

JOURNALISM IN CENTRAL PUNJAB

STATE OF MEDIA FREEDOMS,
ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND
SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS AND
OTHER MEDIA PROFESSIONALS
IN CENTRAL PUNJAB >
THE WAY FORWARD

Pakistan

Minahil Shahab & Adnan Rehmat



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Executive Summary

This report, prepared by Freedom Network in 2025 provides a comprehensive account of the state of journalism, safety of media workers, and press freedoms in Central Punjab, focusing mainly on Faisalabad, Lahore and surrounding districts. Based on desk research, focus group discussions, and interviews, it reveals a media environment undergoing rapid transition, shaped by both expanding opportunities in digital media and unprecedented threats from legal, political, and economic pressures.

The media landscape of Central Punjab is witnessing the sharp decline of print journalism alongside the rise of digital platforms. Traditional newspapers, long central to public discourse, are burdened by rising costs, dwindling circulation, and reliance on government advertisements. State bailouts have not reversed their decline or restored public confidence. In contrast, digital journalism is booming: Faisalabad alone hosts dozens of digital channels with audiences in the millions. Senior journalists who lost jobs in shrinking print outlets have shifted to YouTube channels and shared studios, some supported by investors. The Faisalabad Press Institute (FPI) has trained new cohorts of journalists in digital skills, enabling them to enter this changing space.

Yet the growth of digital media brings risks as many platforms prioritize political narrative-building over credible news, undermining the reliability of journalism. An influx of young graduates has added to market saturation, leaving social media as their only option for work, often pushing them toward partisan or low-quality reporting.

While structural shifts create opportunities, they coexist with severe constraints on free expression. Journalists face threats from multiple sources: state institutions, police, secret services, criminal gangs, religious leaders, and even their own employers. Police cases are among the most common tools of suppression, especially in smaller towns. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), first enacted in 2016 and amended majorly in 2025, has emerged as the greatest threat, described by journalists as a sword hanging permanently over their heads. It criminalizes legitimate reporting, restricts freedom of expression, and has established a climate of fear.

Amendments increasing penalties to up to ten years' imprisonment have intensified its chilling effect, with cases of journalists being prosecuted for old social media posts. Non-state actors add to the danger, with testimonies of assaults, confiscated equipment, and attacks by narcotics gangs. Such threats force many journalists into self-censorship, undermining the integrity of their work.

The professional service structure for journalists has simultaneously deteriorated. Despite high levels of education and experience, many have lost their jobs as media organizations close or downsize. Those still employed face stark wage disparities between metropolitan centers and regional cities, with most journalists earning between 2,000 and 30,000 rupees per month without legal protections.

Even major outlets exploit workers: Dawn media group, for example, cut salaries by 40 percent in 2019 and by mid-2025 had not restored them to their previous levels. Privatization and corporate-style ownership models prioritize profit, shrinking opportunities for quality reporting. At the district level, journalists suffer from the absence of training and institutional support, relying on self-learning or peer-to-peer training in order to adapt to digital technologies and shifting professional demands.

Women journalists face layered challenges of harassment, stereotyping, and lack of facilities. Many are pressured into “soft reporting” and discouraged from pursuing hard news. Basic needs such as separate bathrooms or childcare remain unmet, though the Faisalabad Press Club has made limited improvements with dedicated facilities for women. Representation in elected bodies remains minimal, though growing slowly. These patterns reflect both systemic exclusion and tentative progress as institutional reforms begin to emerge.

Safety is the overriding concern for all journalists in Central Punjab. Testimonies describe routine assaults by police, intimidation by secret services, and threats by both state and non-state actors. Crime reporters face particular risks, as media institutions often cut deals with gangs and officials, leaving frontline reporters exposed to retaliation. Press clubs remain the only protective shield, as media houses provide little to no support for their staff.

Censorship is pervasive and multilayered. Journalists face pressure from their own editors and owners to avoid stories that may anger political or commercial elites. Externally, legal harassment through PECA and defamation cases is widespread. Denial of access to official sources and threats of dismissal deepen

the pressures. Many journalists admit they practice self-censorship as the only way to survive, with credibility suffering as stories are tailored to institutional or political demands.

