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Freedom of Press Association: Reality and Challenges

Dr. Assaad Sadaka



This publication is within the project entitled "Media Reform to Enhance Freedom of Expression in Lebanon", implemented by Maharat Foundation, Legal Agenda and the European Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC) with the support of the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon. The project aims at enhancing Freedom of Expression in Lebanon through the promotion of media law reform as a priority on the national agenda and improvement of the environment for media coverage on the transparency and accountability of elections process.

The project supports the publication of background papers produced by Maharat Foundation on the local Lebanese context and by MJRC on the European standards and best fit recommendations for Lebanon. The papers cover 6 main themes: Protection of journalists and their sources, Associations of journalists, Decriminalization, Incentives, Innovation, and Regulation, co-regulation and self-regulation opportunities for the media.



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This study was prepared within the project to reform media and promote freedom of expression in Lebanon:

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Media and Journalism Research Center (MJRC) MJRC:

[MJRC](#) is an independent media research and policy think tank that seeks to improve the quality of media policymaking and the state of independent media and journalism through research, knowledge sharing and financial support. The center's main areas of research are regulation and policy, media ownership and funding, and the links between tech companies, politics and journalism.

Maharat Foundation:

[Maharat Foundation](#) is a women-led freedom of expression organization based in Beirut dedicated to campaigns grounded in research and strengthening connections between journalists, academics, and policy makers.

It advances and enables freedom of expression, quality information debate and advocates for information integrity online and offline. Maharat promotes innovation and engages the journalistic community and change agents within Lebanon and the wider, MENA region to promote inclusive narratives and debates and to counter misinformation, disinformation, and harmful content.

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1 .EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lebanese media currently contends with a myriad of contradictions and challenges, foremost among them being the absence of a comprehensive and holistic regulatory framework governing operational mechanisms across all sectors. This predicament necessitates the implementation of updated practices to supplant an antiquated legal structure fraught with numerous constraints and issues, many of which trace their origins back to the year 1962. This legislation encompasses an antiquated definition of the press and its practitioners, focusing primarily on newspapers, print publications, and publishing houses. However, it fails to address the significant advancements witnessed in the audiovisual media sector or acknowledge the emergence of digital media, which has become a pivotal and interactive force shaping public opinion on a global scale. Despite the Lebanese legislative body enacting numerous laws and regulations concerning television and radio broadcasting since 1994, these initiatives have often failed to align with the intended trajectory. Instead, ownership of television and broadcast media has been divided along political and sectarian lines, fostering the proliferation of clientelist media outlets that operate outside standardized norms and regulations. These legislations did not either take into account the journalists, hosts, and technicians who work with these media outlets, nor the rights and obligations that this entails. As these people are not subject to the provisions of the Publication Law in terms of syndicate organization, and since they do not work in the print media and news agency, this category of workers in the audiovisual media sector was left without any syndicate that defends its rights.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Moreover, the Lebanese media, particularly traditional outlets, grapples with an unprecedented crisis concerning funding, production costs, and sustainability. Consequently, numerous media entities have shuttered, while those that endure find themselves navigating a landscape marked by economic challenges and technological advancements. These dynamics dictate new operational paradigms, necessitating adaptations in interactions and engagement with diverse audience demographics. The funding crisis and the lack of supportive and protective legislation have had profound implications for workers in the media sector, leaving them vulnerable to sudden layoffs. Over the past few years, hundreds have already lost their jobs as a result. For those who have managed to sustain their careers, they find themselves susceptible to various forms of coercion and blackmail that compromise their social security and livelihoods. These challenges unfold against the backdrop of the most severe economic conditions in Lebanon's history. These circumstances underscore the urgent need for the establishment of modern legislation that aligns with the rapid evolution of the media landscape. Such laws should redefine the framework of media work to safeguard the rights of journalists and adapt to the prevailing transformations. Paramount among these changes is the emergence of a vast media landscape encompassing print, audiovisual, and digital platforms, alongside the steady growth and escalating influence of social media platforms.

