

# LOCAL MEDIA REPORT

The State of Local Media After  
the February 6 Earthquakes  
and Policy Recommendations

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December 2024





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*This study was prepared as part of the “Protecting Fundamental Freedoms in Post-Earthquake Turkey” Project supported by Freedom House and enriched with contributions from the workshop titled “Fundamental Rights and Freedom of Expression in the Aftermath of the Earthquake,” held in Istanbul on November 16-17. The views expressed in this study are the author’s sole responsibility and do not reflect the positions of Freedom House or the Freedom Research Association.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The two major earthquakes centered on the Pazarcık and Elbistan districts of Kahramanmaraş, which occurred on February 6, 2023, are recognized as constituting two of Turkey's most devastating natural disasters. These earthquakes impacted a total of 11 provinces, leading to the death and injury of tens of thousands of people and the destruction of innumerable buildings. One of the most critical needs in the chaotic environment that emerged in the hours and days following the earthquake was establishing healthy and continuous communication with the public. At this point, the media strove to assume a critical role in informing the public, coordinating aid efforts, and managing the crisis. The extent to which local media bodies in the affected regions could fulfill this role, alongside the logistical and psychological challenges journalists face, became a contested topic of discussion.

This report aims to examine the role of local media outlets in disaster management, address the challenges faced by journalists following the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes and continue to face them at present, and offer policy recommendations. This report assesses factors such as the communication difficulties encountered by local media representatives during and after the disaster in informing the public, equipment deficiencies, and working conditions in the context of interviews conducted with local journalists. This report additionally makes policy recommendations concerning the financial and psychological struggles experienced by the local media, the post-disaster recovery process, and the measures that must be undertaken to mitigate the consequences of future natural disasters.

Local media plays a critical role in providing information in disaster-stricken regions beyond the reach of the national media. Following the Kahra-

manmaraş earthquakes, however, local media representatives faced great difficulties while fulfilling this important duty. Interruptions in communication, loss of offices and equipment, inadequate energy resources, and psychological traumas significantly hindered local journalists from performing their jobs in the earthquake zones. Alongside these challenges, efforts to relay information to national media outlets often proved insufficient. Resultingly, the full magnitude of the disaster could not be adequately conveyed to the public. Moreover, as frequently mentioned in interviews with local media representatives, the lack of sufficient collaboration between disaster coordination centers and the media and a lack of transparency regarding information sharing led to the deepening of chaos and disinformation.

Another significant issue faced by local media outlooks was the disruptions in ensuring the flow of information after the earthquake. Journalists experienced great difficulties obtaining information from local officials and were often subjected to pressure and censorship by authorities. As frequently voiced in interviews with local journalists, officials did not act transparently in providing information to journalists. On the contrary, officials often sought to censor the press. This state of affairs prevented local media from relaying the actual dimensions of the disaster to the public and further complicated the endeavors undertaken by local journalists in performing their duties. Particularly in regions such as Hatay, among the worst affected by the earthquake, journalists were pressured and censored during the reporting process.

In conclusion, the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes severely tested the capacity of local media to communicate with society as a whole and the role local media plays in disaster management. Local media workers in the regions affected by the earthquake had to cope with physical and material difficulties, psychological traumas, and communication restrictions. Despite these challenges, local media representatives assumed an important responsibility to inform the public and ensure that disaster management was conducted efficiently. However, the shortcomings faced by local media workers during this process contributed to failures in disaster management and disruptions in the flow of information. This report closely examines the difficulties faced by the local media during this period. It offers suggestions as to how local media outlets may assume a more efficient role in the face of future natural disasters.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The data collection process for this report was planned and conducted in three separate phases. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with local journalists. During the first phase, interviews were held with 20 representatives of the local press in Adana, Hatay, Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Adıyaman and Elazığ provinces in March 2023. The second phase was conducted in October 2023 in the provinces above, with face-to-face interviews conducted with journalists in six provinces. The final phase of the study was conducted between August 12–19, 2024, with in-depth interviews conducted with 25 journalists in the provinces declared disaster zones.

The participants were selected from press representatives actively engaged in journalism in the regions affected by the earthquake. Participants were chosen to represent diverse profiles, such as assorted media organizations and experience levels. The study aimed to provide a broad perspective by including both local representatives of national media and local media representatives.

A semi-structured interview method was employed during the data collection process. This approach ensured that the interviews followed a structured framework, permitting participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. Audio and/or video recording devices were used during the interviews, and the data were transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 75 minutes and was typically conducted in the journalists' temporary working environments (e.g., containers, homes, offices, etc.). All journalists participating in the volunteer work were informed that the interviews would be recorded and confidentiality would be maintained. The names of the participants were not disclosed in the report without their consent.

## 3. NATURAL DISASTERS, LOCAL MEDIA AND THE KAHRAMANMARAŞ EARTHQUAKES

Natural disasters are among the most significant challenges faced by societies. Earthquakes, in particular, cause extensive damage owing to their unpredictable nature and impact on infrastructure. The media is critical in informing the public, guaranteeing safety, and supporting effective disaster management in the aftermath of an earthquake. Local media can con-

tribute more directly to disseminating information and crisis management as they understand the needs of the affected populations, regional dynamics, and context compared to national and international media outlets.

