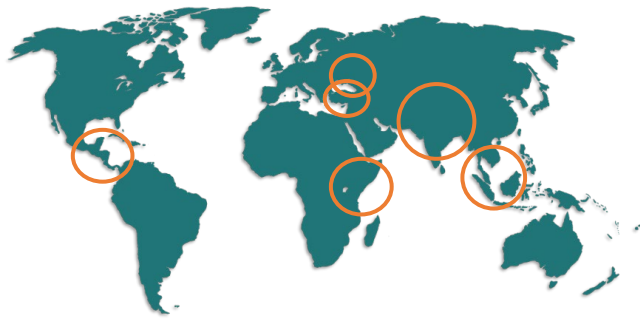


# Securing Access to Free Expression (SAFE)

Ten years of support for journalists and social communicators



Since 2013, IREX has worked to enable media practitioners and social communicators to work as safely as possible in closed and closing spaces. Addressing safety through the unique lens of digital identity, physical awareness, and psychosocial care, SAFE has reached over 8,000 journalists and social communicators organizations across 18 countries.

## Expanded reach through targeted interventions

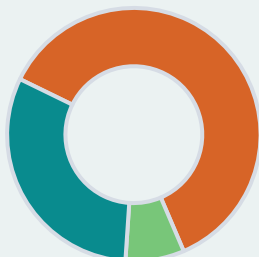
Over the ten years of safety support to the media and social communicator communities, SAFE has implemented a responsive range of activities to meet the needs of beneficiaries. These activities include in-person and remote trainings, targeted consultations for individuals or organizations at risk, events to build solidarity, and trainings-of-trainers to enable local groups to conduct integrated safety trainings. Over the past ten years, 4,615 media professionals and social communicators were trained directly, while local partners trained 305 participants. 563 individuals and 39 organizations received individualized consultations to meet their safety needs. On a scale of 1 to 10 of how likely they would be to recommend the SAFE training to a friend or colleague, participants responded with an average rating of 9, indicating their high satisfaction with the support they received.

99%

of participants indicated that the training had met, fully met, or even exceeded their expectations

(n=1,675)

## Over 8,000 individuals and organizations supported, including



- More than **4,900** trained directly or by ToT partners in over **470** trainings
- More than **600** provided with one-on-one risk mitigation support
- More than **2,500** supported through solidarity-building events

**48%**  
Female

**48%**  
Male

**1%**  
Additional

**3%**  
Prefer not to say

After the first few years of implementation, the program team identified a need to expand the target groups. In several of the target regions, women, gender non-conforming people, people from rural communities, and ethnic minorities generally face barriers in the media sector. To respond to this problem, IREX invested in targeted trainings for media outlets and civil society organizations that service and represent marginalized groups, including indigenous communities, the LGBT+ community, journalists from remote areas, and women, providing tailored trainings that met the diverse needs of the target group. The program team also developed specific [approaches and lesson plans](#) to meet the needs of marginalized groups. As a result, the majority of SAFE trainees represent marginalized groups and the program reaches a gender-balanced group of participants.

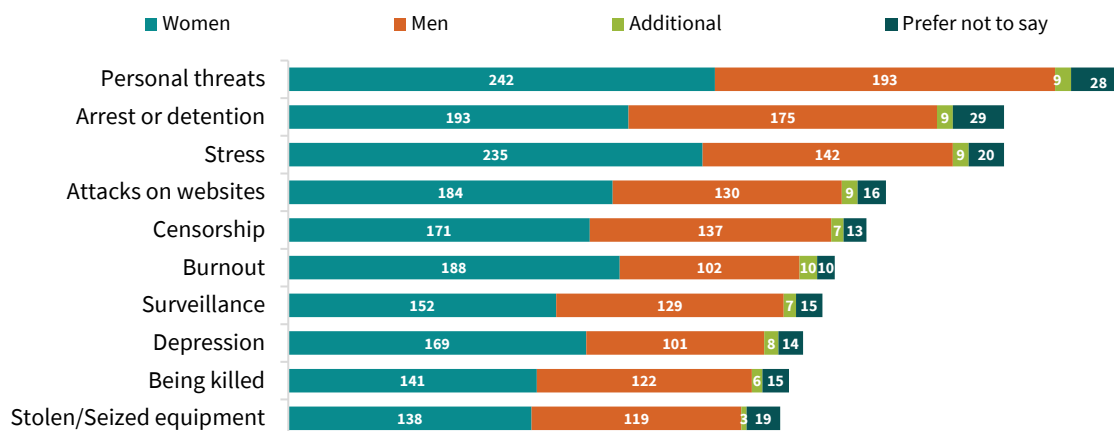
83%

of participants identified as belonging to one or several marginalized groups

(n=2,863)