2 .DEFINITION OF JOURNALISTS

By reviewing the texts related to the regulation of the work of Lebanese media, one can note that the only definition that pertains to the journalist's job is the one stipulated in the Law of 1962, specifically Article 10 thereof, amended pursuant to the legislative decree number 104 of 30/06/1977, which defines the journalist as "every person who has chosen journalism as their career and source of income pursuant to the requirements stipulated in Articles 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 thereof."¹

Article 11 thereof further adds that "journalism includes writing and proofreading in print media, as well as providing them with information, translations, investigations, and press material, including photographs and illustrations."

Article 22 thereof stipulates the requirements that every journalist must fulfill in accordance with the definition included in Articles 10 and 11 thereof, as follows:

1. Being Lebanese and no less than 21 years old
2. Possessing at least a Lebanese Baccalaureate II certificate or its equivalent and having practiced journalism for four years following their admission into an internship in journalism; Possessing a Bachelor's Degree in Journalism from any institution affiliated with or accredited by the Lebanese University
3. Enjoying their civil and political rights and not being convicted of any heinous crimes
4. Practicing journalism only without any other profession, in accordance with the principles specified by the bylaws

Therefore, and according to the current Lebanese media reality, it appears that this definition and these conditions do not cover the work of thousands of Lebanese journalists and media professionals who are employed in audiovisual media outlets and print media institutions, in addition to digital media workers, most of whom are not affiliated with any press-related syndicates, or do not meet some of the work requirements.

2 .DEFINITION OF JOURNALISTS

With reference to this brief definition, it becomes apparent that the antiquated law primarily addressed the procedures for issuing print publications and newspapers, along with the roles of journalists involved, yet it notably omitted any provisions regarding the rights of these workers. Likewise, the Audiovisual Media Law of 1994 primarily concentrated on the procedures for establishing media outlets, obtaining licenses, and associated operational mechanisms, encompassing prohibitions, advertising regulations, engagement with Tele Liban, and censorship protocols for media operations. However, it notably lacked provisions safeguarding the rights of individuals working within this sector. In this context, the President of the Syndicate of Workers in Audiovisual in Lebanon, Rindala Jabbour, noted that the old law of 1994 is no longer valid in light of the current media reality, and that it only dealt with the privileges provided by media outlets and those entitled to these privileges. Ms. Jabbour further highlighted that the same individuals and factions, often divided along sectarian lines, maintained involvement, particularly concerning the privileges allocated to print media workers, including monopolistic practices, as well as the allocation of radio and TV broadcast frequencies. This scenario has effectively rendered the Lebanese media vulnerable to the influence of a select group of influential figures, disregarding the significant transformations affecting both the media sector and its workforce.

The Public Relation and Media Manager at the Syndicate of Press Editors, Wassef Awada, asserts that the main problem lies in the absence of a comprehensive media law to this date, and the fact that the Publications Law that deals with print media is the only law available in this regard, but that it is outdated. He also refers to the Audiovisual Media Law of 1994 that tackles television and radio, despite the existence of some proposals and draft laws for the media that have been circulating in the Parliament for about ten years and which address all media outlets. However, these draft laws and proposals have not been formalized yet.

2 .DEFINITION OF JOURNALISTS

These laws, initiatives, and proposals impose various constraints on the media and journalists, yet they fall short in adequately safeguarding the rights of media professionals or accurately delineating the scope of their work, which fundamentally aims to convey messages. Notably, Decree 104 issued in 1977 stands out as an exception. It amended the Publications Law, abolishing pretrial detention of journalists, prohibiting their imprisonment, as well as precluding their referral to courts or investigations outside the Publications Court. Awada believes that the problem with the Publications Law is that it limits the membership of journalists to syndicates (the Press Editors Syndicate) to journalists working in print media.

“We at the Syndicate of Press Editors have transcended this concept, and we now accept editors working in all media outlets, including digital and electronic media.”

