Bashar publicly declared that independent media and journalists were his enemies. Describing the uprising in Syria as "a crisis", he declared: "I did not talk about the external component and its role in this crisis. I did not talk about the components that we all know. There are people who are well paid to carry video cameras, film and collaborate with the media."

Bashar al-Assad clearly showed his attitude towards independent media and journalists in speeches and interviews published by the official State news agency, SANA-Syrian Arab News Agency, from March 30, 2011 to March 31, 2016. He mentioned the word "media" around 80 times and associated it with "war" 10 times. Here are other expressions he used when talking about the media: "media attack - media battlefield - the bloody media machine - media fabrications - media campaign against Syria - fabrications of media - media and military resources - virtual war using the media - media forgeries - the media and arms - politics, media, and oil - hostile media - the media amount to nothing - exaggerating media - labeling Western media - deceiving media outlets - media propaganda - in the media, when it bleeds, it leads - barrel bomb came from the media exaggerated in foreign media - titles used by foreign media called for dividing Syria - fantasy media - money coming from outside just for the media - the media image of the big lie - media game - media are used to forging - Western media channels are biased - despite the media - media falsification - media against Syria - illusions created by the media - media outplayed - the glare of the media - Western media frenzy - fierce media campaign - the moans and groans of the Arab media."

The only time Bashar al-Assad associated "media" with "freedom" was in an interview with Argentina's Clarin newspaper and Telam News Agency, on May 18, 2013, when he was describing his "reform steps" that were going to include "a new Constitution with a wider range of freedoms, including political and media freedom."

Caught in a dilemma of journalism ethics and the need to make a living, further complicated by fear of retaliation, Syrian journalists had very few options: either they kept working in Syria and the State propaganda outlets, or they left the country and tried to live in exile – if they had managed to survive detention in the first place... Once they decided to leave, they had to justify it or risk disastrous retaliations as "defectors" from governmental media outlets. It was a complicated and difficult decision to make, especially if they chose to keep working and living in Syria. Consequently, they started fleeing Syria, and even more so when ISIS and other extremist groups joined al-Assad in hunting down journalists and silencing the independent media.

Most of the journalists fled to three neighboring countries: Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Like other refugees, journalists had to start a new life there. They found themselves in different sets of circumstances than home, especially in terms of regulations and living and working conditions, and faced threats coming from both inside and outside their host country.

RSF tried to dig deeper to shed more light on the plight of exiled Syrian journalists and their living and working conditions.

RSF interviewed a total of 24 journalists in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Only three agreed to have their real names mentioned, while the others asked to remain anonymous, fearing retaliation against themselves or their family members still in Syria. Their source of fear was the Assad regime, ISIS, other groups in Syria, the authorities of their host country as well as the media organizations where they used to work or are still working.

1 TURKEY

FLEEING INSECURITY

According to the UN, Turkey is currently the country receiving the largest number of refugees in the world. Indeed, research conducted by RSF found that Turkey is a top destination for many Syrian journalists who wish to continue covering Syrian affairs. Turkey hosts the largest number of exiled Syrians working in the media. A closer look at the situation of Syrian journalists reveals their obstacles to make a living and maintain employment, against a backdrop of fear and feelings of ambivalence. This struggle may influence the future of Syrian media as a whole. However, the situation could be improved by legally recognizing their profession and providing media outlets with licenses, as well as publishing police investigations into the security issues affecting Syrian journalists in Turkey.



Turkish soldiers keep watch from an observation tower in the Nusaybin district on the border with Syria's northeastern city of Qamishli in the Hasakeh province.

© AFP PHOTO / DELIL SOULEIMAN



Limitations to freedom of movement

The majority of Syrian journalists interviewed by RSF said that they fled to Turkey in order to escape threats from the Syrian government.

A Syrian editor-in-chief explained to RSF how he was forced to leave his homeland: “Syrian authorities arrested a colleague who worked for our magazine. After being tortured, she was forced to reveal our names by allowing them access to her laptop. Many of the magazine team managed to flee the country and I did, too.” He added: “I had to smuggle myself into Turkey, because I didn’t have the necessary documents to enter legally.”