Alongside these legal and political threats, economic intimidation and dismissals are routine. Senior editors often force reporters to follow political or personal directives, threatening their jobs if they refuse. Downsizing has eliminated hundreds of jobs across major outlets including Jang, Express, and Hum TV, while local newspapers increasingly abandon independent reporting to survive as mouthpieces for government and business elites. For many journalists with decades of experience, the collapse of media organizations has destroyed careers and forced them into alternative employment outside journalism.

Taken together, the findings of this report present a bleak picture of the state of journalism in Central Punjab. The growth of digital platforms has created opportunities but also instability and manipulation. Print journalism is collapsing, leaving thousands underpaid or unemployed. Women face systemic barriers, harassment, and underrepresentation. Above all, legal repression under PECA, combined with harassment by state and non-state actors, has created an environment where fear governs reporting.

Despite these grim realities, journalists continue to demonstrate resilience. Digital journalism has provided alternative livelihoods, press clubs remain important platforms of solidarity, and initiatives such as training programs in Gujrat show pathways for localized reform. Yet without urgent structural changes—including reform of PECA, wage protections, stronger unions, and gender-sensitive facilities—the survival of independent journalism in Central Punjab is at serious risk.

Chapter 2

Introduction

The media landscape in Pakistan has long been shaped by a tension between promises of free expression and the lived reality of restrictions, threats, and precarious working conditions. While national-level debates often dominate the discourse on press freedom, it is at the provincial and district levels where many of the most acute challenges are faced. The Central Punjab region offers a telling case study of how broader structural changes, legal repression, and local power dynamics converge to shape the conditions under which journalists work.

This report, prepared by Freedom Network in 2025, is based on a combination of desk research, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with journalists, union representatives, press club leaders, and media workers from the districts of Central Punjab. The aim is to provide an evidence-based account of the state of journalism in Central Punjab, with particular focus on safety, legal frameworks, service structures, censorship, and gender dynamics. Testimonies from journalists form the backbone of this study, offering authentic voices that illustrate the gap between formal commitments to media freedom and the daily realities faced in the field.

The timing of this study is significant. Journalism in Central Punjab is undergoing rapid transformation as digital platforms expand and traditional print outlets decline. New opportunities have emerged for journalists to create their own spaces through digital channels, but these are accompanied by fresh risks of manipulation, precarious livelihoods, and exposure to online harassment. At the same time, repressive legislation such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) has intensified legal pressures, while harassment from police, secret services, criminal networks, and even media owners has created an environment of constant intimidation. Women journalists, though making gradual gains in representation, continue to face systemic harassment, stereotyping, and lack of institutional facilities.

By documenting these challenges, this report seeks to contribute to the understanding of press freedom at the provincial level and to highlight the urgent need for reforms that protect journalists' rights, ensure decent working conditions, and safeguard the role of the media as a pillar of democracy in Pakistan.

2.1 Methodology

The Freedom Network collected this data through desk research as well FGDs and interviews of key informants between April and June 2025.

2.2 The State of Media in Central Punjab

The media landscape in Central Punjab is undergoing a significant transformation driven by the shift towards digital platforms. While traditional print media continues to exist, it faces mounting challenges from rising costs, declining readership, and dependence on government advertisements. In contrast, digital journalism has become a rapidly expanding avenue, offering both opportunities and risks for local journalists.

The establishment of the Faisalabad Press Institute, which trains journalists in digital media, reflects this transition. “Since every journalist does not command resources, we have set up a studio at the press club on a self-help basis. We only received a small grant long ago from the government,” explained President Faisalabad Press Club, Shahid Ali. Two cohorts of trainees have already graduated, and a studio has been equipped to support them.

At the same time, financial pressures continue to weigh heavily on print journalism. “Shift is happening towards digital media. Cost of newspaper is very high. Newspapers first tried to get bailout packages and advertisements. The government has given a bail-out package through advertisements,” observed a journalist in Lahore.