Awada adds: “Perhaps the greatest flaw in the Publications Law is that it limits journalists’ membership in the Editors’ Syndicate to the Syndicate’s roster committee, which is composed of the President of the Press Syndicate, the President of the Syndicate of Press Editors, members of both syndicates, and a representative of the Ministry of Information. What is astonishing about this is that a press editor must submit to their employer in order to join the syndicate, which is truly sad. The International Federation of Journalists has even approached the Syndicate of Press Editors in this matter more than once, for how can a worker request the approval of their employer to join a labor union? It is in fact a strange phenomenon that is not seen anywhere else in the world.”

3. JOURNALISTS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND HOW TO PROTECT THEM

According to statistics released by the Syndicate of Press Editors, there are approximately 1007 female and male journalists who are members of the syndicate, while the Syndicate of Workers in Audiovisual comprises around 700 male and female members. However, the total number of workers across various media sectors is estimated to be twice these figures. This indicates that the majority of journalists in Lebanon are not affiliated with any syndicate. In addition to some members of the Syndicate of Press Editors subscribing to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) through their respective media outlets rather than through the syndicate, the antiquated law lacks explicit provisions outlining rights or protections for journalists. Financially, the media law fails to stipulate any entitlements or guarantees that must be afforded to journalists during or after their tenure, leaving them vulnerable to the discretion of media owners and market forces that frequently do not adequately address journalists' social and economic rights. According to the head of the Press Editors' Syndicate, Joseph Al-Qasifi, there are no clear and specific financial rights that journalists are entitled to, but rather they are subject to the labor law which often does not do justice to journalists, as employers refuse to remunerate them with more than the minimum wage. He sees that the only solution would be to conclude collective labor agreements which would put pressure on media owners in terms of the rank and salary scale, ensure continuity of work, successful working conditions, and secure both parties' interests. Kossaifi adds that "we have attempted to implement this solution for a long time in the Syndicate of Press Editors, yet we failed, since it requires the consent of all parties, that is, newspapers and print publications owners, media outlets, and the Syndicate itself." With regard to the protection of journalists from legal prosecution, Kossaifi added, "We think that all the syndicates that intend to support workers in the media field attempt to deal with the rights of journalists and protect them, yet, up until today, they are still summoned by the information crimes office and sent to courts other than the Print Media Court. Therefore, the new draft law suggests the establishment of a regulatory body that deals with the protection of journalists, adopting a new sanction mechanism which entails warnings or fines." The President of the Syndicate finds it strange that the old law does not guarantee in any way the right to a decent life for journalists.

3. JOURNALISTS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND HOW TO PROTECT THEM

Regarding the Syndicate of Press Editors, the President asserts its foundation on legal grounds and highlights its established recognition within Lebanese, Arab, and international spheres, evidenced by its membership in prestigious bodies such as the International Federation of Journalists and the Union of Arab Journalists. In terms of its contributions, members benefit from immunity and moral protection, supported by a legal office dedicated to defending journalists. This commitment is underscored by a fundamental principle: the refusal to assail any journalist. Kossaifi adds, "The card carried by journalists is in itself an element of protection, as no one dares to harm them when they have it, and the Syndicate would protect them from danger in such cases. The journalist can sometimes be wrong and bear a certain responsibility, yet we are looking for the best ways to protect him. We are in constant contact with UNESCO and UN bodies, such as the Federation of Arab Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists, and we are not alone in defending the interests of journalists."

Rindala Jabbour, President of the Syndicate of Workers in Audiovisual, contends that the outdated media law primarily addressed media institutions rather than individual journalists and their rights. The focus of this law predominantly centered on institutional matters such as licensing procedures, operational mechanisms, prohibitions, advertising regulations, collaboration with Tele Liban, and censorship protocols. Jabbour highlights that the Syndicate of Workers in Audiovisual maintains an official affiliation with the Ministry of Labor and maintains a moral rapport with the Ministry of Information. The Syndicate frequently engages with the Ministry of Information concerning media activities and proposals for the advancement of media laws. However, Jabbour refutes the notion of receiving economic and social contributions from official bodies. Instead, the Syndicate endeavors to address this shortfall by assisting members in securing special contracts with insurance institutions, hospitals, medical practitioners, laboratories, as well as negotiating collective rates and special incentives with clubs and restaurants.