This section of the report focuses on the strategic importance of local media during and after disasters. It references academic studies and applies these findings to the broader context following the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes.

The role of the media in mitigating the devastating effects of natural disasters on societies is vital for disaster management. In the aftermath of sudden and catastrophic disasters such as earthquakes, the rapid flow of information saves lives and helps restore social order. Numerous academic studies highlight the importance of the media's role. For example, as highlighted in the Handbook of Disaster Research edited by Rodriguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes (2007), local media plays an effective role in emergency management by providing the public with updates and informing them of developments that may be overlooked or ignored by national media organizations and authorities.

The critical role and responsibilities assumed by local media bodies during crises were evident during the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes. However, it was observed that media personnel could not adequately fulfill their duties. Local journalists reported that they struggled to disseminate information with limited resources in the areas severely affected by the destruction. Communication infrastructure collapsed, and power cuts became routine. The capacity for news production and distribution was constrained in the initial days after the earthquake as journalists relocated from destroyed or damaged offices and attempted to report via social media, relying entirely on mobile phones. These efforts were made difficult by the inadequate supply of power.

In addition to logistical challenges on the ground, measures such as bandwidth throttling on social media platforms implemented by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) significantly slowed the flow of information and contributed to the dissemination of misinformation. Journalists working in the disaster zone explained that such measures not only endangered public safety but also increased the pressure on media representatives who were already striving to report on events with limited resources and no infrastructure.



Local media representatives, as an integral part of the affected community, better understand the needs of fellow disaster victims. Their familiarity with the region's dynamics enables them to communicate more effectively, potentially surpassing national and international press and central authorities regarding communication strategy. Okada's (2016) studies on the 2011 Tohoku earthquake in Japan highlight how local media played a crucial role in disseminating evacuation information, enabling safer relocations, and ensuring smoother evacuation processes by directly informing the public.

After the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, however, journalists, already suffering significant psychological trauma themselves, were found to be working under severe financial and logistical constraints. They tried to guide disaster victims and search and rescue teams but lacked adequate resources to do so effectively.

Local media organizations play a key role in ensuring the accountability of governments and municipalities after disasters. Joseph's (2011) study on the Haiti earthquake demonstrated how local media highlighted deficiencies in government disaster management. This resulted in increased public pressure that led to improvements. Similarly, after the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, local media attempted to address shortcomings in disaster management and amplify the demands of earthquake victims who sought prompt intervention from authorities. Unfortunately, these efforts did not yield significant results. Interviews conducted after the earthquake revealed that local journalists had not received adequate training in disaster reporting and had not made necessary preparations beforehand. Training media personnel in pre-disaster crisis communication, crisis management during disasters, and methods of coping with trauma in the aftermath is paramount (Atsumi & Goltz, 2014).

“The local press was not prepared for this kind of event. Since they were entirely unprepared for disaster reporting or earthquake journalism, they could not have the desired impact.”

– Ferit Demir, Elazığ (Halk TV)

#### **4. CHALLENGES FACED BY LOCAL MEDIA AFTER THE FEBRUARY 6 KAHRAMANMARAŞ EARTHQUAKES**

Journalists in the impacted regions shared their struggles based on their experiences, describing the difficulties of reporting amid the chaotic envi-

ronment and limited resources and facilities. Nearly all journalists reported challenges accessing shelter, food, and hygiene products during the first weeks following the earthquake.

As M. Belgizar Abiri Şimşek noted, the issue was less about having resources and more about efficiently utilizing what was available:

“We were tested on how efficiently we could use the materials. We had to think carefully before capturing every shot due to electricity shortages.”

In addition to logistical challenges, Şimşek highlighted the disaster’s physical and psychological toll. He described the mental strain caused by the scenes they witnessed:

“The psychological impact of what we saw was exhausting. It was a tough situation and hasn’t improved - it’s still not better.”

Most local media workers had to continue their work without access to professional support. Among the journalists interviewed, only one had benefited from a temporary psychological support program provided by the Turkish Journalists’ Union and continued seeking assistance afterward at their own expense. The rest had received no psychological help, underscoring the inadequacy of mental health support programs and the ongoing struggles of local media representatives.

When asked, “What support did you receive? What were you lacking?” Abdurrahman Akçal of Perre News Agency in Adiyaman responded:

“We didn’t receive any support. Representatives of major organizations from other cities came, and visitors inquired about our well-being. We’re grateful for their concern. However, no concrete support arrived - no cameras, no lights, nothing I can list. All I can say is we got a notebook and paper.”

Another significant challenge for local media was combating the rapid spread of misinformation in the aftermath of the earthquakes. For instance, in Hatay, rumors circulated that a dam had burst, and a massive tsunami was imminent. In Adana, it was falsely claimed that a significant gas leak had occurred, posing a risk of a major explosion.

Journalists frequently observed and attempted to counter cases of misinformation. However, the lack of adequate resources often hampered their

efforts, allowing false information to cause panic amongst the public and exacerbate the situation in the disaster zones. Local media organizations struggled to disseminate accurate information, highlighting the critical role of reliable communication during crises.

## **5. THE SITUATION OF JOURNALISTS 1.5 YEARS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE**

Devastating impacts continue to leave deep scars on the lives of local media workers a year and a half after the earthquake. Journalists in devastated regions struggle with acute professional and personal challenges, office shortages, equipment deficiencies, financial struggles, and other pressures. The issues journalists face in impacted cities vary depending on their ability to cope with the disaster's impacts, the adequacy of local support, and the level at which regional needs are met, demonstrating similarities and differences across provinces.