Since 2011, Turkey had maintained an open border policy with Syria, but in 2014, it started implementing restrictions at border gates until, finally, in early 2015, it closed the border to Syrians, altogether, allowing very few exceptional humanitarian cases in. When the border was open, Syrian journalists went freely to Syria for work. The border closing prevented almost all journalists from continuing their work in Syria. “After I finished my work in Syria, I had no choice but to illegally cross into Turkey,” said a Syrian journalist. He added: “I had to pay smugglers to help me cross to the Turkish side, but I was caught by Turkish border patrol. They beat me for hours, even when I told them ‘I am a journalist’, they arrested me for one day, along with many others, and later forced me to return to Syria. After I spent a few days recovering in a hospital, I managed to illegally return to Turkey - through ditches and under fire. I decided not to go through this horrible experience again, so I stopped working as a reporter from Syria and launched a new media in Turkey that does not require me to cross into Syria.” Many other journalists described similar experiences, and stopped returning to Syria.

As of May 1, 2016, over 2.7 million Syrian refugees had been registered by the Turkish authorities. The UNHCR in Turkey does not itself register Syrians, since their protection is supposed to be undertaken by Turkish authorities. Like other Syrians, Syrian journalists are entitled to temporary protection status. Once they are registered with the Turkish authorities, they have access to medical care, education and the right to work, under one condition: they need to have the KIMLIK - the Temporary Protection Foreigner ID Card, indicating their legal status.

However, since early 2016, registration for KIMLIK is not open in all Turkish provinces. It is also subject to individual provincial regulations and practices.

Although their residence in Turkey is legal, Syrian journalists’ freedom of movement inside the country is restricted. For example, when Syrians registered in Gaziantep want to travel to another city, they have to apply for a travel permit with local authorities, and hand the document back to its issuing office on their return. If not, they face administrative problems. Given that not all provinces provide Syrians with KIMLIK, their freedom of residence is restricted.

“Syrian authorities arrested a colleague who worked for our magazine”.

6

“They beat me for hours, even when I said to them ‘I am a journalist’”.



→
Naji Jerf, journalist, was
murdered in Gaziantep
on December 27, 2015.

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These cumbersome procedures add to the burdens already befalling exiled Syrians, which is further compounded when they are journalists. Though such restrictions are considered acceptable by many Syrians, since they view them as regulations and security measures put in place by the authorities, when it comes to journalists, such restrictions become a challenge for their work, since they deprive them of the very fundamental freedom of movement that is necessary to their profession. For example, there are official days and hours when a journalist is allowed to apply for a travel permit. "I cannot ask a car accident to wait until I get a travel permit to cover it," Syrian reporter in Gaziantep told RSF.

Some journalists found a legal solution that can help them bypass these restrictions and do their work. They ask for and obtain a tourist residence permit, which allows them full freedom of movement in Turkey. However, this type of permit denies them some of the advantages they are entitled to when having a KIMLIK, such as access to medical care, assistance and education.

Very few journalists manage to obtain a work permit, which is the best way to work legally and enjoy freedom of movement. It is not easy. It entails conditions that the majority of Syrians cannot satisfy and requires documents they just don't have. All journalists interviewed by RSF expressed their urgent need for a press ID that would be recognized in Turkey, so as to facilitate their work both in Turkey and across the border in Syria.

On January 22, 2016, President Erdogan of Turkey met with a number of Syrian journalists in Istanbul who highlighted their problems. Erdo an said the Turkish authorities were looking into the problem of proper licensing and press IDs for Syrian media institutions and Syrian journalists in Turkey.