3. JOURNALISTS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND HOW TO PROTECT THEM

Moreover, the Syndicate appoints legal representatives to aid members in cases of arbitrary dismissal, a phenomenon that has regrettably surged in recent times. Wassef Awada observes that the recent economic crisis in Lebanon has underscored the dire circumstances confronting journalists on both economic and social fronts. In the absence of adequate social and economic protections, coupled with the Syndicate of Press Editors' inability to effectively address these challenges due to budgetary constraints—whether from the state or its own limited income—journalists find themselves particularly vulnerable (the current annual subscription for editors is equal to 250,000 LBP, i.e. 2.5 USD).

He further adds: “We have tried hard in the last ten years to secure fundings for the syndicate and journalists, through several proposals submitted to the Ministry of Information and the government authorities, yet we failed to do so in practice. The syndicate has collected a fair amount of money over the years, which was supposed to be allocated to the construction of a private establishment for the Syndicate that comprises different departments that generate income, but unfortunately, the money was frozen in the banks due to the current economic downfall faced by all the depositors.”

“Although we referred back to the competent authorities, we failed to provide social protection for journalists due to the inability of the authorities to meet our demands, except for the establishment of the social security law for retired journalists by the Lebanese Parliament last year.¹ The law is yet to enter into action due to the resignation of the government and the inability to issue regulatory decrees for this law.”

1- The Lebanese Parliament approved Law No. 263 issued on 1/5/2022, relating to subjecting Lebanese journalists and photographers who do not benefit from any contributions to the provisions of the Social Security Law - with regard to medical care in cases of illness and maternity only.

3. JOURNALISTS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND HOW TO PROTECT THEM

In light of the authorities' neglect and the Syndicate's limitations, journalists have been left to navigate their fate without adequate social protections, particularly in the wake of the depreciation of the Lebanese currency. Consequently, they find themselves susceptible to external and local pressures, exacerbating their vulnerability to external and local temptations. Journalist Youssef Diab notes that, "In addition to the lack of organization and failure to gather journalists under the umbrella of syndicates that secure their rights and set their obligations, the Lebanese media in its essence is politicized and funded by specific parties, which limits their freedom."

According to Diab, the Publication Law is ambiguous with regard to the freedom of expression of journalists who are immediately prosecuted as soon as they deal with political or judicial sources without prior permission from the competent authorities. Therefore, the freedom of press is restricted to a certain extent, with some wide media spaces that are left unregulated to this day.

4. THE ROLE OF SYNDICATES THAT DEAL WITH PRESS WORK IN LEBANON

1. In addition to the Ministry of Information, which serves as the recognized custodian of the media sector, Lebanese law stipulates that this sector and its workforce are officially under the guardianship and authority of three primary institutions. **The Press Syndicate:** According to Article 79 of the Publication Law, the general assembly of the Lebanese Press Syndicate comprises all print publication owners in Lebanon who meet the requirements imposed upon Lebanese journalists as per Article 10 thereof, with each print press institution having the right to no more than one vote or representative in any body. As for print publication institutions that are owned by non-journalists, they shall be represented by either their director, chief editor, or commercial manager, provided that they meet the requirements set out in Article 10 of the Publication Law and that they share the same status as newspaper owners. In the event that this representative is elected to be member of the Syndicate council, their membership shall not be revoked by withdrawing the status of representative from them throughout the mandate of the council.

The remaining articles of the law pertaining to the Press Syndicate predominantly center on procedural mechanisms for conducting meetings and plenary sessions within the Syndicate. Additionally, they delineate the allocation of seats in the general assembly, dividing members between representatives of political print publication institutions and those from non-political print publications and news agencies. Article 83 deals with the jurisdiction of the Syndicate's general assembly, the powers of which are limited to approving the annual budget, determining the subscription allowance for its members, and discussing financial issues in general. Article 84 dictates the formation of the Press Syndicate Council, the distribution of its members according to daily political press publications, and temporary political press publications, and their representation of press publications. Articles 85, 86, 87, and 88 thereof deal with the elections of the Syndicate Council, the mechanism for its convening, and the nature of its powers and jurisdiction.