### **Hatay**

Most journalists in Hatay need their own offices. Due to damaged or destroyed workplaces, they have been forced to work from home. Local media representatives have struggled to replace equipment that was lost during the earthquake, receiving minimal support from independent or official journalism organizations. Many journalists continue producing news with limited equipment, including mobile phones, cameras, and tripods acquired through personal means.

Hatay journalists also need more transparency and continued pressure. Many reports receive calls from local authorities attempting to influence their reporting. Infrastructure problems in Hatay negatively impact daily life for both the public and journalists. One journalist attending our workshop mentioned inadequate street lighting as a security concern for female journalists. Limited public transportation and schedules often compel journalists to hitchhike to news sites, which raises concerns regarding safety risks.

### **Adana**

Adana, relatively less affected by the earthquake, shows a more favorable recovery trajectory. During the first days of the disaster, local media work-

ers found shelter in the Çukurova Journalists Association building, where they could access necessities such as the internet, electricity, water, and food. However, this support was temporary, and journalists were compelled to relocate after 1.5 to 3 months. Observations reveal that high rental costs for office spaces now constitute financial burdens for journalists, leading to a significant decline in local newspapers. Increasing costs and declining revenues have pushed many local outlets toward insolvency.

## **Gaziantep**

The İslahiye district of Gaziantep was among the hardest-hit areas. The sole local newspaper, İslahiye'nin Sesi (Voice of İslahiye), struggled to operate in the first months after the earthquake. However, after a year and a half, the newspaper closed due to insufficient support and pressures from the Press Advertisement Agency. Another journalist interviewed during the early stages of the disaster later left Gaziantep for another city. The precarious situation of media outlets and journalists in İslahiye raises serious concerns regarding the sustainability of regional media organizations.

## **Adiyaman**

In Adiyaman, one of the most severely affected provinces, local media professionals operate from a container village established by the municipality. These 21-square-meter containers accommodate entire newspaper offices. Equipment shortages persist, with journalists struggling to access basic tools such as cameras, microphones, lights, and computers. Some media outlets have had to shut down due to these deficiencies, forcing journalists to struggle to continue their profession under dire circumstances.

## **Malatya**

Journalists in Malatya work in containers in a media village established by the municipality. Each 21-square-meter container is described as a cramped and crowded workspace, complicating news production. Although journalists report meeting basic needs, austerity measures have led to the closure or merger of many newspapers. The economic crisis and declining revenues have put local media workers at risk of unemployment, and they have significant difficulties finding alternative jobs.

## Osmaniye

The most pressing issue for local media in Osmaniye is the dramatic decline in the number of newspapers. Weekly newspapers in the city have decreased from 22 to just 2, increasing unemployment among journalists. Local media workers are engaged in solidarity activities to sustain their profession, as unemployment poses a significant threat to the viability of journalism in Osmaniye.

## 6. RESTRUCTURING LOCAL MEDIA: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to its geographical location and climatic characteristics, Turkey has a high risk of natural disasters. The earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, once again revealed these risks' immense and life-threatening scale. However, limiting the scope to these major earthquakes alone would be misleading. Turkey constantly faces earthquakes, natural disasters such as landslides and floods, and human-induced crises such as forest fires. Considering the floods and landslides in the Black Sea region avalanches in Eastern Anatolia, forest fires in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions, and the earthquake risk that threatens almost the entire country, it becomes clear that Turkey is vulnerable to a wide range of disasters across its vast geography. The diversity and persistence of disasters demand a more effective and holistic approach to disaster management and coordination.

Shortcomings in disaster coordination in Turkey have led to chaotic situations and endangered public safety. Disaster preparedness and coordination are undoubtedly multidimensional issues involving numerous separate elements. Various actors, including the government, local administrations, law enforcement, universities, civil society organizations, and regional and national media, must play distinct roles and act in coordination to minimize destruction during preparedness and in the event of a disaster. In this report, we focus specifically on the role of local media organizations. However, since our goal is to improve the state of local media and ensure it develops a more robust structure for future disasters, it is not feasible to discuss local media in isolation from other actors and institutions.

Local media is expected to play a critical role in disaster situations, including accurately informing the public, issuing calls for aid, and preparing so-

ciety for crises. However, the significance of local media tools in disaster coordination is often overlooked, and the support provided to local media needs to be increased. We have prepared several policy recommendations based on the observations of local media professionals who experienced the February 6 earthquakes. These policy recommendations aim to assist the recovery of local media and journalists affected by the February 6 earthquakes and ensure more effective disaster management through media in future crises.

## **6.1. Disaster Coordination Centers**

Disaster coordination centers play critical roles during crises, such as ensuring rapid information flow, aid distribution, and security. Observations by local media workers after the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes reveal that disaster coordination centers fell short in effective collaboration with the media and faced significant issues in sharing transparent information. To strengthen the relationship between disaster coordination centers and local media and to facilitate journalists in performing their duties, the following recommendations are proposed:

In the first instance, unique “Communication Centers” should be established within disaster coordination centers to enable media workers to carry out their duties during crises. These centers should be accessible to all journalists without restrictive accreditation requirements, such as a turquoise press card. We recommend equal access to these centers for all media professionals, regardless of institutional affiliation. These centers will ensure both speedy access to information and uninterrupted news flow. Given the difficulty in accessing information during crises, as experienced during the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, these centers would play a vital role.