Going digital: Digital platforms, however, are filling the void. “There are many local media channels and websites that attract healthy viewership because mainstream media ignores issues of journalists,” said Farooq Shahzad, a journalist, hailing from Rahimyar Khan. In Faisalabad alone, the growth has been dramatic: “[In 2025] There are around 30 digital channels in Faisalabad who enjoy viewership in millions. They are also making money,” noted Shahid Ali, a leader of PFUJ from Faisalabad.

This rise of digital outlets has created new models of collaboration. “Many known journalists have set up their YouTube channels and their studios and offices. They share facilities that they have set up together,” explained Zameer Afaqi, journalist with Daily City Press, Lahore. However, he also highlighted a troubling trend: “Many news-based digital channels have focused on political narrative building rather than news dissemination and information sharing.”

For some, digital platforms have become a second career. “Many journalists who left jobs have also set up digital media channels. In some cases, there are investors behind them. The basic thing is content. A person who has spent three decades in journalism starts his expertise on social media with some training. There are many success stories. This model is going to succeed,” added Zameer Afaqi.

Yet, concerns remain about the decline of print culture. “People’s habits about reading are changing and there is a degradation of reading, particularly of newspapers. Print media had a tradition of gatekeeping and vetting, and it had a sanctity. Educated people still turn to newspapers and international magazines. The article in a newspaper has a lot of research behind it and it is very different from a story being told on YouTube,” argued Mansoor Malik, Journalist, The Dawn.



FAISALABAD: The picture shows the entry way to Faisalabad Press Club which is home to Faisalabad Press institute. FN photo

Youthful spirit: The influx of young media graduates is further fuelling this shift. “Hundreds of media graduates are coming out of universities and social media is the only option available to them to earn something,” said Mansoor Malik. He added: “Unfortunately, on digital media, media persons are peddling narratives of various parties, and followers of these parties are their main subscribers.”

Regional papers are adapting in their own way. “They have employed correspondents in villages and mohallas where they get news of small social events of local influentials. They have changed the way they do journalism,” noted a journalist in Lahore. But the financial squeeze remains evident: “Almost all newspapers are getting advertisements, but they are increasingly dependent on AI and instead of printing papers in large numbers, local newspapers are increasingly using social media to disseminate news,” said another journalist in Lahore. As a result, “now people access newspapers through websites.”

Training and professional development remain crucial. “The Gujrat Press Club arranges training for journalists twice a year and the press club has an arrangement with Gujrat University. They provide training to press club members after six months by inviting senior journalists from other parts of the country. Journalists need to be trained on ethics and law as well so that they could protect themselves,” explained Raja Riaz, a journalist from Gujrat.

Media Freedoms in Central Punjab

3.1 Threat Actors to Free Speech

Journalists in the Central Punjab region of Pakistan face a wide spectrum of threats to their professional independence, ranging from state institutions and law enforcement to religious groups, narcotics dealers, and even their own professional bodies. While official claims stress that freedom of expression is guaranteed, the testimonies of working journalists reveal a different reality.

Police action has become one of the most common tools to silence journalists, particularly in smaller towns. “Police cases are the main form of threat to journalists these days and this is particularly true for smaller cities,” says Javed Assad, President District Press Club, Hafizabad. Such cases are often lodged on flimsy grounds, creating a chilling effect on local reporting.

The introduction of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) has further heightened risks for journalists. “PECA Act has become a huge threat for every journalist. This law hangs like a Damocles’ sword on the head of every journalist,” said Afshan Batool, Chief Organizer, Women Journalists Forum, Faisalabad. The law has been weaponized by officials to criminalize coverage critical of government institutions.

In addition to state action, non-state actors also pose significant risks. Mohammad Tahir, Photojournalist with Reuters in Faisalabad, recounted: “Threat also arises from various groups whom we cover. For example, we were covering a conflict between religious leaders. We were caught by them and they forced us to delete our data.”