4. THE ROLE OF SYNDICATES THAT DEAL WITH PRESS WORK IN LEBANON

Traditionally, the president of the Press Syndicate typically hails from the ranks of publishers of political newspapers, often representing the Sunni sect. The composition of the rest of the Syndicate council members follows a customary practice established since the adoption of the Publications Law. Members are appointed based on sectarian and political affiliations, reflecting the prevailing political landscape. Thus, one can note that the Press Syndicate is subject, like other syndicates, to the sectarian and political distribution of quotas in effect in Lebanon, which applies to all sectors, syndicates, and public institutions.

2. The Syndicate of Press Editors: Article 89 of the Publications Law stipulates that the general assembly of the Lebanese Syndicate of Press Editors shall consist of all journalists working in press publications issued in Lebanon but who are not owners, in accordance with Article 10 thereof, provided that they are registered in the Press Syndicate. Articles 90, 91, 92, 93, and 94 of the law introduced provisions pertaining to various aspects of the profession, including regulations for foreign practitioners, requirements for convening the Syndicate's general assembly, the composition of its council, and the regulations governing the activities of foreign correspondents. Typically, the President of the Syndicate of Press Editors is a Maronite Christian journalist. Furthermore, the distribution of positions within both the Syndicate's council and the Press Syndicate adheres to the Lebanese sectarian and political landscape. Critics often censure the Syndicate of Press Editors for restricting membership to a select few individuals within the media sphere who fulfill the requisite legal criteria. This limitation has spurred many to seek alternative avenues to secure their rights to protection and social insurance.

4. THE ROLE OF SYNDICATES THAT DEAL WITH PRESS WORK IN LEBANON

3. National Audiovisual Council: The National Audiovisual Council of Lebanon was founded in 1994 under the auspices of Law No. 382. While primarily tasked with advisory and technical functions, it has played a pivotal role in shaping the regulatory framework for radio and television broadcasting. Its efforts have culminated in the formulation and endorsement by the Government of Lebanon of the General Conditions booklet, which outlines the requisite conditions and standards for broadcasting operations. National Audiovisual Council's tasks include receiving radio broadcasting licensing applications, studying media institutions' files and providing advisory opinions in this regard, on the basis of which new media licenses were granted to new media outlets and some other media outlets were closed. Its functions include verifying licensing requirements and monitoring media content, and then submitting its reports to the Council of Ministers. Nevertheless, the Council remains devoid of executive authority due to its advisory nature. Furthermore, its effectiveness is hampered by the equal allocation of its 10 members between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers on a sectarian basis, a structure that constrains their influence and capacity to act. Compounding these challenges is the expiration of their legal mandate in 2009, with no new appointments made to date. Like other syndicate councils, the Council is subject to the sectarian and political formulas applied in the rest of the syndicate councils and its presidency was granted to the Shiite community.

Many media professionals bear the dangerous role played by the National Audiovisual Council in "restoring control over the media, such as instructing Public Security to prosecute a radio station on the pretext that it is not licensed, implementing censorship on media professionals, and proposing systems that are not based on sufficient technical and informational knowledge and do not rise to high professional standards" and "it is an expired council and has not changed since its establishment, in terms of structure or leadership, and it also carries an advisory capacity, not a reportage one, noting that this council played oversight roles over the media on more than one occasion in which it was a supporter of political parties and sectarian bodies in the country, not for freedom of media and expression. This is what makes it a council subordinate to the authority and not a body authorized to develop the media legally and professionally, and certainly not the authority that guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the media."