One of the primary challenges journalists face during disasters has been the need for more secure working spaces. Therefore, disaster coordination centers should be designed to ensure the safety of journalists. Protected structures like tents or durable containers should include dedicated areas for journalists equipped with basic working tools such as desks and chairs. This would allow media professionals in disaster zones to focus solely on producing news without concerns for their safety. The absence of such secure spaces, as observed during the February 6 earthquake, forced journalists to work in hazardous environments, disrupting the flow of accurate information between local media and the public.

“Mobile units are also essential for disaster coordination centers to support journalists. More development is needed in this area. The Communication Directorate’s mobile units should reach locations where the press is present to provide energy resources.”

– Ömer Karakuş, Adıyaman, Adıyaman’da Haber

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, journalists lost most of their equipment and later faced challenges in continuing their work even with mobile phones due to electricity shortages. Communication centers must be equipped with generators and internet connections to prevent such issues and ensure uninterrupted energy and communication resources for journalists. Power outages make it impossible for media professionals to maintain the flow of information. Therefore, disaster coordination centers must plan essential infrastructure needs, such as electricity and the internet, to provide ongoing support to local media.

To provide journalists with fast and organized access to information, “communication officers” should be appointed within disaster coordination centers. These officers should update journalists on developments in real-time and eliminate potential barriers to accessing information. Considering the rapidly changing nature of information during disasters, communication officers would facilitate the flow of current information, easing journalists’ work and contributing to accurate information reaching the public—a necessity clearly demonstrated during the February 6 earthquakes.

Lastly, journalists must work in an environment free from pressure or censorship throughout crises. While disseminating accurate information during disasters is vital, censorship or pressure on journalists could hinder news flow, causing many media professionals to self-censor in reporting. Therefore, disaster coordination centers should provide the conditions for media workers to report freely and objectively. It is essential to recognize that the independence and freedom of local media from external pressures play a crucial role in ensuring public safety and access to information during disasters.

## **6.2. Press Advertisement Institution (BİK) and RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council)**

As we experienced during the earthquakes on February 6, media organizations directly affected by disasters risk losing their financial and techni-

cal infrastructure. For this reason, institutions responsible for protecting the rights of media organizations and journalists, such as the Press Advertisement Agency (BİK) and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), are obligated to undertake the necessary measures to ensure that local media outlets can continue their operations during and after disasters. In this context, we present several policy recommendations to ensure media continuity during a disaster.

First, to maintain the continuity of media operations during disaster periods, BİK should grant flexible broadcasting rights to outlets operating in affected regions. Especially for print newspapers, measures such as temporarily suspending printing requirements or redirecting advertisement revenues to impacted media organizations should be implemented. Such support would alleviate the financial burdens on media organizations immediately after the disaster while ensuring the flow of accurate information to society.

Economic support is crucial for press organizations operating in impacted areas during the reconstruction phase. In this regard, BİK should establish a special fund for journalists in disaster zones and develop disaster support programs covering essential needs such as rent and equipment. Such support from BİK would enable local media organizations to recover quickly and resume their duties. Furthermore, local media outlets in disaster zones should be exempt from financial restrictions such as those imposed by the Presidential Savings Measures. Exempting regional media organizations from such measures would facilitate their operations during financial crises exacerbated by disasters. These exemptions would enable sustainable broadcasting for media organizations facing increased financial burdens during disasters.

“Official institutions should avoid discrimination if they genuinely intend to support journalists here. We are all prioritizing the interests of society here. Our primary goal is to inform the public transparently, not to manipulate them. Therefore, no distinction should be made based on whether journalists are members of the Press Advertisement Agency. As a freelance journalist, I am not recognized by the agency. This is an unacceptable situation.”

— Mustafa Dilek, Freelance Journalist, Hatay



In disaster zones, media organizations and the entire economic life are severely impacted. Official and private institutions affected by the crisis reduced advertising and promotional expenses, directly reducing media organizations' revenues. Considering this situation, BİK should urgently implement additional programs to support media organizations deprived of advertisement and promotional income. These programs could include contributions to staff salaries and support for printing and distribution costs. Such assistance would enhance the financial sustainability of local media, in particular.

All measures proposed by the Press Advertisement Agency for print media should also apply to visual media. RTÜK should provide the same support to visual media outlets in affected areas to enable their continued operations. Ensuring uninterrupted television and radio broadcasts during disaster periods is critical for informing the public accurately and disseminating calls for help.

Additionally, BİK and RTÜK should develop special support programs for press workers injured or killed in disasters. These programs should include financial support for the families of press workers and rehabilitation assistance for those injured. Such support would help journalists feel more secure while working under challenging conditions in disaster zones.

Finally, support should be provided to media outlets forced to relocate due to disasters or wish to continue their broadcasting activities in other regions. BİK and RTÜK should facilitate the establishment of suitable conditions for these organizations to resume operations in new locations. These measures would allow affected media organizations and journalists to continue their work in other regions.