Undercover work

Undercover media threatens job security and long-term career objectives

Though it can be said that Syrian media organizations and journalists work freely in Turkey - that is, without interference from the government - they do so illegally, without an appropriate legal framework - and are liable at all times. This makes the organizations and their employees vulnerable and puts them under constant threat of being shut down, or worse. One Syrian media outlet manager in Istanbul told RSF: "I have run a media organization for more than two years. We have never faced any problem, interference or harassment by the authorities here." However, another media organization manager explained how his status is threatened and not safe at all: "Once I was assaulted by someone in my office. I went to the police to report it, and the police officer told me that if I wanted to take legal measures, they had to report my illegal office and work, adding that I was illegally hiring employees and paying their salaries. I decided to give up my right to police protection and left."

Syrian media organizations do not have a legal license to operate and they take few legal steps towards obtaining it, or they take other steps such as registering as a non-profit organization or a production company or other. This lack of status or "semi-legal" status does not entitle these media outlets to provide their employees with legal job contracts. It offers neither labor law protections nor decent working conditions. In addition to the irregular flow of funds coming from donors, this leads to constant concerns; Syrian media organizations are always worried about a sudden cut in funds." This status also causes several other problems, such as poor employment security, manipulation or even corruption in these media. A Syrian freelance journalist in Gaziantep told RSF that he was subject to exploitation by a Syrian media employer, because he had no other choice: "I used to sign empty monthly salary receipts but I didn't know the real monthly salary I was supposed to have, and sometimes they failed to pay me altogether." Another journalist told RSF: "No one working for Syrian media feels safe; overworking has become a condition to keep one's job." A Syrian radio anchor bitterly described his working conditions by saying: "I have no guarantee whatsoever not to lose my job at any time. I am trying my best to keep my job, and I do whatever I am asked. There is the media organization's elite group - relatives and friends - while the only source of income for other employees can be stopped with one word from the manager."

8

"No one working for Syrian media feels safe".



The city of Gaziantep, located in the south of Turkey, a hundred miles from Aleppo.

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Threats and security constraints

Self-censorship is hitting Syrian journalists in Turkey, induced by the cross-border fear of ISIS. "I edited my article four times and cut some information out. The final text was not what I wanted to really say and publish," a Syrian freelance journalist to RSF. He added: "I don't want to be shot in the head by an unknown person, just out of the blue."

A radio anchor described to RSF to what extent concerns about security in Gaziantep affected her behavior: "I avoid saying the word 'ISIS', and I don't get into conversations about it in public, as I don't know who could be listening."

"The final text was not what I wanted to really say and publish".

The murder of Syrian journalist Naji Jerf caused enormous fear among Syrian journalists in Turkey. Most of the journalists RSF interviewed have stated that this moment constituted a "before" and an "after" in their lives because of this murder.

Some Syrian journalists take ISIS threats very seriously, even when they are not directed at them. One journalist described to RSF how he changed residences more than once: "After I heard how ISIS murdered members of "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently" in Urfa, I spent just a few days in the new house I had moved into with my family. When I heard that Naji Jerf had been killed, I moved houses again."

While a freelance journalist based in Gaziantep said she had not received threats and that her work did not involve ISIS, she added: "Because of the explosions in Gaziantep and the security threats, I restrict my movements; I don't go out unless it is necessary."

"I avoid saying the word 'ISIS'".

A Syrian media outlet manager described to RSF how "the ISIS effect" impacted the editorial line: "In our editorial staff meeting, we agreed on working as little as we could on news regarding ISIS, we don't know if the threats are real. We have no clue. Results of the investigation into Jerf's murder are not public. It should be made public so we understand what is going on."

Another freelance journalist in Gaziantep talked about the desperate need to make investigation results public: "No one knows yet who killed Jerf or why. It is circulated that ISIS claimed responsibility for the assassination, but we don't really know who did it and why, we need to know more about it, so we can take safety measures to protect our lives." ISIS has not directly claimed responsibility but showed a photo of Jerf in a video it issued later - without confirming it was responsible for his murder.



→ Logo of the citizen journalism group 'Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently'.

2

JORDAN

REPORTING FROM THE CAMPS

Under the UNHCR's care

Jordan hosts around 1.2 million Syrians, 600.000 of whom are registered with the UNHCR, while around 750.000 Syrians are not registered, according to Brig. Gen. Waddah Hmoud, director of the Syrian Refugee Affairs Department.