Journalists reporting on crime and extremism face similar dangers, sometimes resulting in physical violence. “My office was fired upon by narcotics sellers,” recalled a journalist in Faisalabad. Another added: “Police does not come forward itself. They can use criminals for the purpose, who can kill you or hit you with a vehicle.”

Direct action against journalists is not uncommon. “I worked on a story on

Raymond Davis. I received many threats and once I was even picked. The city is full of threats for journalists,” shared a journalist in Faisalabad. Similarly, Azadar Hussain, Reporter for City 42, Faisalabad, explained: “We did a story on a domestic abuse case. Journalists were manhandled and their cameras were snatched. However, five journalists were booked on the offence of dacoity by the Police.” He also recounted the risks of reporting on official misconduct: “A journalist was reporting encroachment. The Assistant Commissioner snatched his camera and took it away.”

The threats extend beyond visible harassment to unseen pressures like economic insecurity. “Journalists have a number of seen and unseen threats and job security is one of the largest unseen threats,” noted Azadar Hussain. Reporters covering sensitive beats such as narcotics or corruption often face both intimidation and reprisals. “A cache of narcotics was destroyed, and we reported that the destroyed narcotics were much lesser in quantity than claimed, and we had to face various threats,” he explained.

Even routine reporting on hospitals or government services can trigger surveillance and intimidation. “I reported about some people injured by bullet wounds getting treatment at a Faisalabad hospital. I was asked to report to secret service who kept me for the night and allowed me to go the next day after taking all evidence and asking me not to report it,” said a journalist in Faisalabad. Another added: “If you report low quality of services by government institutions, these officials can apply PECA law upon you.”

Collective security structures remain weak. Journalists frequently note that their unions and press clubs provide limited support outside main media centres. “Our journalist leaders in media centres don’t support journalists at the district level. They often join hands with the administration. Another thing, unions support only those journalists who are their members; otherwise, they are ignored,” lamented one reporter.

The diversity of threat actors makes the environment uniquely hostile. “Journalists face threats from officers of administration, from secret services, from drug dealers, from religious organizations,” summarized Shahid Ali, President of Faisalabad Press Club. This combination of state repression, criminal intimidation, and weak institutional protection leaves journalists in Central Punjab navigating an environment of constant uncertainty and fear.

3.2 Poor Service Structure

The service structure for journalists in Central Punjab remains precarious, characterized by low wages, job losses, lack of professional development, and shrinking opportunities within both print and digital media. Despite high levels of education and professional experience, many journalists face extreme insecurity in their careers.

“There are more than fifty journalists in Faisalabad who hold master’s degrees and who have put more than a decade in journalism and yet they have lost jobs. They have no hope of getting jobs because new organizations are not emerging. They are trying to find their feet on the ground,” explained Shahid Ali, President of Faisalabad Press Club.

Even where employment exists, disparities in salaries highlight the uneven treatment of journalists. “A journalist who is employed from Islamabad gets a salary package that is totally different from the package of a journalist based in a large media centre like Lahore or Rawalpindi,” noted Rana Hina, Woman Journalist, Faisalabad.

The restructuring of the media industry into corporate models has compounded the insecurity of journalists. “The government itself is moving towards privatization and public-private partnerships. In this situation, journalists’ jobs have become precarious and there is no one to protect them,” observed a journalist in Lahore.

Technological disruption has further reduced demand for traditional media workers. “Technology has played a key role in diminishing the need of media workers,” pointed out Zameer Afaqi, Daily City Press, Lahore. He added: “Journalists used to manage and run newspapers. But then businesspeople became owners whose main interest is promotion of their businesses. These people made large media houses. However, when they saw that they were not getting enough profits, they shrank their operations.”

The absence of wage protection has left journalists vulnerable to long-term exploitation. “Dawn is Pakistan’s largest newspaper. In 2019, a pay cut of 40% was applied on all journalists and it has not been restored yet. People are still working on those salaries because there are no jobs in the market. This kind of exploitation has become very serious. Media people aren’t getting minimum wages. Our unions have not been able to raise their voice and do something

about it. People are still working on 20,000 to 30,000,” explained Mansoor Malik, Journalist, Dawn Lahore.