In conclusion, implementing the above recommendations would contribute to the sustainable operation of media outlets during disasters and ensure the public's access to accurate information. Given the frequent occurrence of disasters in Turkey, such support would enable media organizations to manage crises effectively.

### **6.3. Presidential Communication Center (CİMER)**

During a disaster, the Presidential Communication Center (CİMER) must actively ensure rapid and accurate information flow. Establishing a "Disaster Communication Center" under the auspices of CİMER to support

media outlets and provide reliable information to the public would help reduce misinformation during crises and ensure society's access to accurate information. In this regard, we propose policy recommendations for CIMER to establish effective communication with the media during disasters and improve journalists' working conditions.

The "Disaster Communication Center," to be established under the umbrella of CIMER, should be responsible for assessing the conditions of journalists in disaster zones, identifying their needs, and maintaining regular information flow with the media. This center must act swiftly from the onset of a disaster to ensure journalists can safely perform their duties. The center's mission should focus on meeting journalists' needs and guaranteeing that the public has reliable access to information.

As an official body, CIMER must facilitate journalists' work in disaster areas without hindrance, swiftly issuing all necessary permits and completing official processes. To prevent journalists from encountering obstacles in accessing information or reporting, CIMER should provide them with all the required support. In this regard, journalists tasked with informing the public during disasters can focus on their work without being delayed by bureaucratic challenges.

CIMER has hitherto addressed misinformation during disasters primarily through its Disinformation Combating Center by refuting false information. However, this practice often leads to perceptions of censorship and information restrictions. CIMER should instead combat misinformation by opening transparent information channels and ensuring journalists have access to accurate data. This transparent flow of information prevents public panic and facilitates access to trustworthy information during crises.

CIMER should adopt an impartial accreditation policy for journalists in disaster zones and beyond. Practices that sometimes exclude certain journalists while favoring others perceived as aligned with the government should be avoided. Equal access opportunities should be provided to all journalists. This approach would ensure that society can access information through various media outlets, contributing to developing reliable and diverse news sources.

In cases where journalists are stranded or working under security risks in disaster areas, CIMER should take swift action to evacuate or relocate them to safer areas if necessary. Ensuring the safety of journalists not only

protects their lives but also guarantees public access to information. Support mechanisms for media workers during disasters would boost their morale and enable them to perform their duties more effectively.

For the Presidential Communication Center to maintain effective communication and collaboration with the media during disasters, it is vital to ensure the public's access to accurate and secure information during crises. Implementing the recommendations outlined above will enable media outlets to carry out their responsibilities during disasters without impediments, enhancing CIMER's role in crisis management. Additionally, establishing institutional mechanisms like the Disaster Communication Center will help maintain the integrity of information flow during disasters, bolstering public resilience in crises.

#### **6.4. Social Security Institution (SGK) and Local Governments**

As we have frequently emphasized, media outlets' continued operation during natural disasters is crucial for ensuring public access to accurate information. However, media organizations affected by disasters face significant economic and logistical challenges. Addressing these challenges involves supporting the social security needs of journalists and local media. In this context, the Social Security Institution (SGK) and local governments should develop comprehensive support programs for media organizations. Below are detailed measures that SGK and local governments should take to ensure the continuity of media operations during disaster periods.

Media organizations operating in affected areas should be exempted from taxes and social security premiums. SGK should implement such measures immediately after a disaster to alleviate the economic burden on media organizations. Local media outlets, in particular, face difficulties in maintaining operations due to sudden revenue declines and increased costs. Tax and premium exemptions would reduce the risk of unemployment for journalists and allow them to practice their profession without the fear of job loss, thereby enabling a steady flow of accurate information to society during and after the disaster.

Exemptions from utility bills for essential services such as electricity and the internet should be granted to help media organizations continue their op-

erations after a disaster. The uninterrupted availability of energy and communication services is critical for media workers to fulfill their responsibility of informing the public. Relevant institutions can introduce temporary utility bill exemptions for media outlets in disaster areas, thereby reducing their financial burden and ensuring the continuity of information flow.

“But we lost a lot of time before we recovered. We had to fend for ourselves, but we wished we had support. Our resentment is about the past. There’s still an opportunity now to make improvements. For example, insurance discounts can be offered to media organizations. Some of our colleagues lost their cameras, computers, and radios. These items of equipment could have been replaced, but they weren’t. From this point forward, an electricity discount would help ensure the continuity of businesses.”

—Abdurrahman Akçal, Perre News Agency, Adiyaman

Local governmental bodies, especially municipalities, are responsible for meeting the basic needs of journalists working in disaster zones, such as shelter, food, and hygiene, just as they do for the public. Media workers in disaster regions might face difficulties meeting these needs, as observed during the February 6 earthquakes. Local governments should provide temporary shelters, such as tents, containers, or safe areas, and meet food and hygiene needs for media personnel. This support would help journalists focus on their duties.

The support measures taken by SGK and local governments for media organizations in disaster areas would contribute to the survival of media outlets and the public’s access to accurate information during crises. Structural measures such as tax and premium exemptions, utility bill support, and meeting basic needs would help media workers continue their duties. Implementing such structural arrangements would ensure the continuity of information flow during disaster periods and enhance the resilience of media organizations in times of crisis.