## Risks faced by journalists and social communicators

Over the course of the 10 years that IREX has been supporting journalists and social communicators in keeping themselves safe, SAFE monitored the risks they face. In the last calendar year (January 2022 – December 2022), SAFE trainees cited threats, arrests, and threats as the top risks faced by people in their profession in their country.



**Figure:** Participants’ responses to the question: “Which of the following do you think is the biggest threat facing people in your line of work or activism?”

99%

of participants indicated that the training had met, or fully met their safety needs.

(n=1,693)

Over the past ten years, about half of SAFE’s participants (54%, n=2,262) report having faced negative consequences of their work. Yet, only 27% (n=2,293) had attended a safety training in the past 12 months, and those who had often did not attend a holistic training. IREX responded to this gap through offering holistic safety trainings to meet the needs identified by journalists and social communicators, tailoring each training to the unique risks and threats by the respective cohort of journalists and social communicators supported.

## Trainings help participants mitigate risks

IREX's interventions supported journalists, outlets, activists, and civil society organizations in mitigating risks and responding to threats. Trainings not only supported participants in building and expanding their tools to remain safe in their profession but—the data shows— that they were also able to implement these safety tools and strategies. Following their participation in a SAFE training, 90% of participants (n=136) who had faced a safety challenge in the months after the training indicated that the knowledge and skills they had received during the training had been “very helpful” or “extremely helpful” in addressing it. Similarly, one-on-one targeted interventions for individuals at immediate risks proved helpful to those who received it, with 90% of individuals and organizations (n=36) which had received this type of assistance reporting that the SAFE support had been relevant and helpful to their situation. Meanwhile, over 63% of participants surveyed (n=114) reported that their organizations had implemented new or updated existing safety procedures and protocols within their organization after staff had participated in the SAFE training.

95%

of participants reported that they had stayed in their profession following the training

(n=397)

Training participants shared knowledge and skills gained during the SAFE training with at least

**1,500**

of their colleagues, friends, and families.

Meanwhile, the trainings and other activities also succeeded in building solidarity among participants and thereby help create “communities of safety”. This effect did not only cover the individuals and organizations directly supported by SAFE, but also extended beyond the project's immediate reach. Close to 90% of participants (n=396) indicated that they had shared the knowledge and skills they had received in the training with their colleagues, friends, and/or families; on average, participants shared the knowledge with 4 to 5 additional individuals.

## Participant reflections

This training was extremely timely and eye opening! All people need to have this knowledge. It is life saving!

The training was so useful, and the trainers were very good and kindhearted. They explained topics using activities, pictures, and videos which helped us understand. I felt so welcome, comfortable, and safe when I shared my feelings with them because they were always attentive and listened carefully. They always came up with good answers and no judgment!

Apart from being more sensitive about my own safety, the training made me feel grateful to have met new friends. I learned to be stronger and to see problems from different perspectives.

I had my Facebook account hacked, but thanks to the training I felt that I was well prepared to deal with it. I immediately changed my passwords on all applications and social media platforms, and I was able to regain access to my account.

We received a grant from another organization to strengthen the physical security and safety of our organization. When we prepared the budget for the grant, the information and knowledge from the SAFE training and trainers helped us to plan the budget and purchases according to best practices.

The training was a great opportunity to learn more. I now feel that I have control over my digital space, psychosocial wellbeing, and physical safety.

As female journalists working on sensitive topics, we are exposed to additional threats such as having to deal with pressure from our society, family, and our support network. Thank you so much for the safe space you provided.

The training was above what I expected and was very easy to understand. I didn't feel overwhelmed at any point and the trainers were very knowledgeable in their various areas of expertise. The use of real-world examples made the topics very easy to grasp.