Unlike Turkey, Jordanian authorities do not offer Syrian refugees a legal status for temporary protection, and do not automatically grant rights to residency, employment or health care, leaving the UNHCR in Jordan to deal with the situation. Every now and then, Jordan expresses its inability to address the Syrian refugees' basic needs and makes it more difficult for refugees to access decent and proper aid. Syrian journalists are no exception. This adds more constraints to their living and working conditions, including obtaining the official ID issued by the Jordanian authorities. Such ID cards require documents that are almost impossible to obtain for most refugees. A legal recognition of Syrian journalists and their work would make their lives much easier and protect their labor rights.

Reaching Safety

In 2013, Jordan started to restrict border crossings from Syria, and at times, closed the border altogether to Syrian refugees. Since then, though Jordanian authorities officially state that the door is not shut to Syrian refugees, evidence shows otherwise. An open border policy is decisive in protecting refugees, including journalists and media activists from Syria. Almost all journalists interviewed by RSF said they crossed the border to Jordan illegally, due to the threats from Syrian authorities, including arrest, enforced disappearance or death in detention. Some reporters have already been detained. A Syrian freelance reporter in Jordan told RSF: "I was wanted by the Syrian regime after I covered demonstrations, and I was arrested in 2011." He added: "I was released only after bribing the authorities." A TV anchorwoman told RSF that she had to cross into Jordan illegally because she "was wanted by the Assad forces" for her work covering demonstrations in Daraa city.

"I was wanted by the Syrian regime after I covered demonstrations".

One-way ticket out of the Kingdom

Syrian refugees in Jordan are granted a document from the UNHCR if they are registered and are entitled to apply for an ID card issued by the Jordanian authorities. Brig. Gen. Waddah Hmoud, director of the Syrian Refugee Affairs Department, said Syrian refugees, as well as other foreigners in the country, constitute 20 to 22 per cent of the Kingdom's population. Hmoud added that all Syrians in the Kingdom, whether or not registered as refugees, will be issued new cards at the country's 180 police stations.

Syrians started to get this new ID, but it does not entitle its holder to advantages and only serves as proof of identity and for statistical purposes. Obtaining this card entails conditions that many refugees cannot meet.

Furthermore, Syrian refugees can be forced back to the refugee camps, if they are caught without proper documentation or are working illegally. Though forcing them to return to Syria is prohibited, Jordanian authorities have done so for some Syrian refugees, with no clear explanations given.

Leaving Jordan is a one-way trip. Syrian refugees cannot return to Jordan once they have left, unless they hold residency in another country. Jordanian authorities recently adopted a less restrictive system, and issued permissions to travel. A Syrian editor told RSF he could not leave Jordan to participate in journalism training workshops, and added: "But when I was granted permission to travel and then come back, I joined a training workshop that was very useful to me." To a certain extent, this allowed Syrian journalists to join professional workshops outside of Jordan, enabling them to develop professionally. Several Syrians were denied this permission, while others were granted it, but the reasons to grant or refuse are neither clear, nor specified by Jordanian authorities.

Working without legal status

Administrative obstacles deny work permits for a majority of Syrian refugees. Only Syrians with legal residency and a valid passport can obtain a work permit if the employer claims that the job requires experience that is not found among the Jordanian population.

A Syrian journalist who worked for a Jordanian TV channel told RSF about his suffering and the humiliation he faced because he did not have a legal work permit to protect him: "I worked for almost 20 hours a day and slept in the office. I was also subject to verbal humiliation." He added: "I used to listen and not talk." Later, he was fired.

As in Turkey, Syrian media established in Jordan cannot obtain an appropriate legal license to operate, but they are ignored by the authorities. Consequently, however, reporters who are working for them do not have a legal contract. They only benefit from an oral commitment from the media outlet manager. A Syrian freelance journalist described to RSF her situation when working for a Syrian media outlet, with a promise to get a contract: "I worked for a couple of months

"But when I was granted permission to travel and then come back, I joined a training workshop that was very useful to me".