4. THE ROLE OF SYNDICATES THAT DEAL WITH PRESS WORK IN LEBANON

Given this syndicate landscape, the recently established Syndicate of Workers in Audiovisual Media has positioned itself as the rightful advocate for all Lebanese journalists operating within the audiovisual realm. However, despite its emergence, it lacks the authorization to affiliate with any of the official syndicates dedicated to media workers. Consequently, the establishment of this syndicate provided sanctuary for numerous journalists who found themselves excluded from the Syndicate of Press Editors. Despite this, many individuals initially associated with the Syndicate of Press Editors later transitioned to the new syndicate. Joseph Al-Qasifi, the head of the Syndicate of Press Editors, vehemently rejects recognizing the new syndicate as an independent or parallel entity. Instead, he views it as an association aligned more closely with the preferences of most of its members rather than the Syndicate of Press Editors.

Recently, the emergence of the "Alternative Press Syndicate" has garnered attention. This association comprises individuals from the media sector who have affirmed via the association's website that neither the Press Syndicate nor the Syndicate of Press Editors represented them. Instead, they have aligned themselves with the popular uprising aimed at dismantling the existing regime and establishing a secular system founded on principles of social justice and public freedoms, notably including freedom of the press. The Alternative Press Syndicate contends that the Press Syndicate primarily represents employers (concessionaires), whereas the Syndicate of Press Editors is intended to advocate for both male and female workers employed within press institutions. According to the Alternative Press Syndicate, the door to the Syndicate of Press Editors remains largely closed, opening only periodically in accordance with the preferences of employers and the dynamics of syndicate elections. The Alternative Press Syndicate urges both the Press Syndicate and the Syndicate of Press Editors to refrain from taking action regarding the closure of numerous press and media institutions, which has led to the loss of job security for hundreds of journalists. This faction of journalists, critical of the performance of both syndicates, also laments the absence of a transparent affiliation mechanism within a single syndicate. They advocate for a system where members can vote for chairpersons and syndicate councils, ensuring a rotation of leadership and preventing appointments that are perceived as permanent or arbitrary.

4. THE ROLE OF SYNDICATES THAT DEAL WITH PRESS WORK IN LEBANON

Because of all the above, this group decided to continue its movement in isolation from the rest of the syndicate councils, which represent "a dedication to political alignments at the general national level." However, this syndicate has not obtained any legal legitimacy to date.

In a comprehensive review of the roles of these press syndicates and associations, and after reviewing the laws for their establishment and organization, it is clear that none of these laws directly or indirectly provide any kind of rights and benefits to Lebanese media workers, whether social or economic. Most of the legal articles focused on their establishment, namely, the conditions of composition and affiliation, the mechanism of work, and the terms of reference and powers for regular written, visual, and audiovisual media work.

The most glaring gap lies in the absence of clear legislation governing the operations of websites, which have proliferated in recent years and have begun to employ numerous journalists and media workers. These entities operate without a defined legal framework that outlines their mechanisms or provides a legal framework for their employees. Particularly concerning is the fact that the Publication Law, which serves as the basis for prosecuting journalists, does not apply to websites lacking legal personality, as noted by former Information Minister Tarek Mitri.

The Alternative Press Syndicate accuses both the National Audiovisual Council, on one hand, and the Press Syndicate and the Syndicate of Press Editors, on the other, of representing two facets of the same coin: the authority's control over the media. Each entity is perceived as vying to monopolize the electronic media domain, which currently operates without adequate legal regulation to keep pace with its rapid development.

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The absence of a substantive role for syndicates in safeguarding media professionals and facilitating their effective contribution reveals another issue concerning the right to access information. Despite the enactment of legislation guaranteeing this right, its implementation remains deficient, mirroring the broader trend of non-enforcement observed with many Lebanese laws. Those who resist its enforcement often enjoy sectarian and political immunities, exacerbating the challenges surrounding access to information. Although there is easy access to information in Lebanon, obtaining it is linked to the interest of one party in distorting or exposing another party, and in this case, the information may be incomplete, unfinished, or distorted to serve the purpose for which it is given, and therefore it lacks transparency.