## **6.5. Independent Journalism Associations**

During a disaster, independent journalism associations must assume significant responsibilities to protect journalists’ working rights and meet their needs. However, our observations indicate that the effectiveness of independent journalism organizations in disaster zones needs to be improved, causing hardships for many journalists. Below are detailed mea-

asures that independent journalism organizations should take to provide more effective support to journalists in disaster areas and strengthen the spirit of solidarity.

Job dismissals and the inability to pay salaries severely affect journalists during disaster periods. Unions should secure the working rights of journalists operating in disaster zones and actively prevent unemployment or unpaid salaries. In particular, after the Presidential Austerity Measures of May 2024, many newspapers decided to close or merge, putting journalists in the region at risk of unemployment. Unions must quickly contact journalists affected by disasters, provide them with legal support, and protect their rights.

Independent journalism organizations should prepare special support programs to address journalists' needs during disasters. Associations, foundations, unions, and international organizations must increase their presence in affected areas in proportion to the scale of the disaster and swiftly implement these support programs. Such programs would provide financial and psychological support to journalists, ensuring the continuity of information flow in disaster zones.

Journalists working in disaster zones are sometimes subjected to censorship and pressure. Independent journalism organizations must stand in solidarity against such situations and defend journalists' freedom of expression. Ensuring that accurate information reaches the public during crises is critical, and independent journalism organizations must support against such pressures, allowing journalists to work safely.

Independent journalism organizations should constantly communicate with state institutions such as the Press Advertisement Agency, RTÜK, the Presidential Directorate of Communications, and local governments in disaster zones. They must actively contribute to addressing journalists' needs and solving their problems. This communication will facilitate press workers' safe, healthily and well-supported functioning during disasters. Moreover, such collaboration allows media workers to report issues and find solutions quickly.

To address the problems journalists, face in disaster areas, these problems must first be identified. It has been observed that independent journalism platforms in Turkey need more reports, solutions, and statistical studies concerning regional issues and suggestions. Therefore, independent

journalism organizations must analyze the problems in the region in detail, prepare reports supported by statistical data, and develop solutions. The inadequacy of such reporting and solution-focused efforts by independent journalism platforms in Turkey has been noted. These reports highlight the problems and help policymakers make informed decisions.

By adopting a more active and supportive role during disasters, independent journalism organizations can improve journalists' working conditions and ensure accurate information flow to society. Implementing the recommendations outlined above will secure job guarantees for media professionals during crises and strengthen freedom of expression and solidarity. Such structural arrangements will enable independent journalism organizations to play a more effective role in disaster management, contributing to safeguarding the profession of journalism even under disaster conditions.

## **6.6. Disaster Training and Support Activities for Journalists**

Journalists in regions impacted by disasters are responsible for informing the public, conveying safety information, and relaying calls for assistance during crises. However, observations reveal that journalists often need more training and experience in disaster situations. This shortcoming forces journalists to work in conditions that pose risks to themselves and society. Below, how disaster training and supportive activities can help journalists work more effectively and safely during disasters are explained.

Training programs should be developed to teach journalists how to conduct themselves during emergencies. These programs should impart specialized skills in disaster journalism, guide journalists on how to access accurate information during crises and communicate it to the public quickly and safely.

“Professional media organizations in Turkey must work very seriously on this issue.”

Ferit Demir, Elaziğ, Halk TV

The lack of such training leads to issues such as journalists needing access to their equipment or being unable to deliver breaking news to the public during disasters. Training will enable journalists to learn about equipment usage, accurate information delivery, and safe reporting practices.

“Professional journalist organizations in Turkey should conduct seminars on disasters, starting at the local level, but these are not done seriously. I don’t think they are conducted seriously. Efforts should last a few days, and serious training should be provided.”

Ferit Demir, Elazığ, Halk TV

Journalists must prioritize their safety during disasters. However, studies reveal that many journalists need more awareness and often put themselves in danger while performing their duties. Training programs should emphasize the importance of protecting physical safety in emergencies and provide practical knowledge. Journalists who develop a strong sense of self-protection can work more effectively without risking their safety during disasters.

Journalists working in disaster zones are frequently exposed to severely traumatic events. This negatively affects their mental health, making it difficult for them to carry out their duties effectively. Training on coping with trauma should be organized, and psychological support programs should be offered for journalists. Such support would enhance journalists’ psychological resilience, enabling them to perform better under stressful conditions.

Journalists must adhere to ethical guidelines when sharing images and reporting news during periods of natural disaster. Considering the potential impact of crisis reporting on society, journalists should be provided with comprehensive training on ethical principles. Training sessions should address topics such as respecting the privacy of victims and avoiding content that could provoke public outrage. Journalists with a strong moral awareness can gain the public’s trust during disasters and ensure a more effective flow of information.

The spread of misinformation and disinformation during disasters can negatively impact public safety and morale. Special training programs should be organized to equip journalists with the skills to combat disinformation and develop reflexes against manipulation. These trainings ensure that journalists convey accurate information and play a crucial role in preventing the public from being misinformed.

The establishment of disaster journalism training and support programs will enable media professionals to work more consciously, safely, and in accordance with ethical principles during disaster periods. Such structured training and support activities will ensure the continuity of informa-

tion flow in disaster zones, ensure public access to accurate information, and safeguard the mental and physical health of journalists. Investments in training for disaster journalism will help media professionals become better prepared and more effective in future crises.