Professional development opportunities are also severely lacking, particularly in smaller cities. “Absence of training is a huge problem for journalists at the district level. Because they need training in new technologies. Unfortunately, there is no opportunity. Journalists try to find their own resources,” said a journalist in Islamabad.

At the same time, resistance to adapting to new realities has worsened the situation. “Another problem is that journalists are not adapting to the changed situation. Most journalists are still doing traditional journalism. All of us need to adjust with the changes. In corporate culture, no one will employ you if you don’t fulfil their requirements. Hands-on training and learning from peers is the only chance,” stressed Zameer Afaqi, Daily City Press, Lahore.

3.3 Gender in Journalism in Central Punjab

The participation of women in journalism in Central Punjab remains limited and fraught with unique challenges. Despite gradual progress, women journalists continue to face harassment, stereotypes, and inadequate institutional support.

“Women journalists have to face harassment and we are not aware what to do about it,” explained Rana Hina, a woman journalist in Faisalabad. For many, the first challenge begins within the profession itself. “When I joined journalism, the first challenge was from other journalists who thought that I should do soft reporting. Secondly, we have to take news from sources. At that time we have to compromise,” she recalled.

The absence of basic facilities further exacerbates these difficulties. “There are no facilities for journalists, no separate facilities are available. There are no separate bathrooms and no childcare facility,” pointed out Rana Hina. While institutional responses have been uneven, some efforts have been made at the local level. “Faisalabad Press Club has provided a separate room and separate washroom for women journalists,” noted a journalist in Faisalabad.



FAISALABAD: A common-room for female journalists inside Faisalabad Press Club. FN photo

Representation within professional bodies reflects a mixed picture. “We have 22 women members and 5 women in the elected body of the Faisalabad Press Club,” said Shahid Ali, President Faisalabad Press Club. Although this demonstrates some inclusion, women remain underrepresented relative to their male counterparts.

Overall, women journalists in Central Punjab navigate a profession shaped by both systemic barriers and gradual reforms. Harassment and gender stereotypes continue to limit their opportunities, while inadequate facilities compound their daily struggles. At the same time, incremental steps—such as improved facilities at the Faisalabad Press Club and growing representation in unions—suggest that slow but tangible progress is being made.

The State of Safety of Journalists in Central Punjab

The safety of journalists in Central Punjab remains a critical concern, with threats coming from both state institutions and non-state actors. Journalists recount experiences of physical violence, intimidation, and lack of institutional protection, creating an atmosphere of constant vulnerability.

“I was beaten by police officers but the Press Club supported me,” recalled Nadeem Javdan, a journalist from Faisalabad. His experience underscores the limited avenues of protection available, where local press clubs often act as the only buffer against state excesses. He added: “We had a row with the Anti-Corruption Department and cases were registered against us as a result.”

Daily reporting also carries constant risks of harassment. “Local threats include your camera can be snatched when you make footage, you can be threatened. Officers of different departments do this,” said Shaukat Wattoo, General Secretary, Faisalabad Union of Journalists. Crime reporters in particular face heightened risks.

“A crime reporter feels most threatened because he reports on crimes. While media institutions make their peace with criminal gangs and government institutions, professional journalists face the full brunt of their wrath,” explained Kashif Fareed, Express News, Crime Reporter, Faisalabad.

The lack of institutional support compounds these dangers. “Press Club is the only platform that protects journalists. Even our own media houses don’t protect us,” lamented Rana Mohisan Farooq, ARY News, Faisalabad.



FAISALABAD: The picture shows the entrance of the Faisalabad Press Club where journalists often gather in face of threats from various avenues.

4.1 Extreme Forms of Censorship in Central Punjab

Journalists in Central Punjab face multiple layers of censorship, ranging from internal editorial controls to restrictive legislation and legal harassment. Employers, laws, and state institutions combine to create an environment of self-censorship and curtailed independence.