"I worked for a couple of months and did my best to prove I was worthy of the job. But in the end I left, because I was not paid and lost hope that they would legally hire me."

and did my best to prove I was worthy of the job. But in the end I left, because I was not paid and lost hope that they would legally hire me.”

A TV technician talked to RSF about his efforts to help a Syrian TV channel in Jordan for almost a year. Later, funding for the channel stopped and “I lost owed salaries”, time and hope...

Most of the journalists interviewed by RSF expressed their need of a press ID that is recognized in Jordan, so as to facilitate their work in the country. A Syrian editor in Jordan asked: “Why is it that the Jordanian Press Association does not help us? We are colleagues, we have the same profession.” Humanitarian agencies in Jordan focus on Syrian refugees’ urgent and life-threatening needs. A Syrian editor told RSF that his father needed surgery, but “I could not find the appropriate financial support and had to pay 1000 JOD (1400 USD).”

“Why is it that the Jordanian Press Association does not help us?”

12

→ Located in the north east of Jordan, the Zaatari camp hosts more than 80,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict.

© AFP PHOTO / KHALIL MAZRAAWI



Relative security

“I cannot bear it anymore, I get threats from everybody”.

Unlike in Turkey, all journalists reflected on their feeling of relative safety in Jordan. Some of them complained about threats they received via social media and strange phone calls, but they had no serious fear. One freelance journalist told RSF about her experience with an attack on her home when she was employed by a Syrian media outlet: “I wanted to report the attack to the police, and that it may be connected to my work, but I feared the police would ask me about my work and find out I worked illegally in an unlicensed media outlet.”

A media production manager described to RSF the threats he faced when he wanted to tackle the corruption in “extremist opposition military groups” in Syria and others from loyalists to the Assad regime. He added: “The threats I think of everyday are also from the Jordanian authorities saying they could evict me to Syria, I cannot bear it anymore, I get threats from everybody.”



Amman, Jordan. Syrian journalists working there feel safer than in Turkey, although they usually have to work illegally.

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3

LEBANON

A VOICELESS COMMUNITY

No press

Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world. Representing more than 35 percent of the population, according to the Lebanese Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil, Syrians in Lebanon number approximately 1.5 million. Among them, more than 1 million are registered with the UNHCR. This situation is a heavy burden for Lebanon.

Supporting Syrian journalists in Lebanon would make it less difficult for them to investigate and shed light on the problems of the Syrian communities in Lebanon. After all, reporters have a professional obligation to report on Syrian groups in Lebanese society. This, in turn, would help Lebanese authorities to better understand the situation faced by Syrian refugees, and help the government address these issues more appropriately. However, given the Lebanese authorities' restrictions on Syrians, including journalists' work and living conditions, these huge communities - which could constitute a nation by themselves - are deprived of the right to be represented and are ignored by the public opinion of the country they live in. Their dire situation and problems stay out of the spotlight, in a country where the number of Syrian journalists is the smallest compared to Turkey or Jordan. There are 80 countries in the world with fewer than 1.5 million inhabitants, but they all have their own press. Syrians in Lebanon makes up a country by themselves, but a country with no press.

A Syrian freelancer described to RSF the impossible job of reporting on the problems experienced by Syrians in Lebanon: "I started an investigation on human trafficking and found ties to dangerous crime groups," adding: "I am not recognized as a journalist here, and I have residency problems. This kind of investigative journalism would cause me lots of problems. I don't have any kind of protection." He canceled his investigation.

"I am not recognized as a journalist here... I don't have any kind of protection".



No entry without justification

In January 2015, Lebanon announced a new policy regulating Syrians' entry, which required that all Syrian refugees who want to flee the war should clearly state a reason - with the proper documentation - to enter Lebanon, so they can be granted a visa. This considerably reduced the number of refugees crossing into Lebanon.