## **7. HOW TO STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND LOCAL MEDIA?**

The “Post-Earthquake Fundamental Rights and Freedom of Expression: The Role of NGOs and Local Media Workshop,” held in Istanbul on November 16–17, served as a crucial meeting point to explore the potential for enhancing collaboration between media and civil society organizations (NGOs) and to discuss how such collaboration could increase societal benefits. The workshop identified existing challenges, including those experienced during crises such as natural disasters. General principles and concrete proposals were developed to strengthen the partnership between these two key actors within a broader framework.

Firstly, mutual perceptions sometimes make it difficult for civil society organizations and media bodies to develop effective collaboration. Stereotypically, some media professionals believe NGOs merely see them as a “news source” or a “PR tool.” This perception results in a gap in conveying the impact of NGOs’ work to the public and undermines the trust relationship between both parties. Additionally, criticism has been directed at the media’s focus on short-term events, which often leaves the long-term efforts of NGOs under reported.

On the media side, various challenges emerge in relations with NGOs. Many media bodies express concerns that some NGOs are perceived as politically biased, negatively impacting transparency and trust during collaboration processes. Additionally, it has been emphasized that NGOs often need a more systematic approach to developing institutional cooperation with the media, with relationships frequently relying on personal connections. Such fragmented and non-institutional approaches are seen as barriers to fostering sustainable relationships between the media and NGOs.

Overall, the perceptions discussed during the workshop were identified as critical factors hindering NGOs and the media from effectively fulfilling their roles in society. While collaboration between the media and NGOs often gains importance during disasters, this cooperation is typically re-



Policy Area	Policy Recommendation	Explanation
Disaster Coordination Centers	Establishing Communication Centers	<i>Special “Communication Centers” should be established to enable journalists to perform their duties effectively during disasters. These centers should be open to all press members and provide rapid access to information. Restrictions such as requiring a turquoise press card should not apply to journalists.</i>
	Ensuring Safe Workspaces	<i>Disaster Coordination Centers should be designed to ensure the safety and security of journalists. Protected areas such as tents or durable containers should be allocated specifically for journalists.</i>
	Strengthening Energy and Communication Infrastructure	<i>To ensure uninterrupted information transfer by media workers, generators and internet access should be provided, along with access to energy and communication resources for journalists.</i>
	Ensuring Transparent Information Flow	<i>Communication officers should be assigned at disaster coordination centers to provide journalists with information during disaster situations.</i>
	Providing a Press Environment Free from Pressure and Censorship	<i>Media workers should be provided with an environment where they can report freely and objectively, free from pressure and censorship.</i>
Press Advertisement Institution (BİK) and RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council)	Provision of Flexible Broadcasting Rights and Advertisement Support	<i>Flexibility should be granted to media organizations in disaster areas; advertisement revenues should be directed towards media organizations affected by the disaster.</i>
	Creation of Special Allowances and Support Programs	<i>Economic support programs such as rent, and equipment assistance should be offered to media organizations in disaster zones by the Press Advertisement Agency (BİK).</i>
	Exemption from Presidential Savings Measures	<i>Media organizations in disaster areas should be exempted from these savings measures implemented immediately after the disaster by the Press Advertisement Agency.</i>
	Expansion of Economic Support Programs	<i>Salary, printing and distribution support should be provided to media organizations in disaster areas that lack advertisement and commercial revenues.</i>
	RTÜK Support for Visual Media	<i>All supports offered by BİK for print media should be applicable to visual media and RTÜK should ensure these supports are provided.</i>
	Support Programs for Injured or Deceased Media Workers	<i>Rehabilitation and financial support programs should be offered to media workers affected by disasters.</i>
	Support for Media Organizations Forced to Relocate	<i>Support should be provided to media organizations forced to relocate due to disasters, allowing them to continue operations in their new locations.</i>

<b>Presidential Communication Center (CIMER)</b>	Establishment of Disaster Communication Centers	<i>Special “Disaster Communication Centers” should be established to ensure the safety and meet the needs of journalists in disaster areas.</i>
	Provision of Transparent and Unhindered Working Opportunities	<i>Necessary official procedures should be quickly completed through CIMER to allow journalists to perform their duties transparently and without obstacles.</i>
	Ensuring Transparent Information Flow in Combating Disinformation	<i>Instead of merely refuting false information, transparent information channels should be opened to provide journalists with access to accurate information.</i>
	Implementation of Impartial Accreditation Policies	<i>Impartial accreditation policies should be applied to journalists working in disaster areas, ensuring equal access for all journalists.</i>
	Evacuation and Support for Journalists	<i>For journalists in distress or working under security risks in disaster areas, their evacuation and transfer to safer regions should be promptly facilitated by CIMER.</i>
<b>Social Security Institution (SGK) and Local Governments</b>	Tax and Insurance Premium Exemption	<i>Tax and insurance premium exemptions should be provided to alleviate the financial burden on media organizations in disaster areas.</i>
	Provision of Bill Exemptions	<i>Exemptions for services like electricity and internet should be granted to ensure that media organizations can continue their broadcasting activities.</i>
	Meeting Basic Needs	<i>Local administrations should meet the housing, food and hygiene needs of media workers in disaster areas.</i>
<b>Independent Journalist Associations</b>	Securing Union Rights	<i>Unions should secure the working rights of journalists in disaster areas to prevent layoffs and issues such as inability to pay salaries.</i>
	Preparation of Disaster Support Programs	<i>Independent journalism organizations should develop special support programs for journalists during disaster periods.</i>
	Strengthening Resilience Against Censorship and Pressure	<i>Independent organizations should protect the freedom of expression of journalists working in disaster areas and foster solidarity.</i>
	Playing an Active Role in Communication and Problem Resolution with Institutions	<i>Independent journalism organizations should collaborate with government institutions and local administrations to solve the problems faced by journalists.</i>
	Identifying Problems and Statistical Reporting	<i>Statistical reports should be prepared to identify the issues faced by journalists in disaster areas and to develop solutions.</i>