“Journalists face censorship by their own organizations and owners of media groups. They feel the threat of losing their job if their reporting falls foul of high-ups,” observed Nadeem Javdan, Journalist, Faisalabad.

For many reporters, legal intimidation has become routine. “You are barred from entering offices, refused access to their version, which results in unbalanced reports. Frivolous cases of defamation are also registered against me—I am facing four such cases. You have to fight your own battle,” explained Azadar Hussain, Reporter, City 42, Faisalabad.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) is a particularly feared tool. “The PECA Act has terrified everyone and made them watch their words. This proverbial Damocles’ sword also hangs over the heads of digital channels in the area,” said Shahid Ali, Federal Union of Journalists, Faisalabad. This legal threat has reinforced self-censorship, with many journalists choosing silence over risk. “Threats have succeeded in establishing self-censorship in journalists,” admitted a journalist in Faisalabad.

The pressures are not only legal but also institutional. “Every institution we work with has its own policies that we have to follow. I have worked as a journalist for fifteen years. A journalist is forced to tailor their stories according to that policy,” explained Rana Hina, Journalist, Faisalabad.

Such restrictions erode both credibility and independence. “Their challenge is also that of credibility because of checks on journalism and various forms of censorship,” noted a journalist in Lahore.

4.2 Legal Cases and Legislative Challenges in Central Punjab

The use of false cases and repressive legislation has become a major obstacle to press freedom in Central Punjab. Police and administrative authorities regularly employ the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and other legal instruments to intimidate journalists and silence dissent.

“Four cases were registered against me. We were reporting a police encounter and the police registered cases showing that we were carrying steel rods, batons. Another FIR was registered when we went to cover the press conference of a political leader aligned with the PTI. Police registered an FIR against four journalists, accusing them of police encounters. A video became viral showing that we were sitting there to cover the event, but police took away our cameras and gadgets,” explained a journalist in Faisalabad.

The PECA Act has become the single most feared law. “PECA has created a threat for journalists. PECA Act has suppressed journalists from carrying out fearless journalism. Both Right to Information and Freedom of Speech have also been compromised due to this law,” said Ghulam Murtaza, General Secretary, Press Club Khushab. The amendments have made it even harsher: “The PECA Act has been amended and punishment has been increased from 2–3 years to up to 10 years of imprisonment,” warned Azadar Hussain, Reporter, City 42, Faisalabad.

The law has been actively used to target journalists. “The moment you report against government officials or businessmen you can be prosecuted under PECA Act. Recently, two journalists from Faisalabad were sentenced to ten years imprisonment in Faisalabad,” noted Shahid Ali, Federal Union of Journalists, Faisalabad.



FAISALABAD: Journalists gathered at Faisalabad Press Club to talk about the increased threats they face as a result of the new amendment to the PECA law. FN photo

Its wide application is evident. “In Central Punjab, 32 cases against journalists have been registered under the PECA Act. I have written to the IG of Police asking if any action was taken against the people who registered these bogus cases,” shared Abid Mughal, President Regional Union of Journalists. Another added: “The executive officers, when angry, find something on journalists’ social media even if it is years old and register a case under the PECA Act.”

For many, the law has created a permanent sense of fear. “[The 2025] Amendment in the PECA Act is very dangerous. The Punjab government has written a letter to its departments that if a news is printed against them, get a case registered against the reporter. It has become too easy to prosecute a journalist due to PECA. It has created a sense of fear among journalists. Their creativity has been impacted. You can’t write against politicians,” stressed Shahid Ali.

Journalist bodies argue that the government itself has become a threat. “Government itself has become a threat. It enacts new laws. Journalists’ organizations have raised their voice, however, government has not budged,” said Shaukat Wattoo, General Secretary, Faisalabad Union of Journalists.

4.3 Harassment, Intimidation, and Dismissals

Alongside legal persecution, journalists in Central Punjab face direct harassment, intimidation, and job insecurity. Police, secret services, media owners, and criminal groups all contribute to an environment of fear.