In this context, as well as in the realm of audiovisual journalism, the implementation of the specialized law governing the operations of these institutions has been tailored to accommodate the Lebanese quota system. Under this framework, each political faction is allocated a visual press outlet, or alternatively, one visual outlet and one audio outlet, ensuring equitable representation across the spectrum of political entities. This quota also made its way to the formation of the National Audiovisual Council, which supervises the implementation of the law as an advisory institution. Consequently, “the law and its application did not deviate from the twisted formulas for applying the law in Lebanon, to the point that it has become impossible for excessive freedom to express opinions in these institutions to be registered as journalistic freedom. Rather, it takes its immunity from the Lebanese sectarian and political quota system, allowing the practice of the profession to be distorted and to deviate from its conduct in the interest of transforming these institutions into tools dedicated to promoting the policies of their owners regardless of professional standards, so that we see insults among them, accusations, and the use of expressions that are contrary to etiquette, a loss of credibility, and the adoption of a policy of purpose justifying the means.”

4. THE ROLE OF SYNDICATES THAT DEAL WITH PRESS WORK IN LEBANON

All of this is in light of the absence of the National Audiovisual Council, the Council of Ministers, and the professional syndicates from exercising their role in addressing these phenomena, as they are all subject to the same logic of quotas, which has a system of parallel vetoes, with some calls for commitment to the profession through formal statements.

Regrettably, Lebanon's sectarian and political quota system is capable of overcoming any scandal, however resounding and debunked, as it disrupts the role of the press in reform.

The report also revealed that there are fundamental restrictions on the freedom to practice the profession and even freedom of expression in Lebanon, relating to religions, confessions, clerics, sects, and clans, in which it is considered a taboo that may lead to major problems in the country.

In addition, there are gaps in existing syndicates laws in terms of their disregard for any economic or social rights, as well as the absence of laws that explicitly provide for job and social security of media professionals.

In light of this crisis reality, numerous media professionals have found themselves compelled to seek alternative sources of employment and income alongside their media endeavors to ensure financial stability. What's even more concerning is the increasing trend of political and sectarian alignment among many media professionals, as they navigate a path toward achieving political, physical, and financial security. For some, this alignment offers a semblance of job security and protection against arbitrary and indiscriminate dismissals.

Most of the Lebanese media, whether written, visual, or audio, along with the new electronic journalism, are dominated by a clear sectarian tone, despite the presence of some minor violations here and there. This indicates the extent of the impasse affecting the Lebanese media body, which is inevitably affected by the political and sectarian scene prevailing in the country.

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In addition to the pervasive issue of job insecurity, this dilemma has significantly constrained the freedom of work and mobility that media professionals are meant to enjoy. Instead of prioritizing professionalism and upholding the principles of objective journalism, many are pressured into aligning with their respective political parties and sectarian affiliations. This phenomenon undermines the pursuit of a truly objective media that bears social and national responsibility above all other considerations.

Not far from this negative media climate, a number of independent journalists complain about the dangerous developments that the press sector in Lebanon has witnessed in recent years, such as summonses and military trials of some journalists and others, without the Press Syndicate or the Syndicate of Press Editors having anything to do with that, as if they were not concerned with expression and freedoms in Lebanon. The journalist Youssef Diab confirms that syndicates do not play a fundamental role in protecting journalists. The Press Syndicate or the Syndicate of Press Editors does not have the authority to protect journalists. All they can do is to release reprehensible and deplorable positions and statements about prosecutions or attempts to arrest, which in practice does not affect the convictions of the authority or some of them that want to limit the freedom of the media and the freedom of the journalist.

The researcher Nay El Rahi summarizes the situation through a study, focusing on three aspects of the lives of male and female media workers in Lebanon, all of which revolve around the concept of safety in their lives.

The first aspect is economic security, namely, the economic and living condition of workers in the sector in terms of salaries and social benefits provided by institutions, especially in light of the decline in the purchasing power of salaries resulting from inflation and the collapse of the Lebanese currency.

The second aspect is physical-psychological security, where emphasis has been placed on physical safety in the performance of a job, specifically in the area of physical safety training, securing special protective supplies such as helmets and protective vests, follow-up, and material and moral compensation.