<b>Disaster Training and Support Activities for Journalists</b>	Development of Emergency Training Programs	<i>Journalists should be trained on accessing accurate information and reporting quickly and safely during crises.</i>
	Increasing Journalists' Awareness of Safety	<i>Journalists should be made aware of measures to protect their physical integrity during disasters.</i>
	Psychological Support and Trauma Management Training	<i>Journalists should be provided with training and psychological support services to help them cope with trauma.</i>
	Emphasis on Ethical Guidelines	<i>Training on ethical principles should be provided to journalists, considering the impact of crisis reporting on society.</i>
	Developing Reflexes Against Disinformation and Manipulation	<i>Training programs should be organized to enable journalists to combat disinformation and convey accurate information effectively.</i>

active, as it is triggered solely by emergencies. A proactive collaboration model is necessary for these two actors to generate long-term and sustainable societal benefits.

At this point, transforming perceptions between the media and NGOs and building a foundation of trust based on shared values becomes crucial. For effective collaboration, both sides must better understand each other's operational dynamics and strengthen this relationship through institutional frameworks. A model based on transparency, continuity, and mutual trust is necessary for the media and NGOs to solve societal problems effectively.

Overcoming the barriers perceptions create requires cooperation and a mutual understanding between these two elements. The workshop also examined how NGOs' field access capabilities and the media's capacity to disseminate information could be integrated. When NGOs' knowledge of local dynamics and proximity to communities combine with the media's responsibility to inform the public, the potential for effective societal transformation opens up. Another critical issue raised during the workshop was resource and capacity shortages. Local media representatives highlighted how inadequate equipment and manpower during disasters severely limited their ability to perform their duties on the ground. Similarly, NGOs noted that financial and logistical constraints during crises hindered their effectiveness. These deficiencies make it harder to promptly meet public needs and prevent local media and NGOs from fully complementing each other's roles.

Additionally, the necessity of collective action to combat disinformation was emphasized. False information and rumors circulating after earthquakes created significant panic and mistrust among the public. The workshop underlined the importance of joint efforts by the media and NGOs to ensure the rapid dissemination of accurate information during such crises. For example, data collected by NGOs in the field, shared with the public through the media, could prevent the spread of misinformation and build public trust. In this context, creating fact-checking teams and strengthening coordination between the media and NGOs during crises were proposed as solutions.

Finally, the workshop highlighted the concept of “shared benefit.” It was emphasized that local media and NGOs should strengthen their relationships during crises and in normal times. This would enable the development of long-term solutions to meet public needs. Both sides must move beyond seeing each other as competitors or mere tools and learn to work towards common goals. In this regard, organizing regular meetings and joint activities involving both parties were recommended.

The issues and proposed solutions discussed during the workshop provided a significant roadmap for improving collaboration between the NGOs and the media in disaster management. Addressing fundamental barriers such as communication gaps, trust issues, and resource shortages requires both sides to adopt a more proactive approach. Ensuring the flow of accurate and reliable information during crises is not only a responsibility of the media and NGOs but also a vital necessity for society. Therefore, implementing the suggestions discussed during the workshop is key to building a more resilient societal structure against future crises.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

The February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş earthquakes marked a historical turning point in revealing the role of local media in disaster management and the challenges it faces in Turkey. This report analyzes local media’s indispensable position and importance as a critical channel for communicating with society. It also presents policy recommendations to prepare local media for similar disasters better and accelerate recovery following the earthquakes.

Interviews conducted in the first, sixth, and eighteenth months after the earthquake revealed that local media professionals face equipment shortages, office and housing problems, and high rental costs. Many local newspapers were forced to shut down or merge. Hundreds of local journalists either had to abandon their professions due to the closure of their workplaces or financial difficulties. In one case, a journalist was observed working as a factory laborer after a long period of unemployment. Some journalists relocated and needed help finding stable employment in new cities. Meaningful improvements in many conditions have yet to be achieved despite 18 months since the earthquakes.

The details in this report clearly highlight the need for local media to be better prepared for natural disasters and all types of crises. Policy recommendations such as creating supportive environments for media within Disaster Coordination Centers, organizing disaster training programs for journalists, and increasing access to psychological support programs are critical. Additionally, institutions like the Press Advertisement Agency and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) must support local media and establish special funds for crisis periods.

The devastation experienced during the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes revealed the necessity of improving local media and the overall crisis management system. In this context, the role of media in disaster processes must be redefined in terms of ethics and professional resilience. Establishing a media ecosystem that safeguards the public's right to access information, combats disinformation, and strengthens crisis communication should be a shared goal of all stakeholders, including local media bodies and local civil society organizations.