Journalists are frequently subject to threats from law enforcement. “From the police to secret services, journalists are given threats according to their circumstances and situation,” explained Shahid Ali, President Faisalabad Press Club. He added: “Secret services order us to cover news and where we fail to cover, we receive threats from them. We too serve the nation, however, we get threats.”

Economic intimidation is another tool. “Threats to jobs come from media houses and seniors. A journalist has to obey personal orders of their seniors from media centres. Job is a serious problem now as newspapers are closing. Hundreds of journalists have lost jobs in the name of downsizing. Dunya, Express, Jang, Hum, Ehsaas, and some local newspapers closed down. No one cares about it. A master’s degree holder who has spent ten years in journalism was fired and now his career has been destroyed and he is forced to do other work,” said Shahid Ali.

The shrinking media market adds to this insecurity. “Many large papers had made Faisalabad a media centre. The situation of local newspapers has changed. Many local newspapers print the same content by only changing the masthead to save expenses. Newspapers are doing it to save themselves from closing down. Some papers are doing well as well. Local journalism is ending and the newspapers are doing the job of public relations by printing news of government officials and chambers of commerce,” he explained.

Without protection from media houses, journalists rely on collective solidarity. “Unfortunately, media houses don’t extend any protection to us. We try to help each other through press clubs,” explained Javed Assad, President District Press Club, Hafizabad.

Chapter 5

Media Development Roadmap for Central Punjab: *Recommendations*

To foster a free, independent, and sustainable media landscape in Central Punjab, it is essential to address the challenges highlighted in this report. The following recommendations, derived from focused group discussions and key informant interviews, aim to enhance the professionalism of media in the Central Punjab region:

1. **Support organized advocacy for media freedoms:** Equip journalists and media associations, such as regional press clubs and journalists' unions in Central Punjab, with training and resources to campaign for freedom of expression within the region.
2. **Ensure safety of journalists:** Advocate for the establishment of a formal legal and legislative framework in Punjab province overall to ensure the safety of journalists, in line with federal and Sindh provincial laws.
3. **Enforce tight to information regime:** Strengthen implementation of the Punjab RTI [right to information] law to guarantee access to information, to create an enabling environment for information access.
4. **Provide institutional support for journalists:** Provide long-term and continuous institutional support to empower and capacitate journalists through media development groups, particularly in the larger cities in Central Punjab.
5. **Support digital media practitioners and entrepreneurship:** Offer capacity building and technical resources to native independent digital media platforms in the Central Punjab region and facilitate their connections with national and international counterparts for best practices and knowledge sharing. Build shared digital production facilities in press clubs.
6. **Promote gender affirmative measures:** Support women media practitioners in Central Punjab with capacity building and customized resources to

enhance their professionalism, and conduct gender sensitization drives within the local media industry to encourage greater inclusion of women.

7. **Facilitate networking with national peers:** Facilitate networking opportunities for press clubs and journalists' unions in Central Punjab with their counterparts across Pakistan, including the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and key press clubs in major cities like Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta.
8. **Promote interface between media and civil society:** Support the establishment of a formalized interface among native media, civil society, and academia to foster professional collaboration, create a more informed society, and strengthen democratic processes in the Central Punjab region.
9. **Support media and industry interface:** Strengthen the connections between native media in the Central Punjab region and local academia and business industries to support sustainability initiatives for local media.
10. **Strengthen journalism education:** Assist media departments of universities and media associations based in the Central Punjab region in improving journalism curricula and training courses to promote media professionalism.

ABOUT FREEDOM NETWORK

Freedom Network is Islamabad-based independent media watchdog and development sector research, advocacy and training organization. It was established in 2013.

In 2017, Freedom Network was awarded the prestigious French Republic's "Human Rights Prize" for "its efforts for safety and protection of journalists and promotion of freedom of expression."

OUR MISSION:

To protect civil liberties, including freedom of expression and access to information, and promote an informed society that sees media as a key partner in a democratic and pluralist Pakistan.