# Securing Access to Free Expression (SAFE)

Outcomes of five years of support for journalists & media practitioners



#### **Overview**

Between 2013-2018, the Securing Access to Free Expression (SAFE) program enabled journalists and media practitioners from 12 countries in the Central America, East Africa, Eurasia, MENA, and South Asia regions to better manage and mitigate risks in their work. The 4-5 day in-person trainings, delivered by SAFE's local trainers through the lens of digital identity, physical awareness, and psychosocial care were outcome-oriented. Based on the program's theory of change, SAFE expected to observe a positive change in awareness and knowledge across the areas covered by the training, as well as trainees implementing the skills learned. At the conclusion of the first five years of the program, trainee feedback shows that overall, the trainings achieved their intended goal.

1751

1172

Journalists & Media Practitioners Trained Directly Journalists & Media Practitioners Reached through Solidarity Building Activities





## **Participants report safer practices**

At the end of each SAFE training and in the following six months, participants answered a number of questions to self-assess their gain in awareness, knowledge, and behavior.

 Immediately after the training, 96% of participants reported that they were better able to plan around and mitigate risks. Thus, while participants operated in the same high-risk environment, the training made them feel more prepared to handle those risks. After the training, we started planning with the reporters for their coverage, defining potential risks and having plans in case of detention, and creating list of trustable contacts for reporters. Eurasian Participant

- Three to six months after the training, participants overall reported improved knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to communication strategies, information management, planning, profile management, psychosocial self-care, and situational awareness,<sup>1</sup> all key in ensuring an individual's integrated safety. Results were consistent for female and male training participants.
  - ✓ 83% of participants surveyed were more likely to think carefully about using secure communication channels when planning to transmit sensitive information.
  - √ 82% of participants surveyed were more likely to pay attention to how their work affected their
    emotions, thoughts and behaviors.
  - ✓ 75% of participants surveyed were more likely to be able to pause first before reacting if they were in a difficult situation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 18% of SAFE basic training participants completed the follow-up survey.

### Implementing safety skills

Three to six months after attending the basic training, select participants were asked to recount events where they had used what they learned in the training.<sup>2</sup> 99% of respondents were able to provide an example of an instance where they had used skills learned from the basic training. A few areas where participants were most likely to report using skills from the training included:

- Secure communications, for example changing their password or using a password manager;
- ✓ Planning and situational awareness, including planning before going out on an assignment;
- ✓ Profile management, for example limiting what they share on social networks;
- ✓ Self-care, including spending more time with family and friends.



Figure 2: Words most frequently used by SAFE training participants when describing how they had used skills from the training

✓ Passing on what they learned to colleagues, family members and friends.

## SAFE participants' reflections<sup>3</sup>

"[The night shift from different outlets] received a message to go to cover an incident, however we decided not to go because it was a suspicious message that we were not used to receive. When we heard the shots, we decided to go and found my friend [..] bleeding. If he would have stayed with us or avoided approaching abruptly to the place, he wouldn't have been injured. If I would have decided to go like he did, like I did in the past, I would have taken the shot, but I decided to say no and think before acting."

"[I was covering a sensitive story, and] when things got hot, and I knew I was in trouble for uncovering an evil that was going on in the county, someone somewhere was not amused. I started receiving threats through phone calls and text messages. This is where I decided to call in my fellow journalists from different media houses to assist with highlighting the issue. Once the story got aired in several media outlets, it was now hard for the perpetrators to attach it to me. I shared the risk, and it worked."

"During the elections, I planned carefully all day: I dressed properly, had basic first aid kits, and food. [...] During [the] escalation we [were] in touch and checked-in [with] each other. We didn't have anything like this before at the [outlet] and it was a fantastic feeling to know that somebody supports you. [...] After election day, I took a day off and spent time with my family and friend to relax and cope with the stress I faced during elections."

"When my team and I are going to cover battles, I make it mandatory for all the people with me to wear bulletproof jackets and helmets. I feel that I saved the life of a young reporter, who did not want to wear the jacket at first. He was injured during the battle and without the bullet proof jacket, he would have been killed. I am proud of myself for being more conscious about those risks."

"I have made sure not to travel to the office or to the field when the security situation is not so well, particularly given the apprehension of some anticipated political protest in the city. I also take caution when interacting with females in the communities I visit, as at times it has happened that a lot of men are not welcoming to our presence or visits in the field. However, whenever I visit the field, I make sure to know the entry and exit routes of the places we visit. Also, we try to undertake prior planning before such visits and I locate a safe house in the field of a reliable individual where I could take shelter, in case of an unanticipated eventuality."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 15% of participants in basic trainings took part in the evaluation exercise.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Quotes have been edited for clarity.