Syrian journalists interviewed by RSF said they entered either legally or otherwise, fleeing the Syrian government's reach, be it for the purpose of detention or compulsory military enlistment. A Syrian reporter in Lebanon who was detained by the Syrian regime and later released described to RSF the threats that forced him to leave Syria: "After I made films on developments in Syria, the military intelligence came to my house looking for me, so I fled to opposition areas and continued my work there. Later, after threats issued by an opposition group, I was told by friends to leave for my safety, so finally I bribed my way into Lebanon."

"I was told by friends to leave for my safety, so finally I bribed my way into Lebanon".

No status without a sponsor

Syrian refugees who are already in Lebanon are either registered with the UNHCR or should be sponsored by a Lebanese individual or a company in order to acquire legal status. Those who are registered with the UNHCR are entitled to little support, as the UNHCR receives weak financial support from international humanitarian donors.

The other group that is sponsored, or trying to find sponsorship, has no support. It faces unaffordable administrative fees and suffers from lack of documentation. All this leaves many Syrians without legal status and vulnerable to arrest, abuse and exploitation. A Syrian editor who recently left Lebanon for Turkey told RSF that he was subject to exploitation: "Several times after I submitted the work I was asked for, I was paid less than what was agreed on," he said, adding: "I had no other choice." A Syrian media outlet correspondent in Lebanon told RSF how she had to change her job description and subsequently abandon the right to work legally in media so that she could get a sponsor for residency to acquire legal status in Lebanon: "Syrian regime forces wanted me because of my work, and later seized my house." She added: "Now I am registered as a farm worker."

"I was paid less than what was agreed on".

As in Turkey and Jordan, Syrian journalists suffer from the absence of work permits and legal contracts, which greatly impairs their ability to work and their freedom of movement. Many Syrian journalists expressed their awareness of the fact that journalists are appreciated by the general public in Lebanon, and stated that their work would be much easier if they had a press card or legal recognition of their profession by Lebanese authorities.



→
Beirut. 1.5 million Syrians took refuge in Lebanon, representing one quarter of the total population.

© AFP PHOTO / STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN

Threats and self-censorship

Lebanese society is deeply involved in the political and military conflict in Syria, and this affects on Syrian journalists living and working in Lebanon. A Syrian reporter told RSF of the threats he received while working in Lebanon. He said: "I was caught by the Hezbollah militia and subjected to investigation about my work. They threatened me, telling me I am now in Lebanon and should not write about them." A Syrian editor told RSF that he had not received threats but restricted his work in order to avoid possible confrontations with political parties in Lebanon.

"I didn't want to leave Lebanon, because I wanted to cover Syrians' stories here," a Syrian reporter in Lebanon told RSF. He added: "I found that changing the subject matter of my reports would save me from a confrontation with the Hezbollah militia, so I started covering humanitarian stories instead."

In Lebanon, RSF documented cases of threats, abuses and beatings of journalists coming from Syria, because of their work and/or residency problems.

"I am now in Lebanon and should not write about them".

"I found that changing the subject matter of my reports would save me from a confrontation with the Hezbollah militia".

HUMAN RIGHTS AND RIGHT TO INFORM

In addition to fatal attacks and threats Syrian media workers are facing in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, RSF documented many violations of Syrian media workers' rights in those countries since 2011. Very few rights in the Universal Declaration of Human rights and International Refugee Law are fully applied to Syrian refugee journalists.

Their rights to freedom of movement and residence, or to leave any country and freely return are restricted. Their rights to protection are compromised, and they don't have equal access to legal protection. They are subject to work exploitation and servitude. They can be arbitrarily arrested, detained or sent back to Syria. It would only requires a few measures to change this state of utter vulnerability. An official and legal recognition of Syrian journalists and their journalistic work in these countries could spare them many of these violations and threats, as well as provide legal and administrative framework for their activity. This recognition can help them develop their profession and allow them to contribute to understanding and exposing the Syrian refugees' living conditions, which would play an important role in improving the situation of Syrian refugees as a whole.

→
Syria, Aleppo.
Syrians ride a motorcycle past a fruit stall in the rebel-held side of the northern city of Aleppo

© AFP PHOTO / KARAM AL-MASRI



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