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The third aspect is job security, where interviews and groups focused on discrimination and exclusion within media organizations against male and female journalists on the basis of political opinion, if it differs from the institution's overriding editorial policy, as well as on the basis of gender, including sexual harassment and blackmail of women journalists within and outside while performing their work.

According to the study, 20 percent of the male and female respondents heard testimonies of female colleagues who were subjected to sexual harassment or blackmail as part of the field practice of their work, while 52 percent of female journalists were exposed to harassment in the workplace, and most female journalists characterized the media sector in Lebanon as an environment marked by the "exclusion of women."

The majority of male and female workers in Lebanon's media sector from the sample surveyed were found to be unsafe and to have lost any living security due to lower wages before and after the economic crisis (2019), as the gap deepened further.

The Journalist Wassef Awada says that **"despite all the reviews and suggestions, officials have not responded to our demands, either in the Syndicate of Press Editors or in the Audiovisual Syndicate. Journalists have been left without any social protection, manipulated after the collapse of Lebanon's currency and exposed to local and foreign temptations."**

5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper's findings are as follows:

- The Media law currently in force is a long-standing law that is no longer keeping pace with the media realities and the accelerated developments in the media, whether the definition of media workers in their various institutions and sectors, or the identification of their rights and duties in clear legal texts are easy to apply and prosecute.
- The currently applicable Publication Law has not kept pace with the development of the journalism profession through visual or audio media, or new and electronic media, despite its diverse applications. This has left thousands of workers in these sectors outside any syndicate frameworks or codified job descriptions, and they have become vulnerable to arbitrary and discretionary decisions by their institutions as well as by official authorities.
- The monopoly of ownership of media outlets and the distribution of privileges to the pillars of power, influential people, and owners of capital constitutes a real obstacle and challenge to the performance of a free media that adopts the standards of professional journalism instead of subordination and dependence on employers and owners.
- The factor of funding from internal or external parties affects media institutions in terms of setting their political and news agendas, thus restricting the workers in these institutions to ensure the implementation of those agendas.
- Political alignment remains a fundamental determinant with regard to media freedom, as workers in media institutions identify with political reality to a large extent, and have become governed by loyalty to their political line more than to professional media practice.
- The financial situation of media professionals is one of the most important factors affecting their professional performance. Financial sufficiency for journalists is one of the most important elements that helps them carry out their duties free from pressure. Amidst the prevailing economic hardships, journalists have become increasingly susceptible to blackmail and arbitrary dismissal, leading many to prioritize maintaining their livelihood and social security over upholding their duty to ensure a free and objective press.
- The chaos of news websites and the absence of laws regulating their work remains one of the most prominent challenges facing the media sector and concerned parties, whether governmental or syndicate.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following are the recommendations based on the above conclusions reached by the conducted research:

1- The promulgation of a new media law takes into account the latest developments, whether in the concept of journalistic work in terms of defining the journalist, the media institution, journalistic activity, and Syndicate associations, or in terms of the challenges facing the work of journalists in protecting and strengthening economic, social, and legal guarantees in a way that ensure the freedom of their work and independence.

2- It has become necessary to reconsider the structure and powers of both the Press Syndicate and the Syndicate of Press Editors and to review the obligations of these syndicates towards their members, in a way that guarantees the regularity of their work, secures their financial and employment rights, explains their duties without any ambiguity, and provides room for the establishment of freedom of syndicate association, because independent syndicate associations contribute effectively to providing an enabling environment that enhances the various guarantees and rights for journalistic work.

3- The necessity of reconsidering the role of the National Audiovisual Council and its powers with regard to monitoring the performance of the media, granting licenses, and activating its performance and tasks away from the influence of the political authority, its accountabilities, and the interests of its members.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

4- The necessity of working to enact legislation aimed at ensuring the physical, social, and economic security of media professionals, and preventing them from being political, partisan, or sectarian mouthpieces. These legislations would also protect the journalist from being vulnerable to blackmail regarding their livelihood, which would affect their margin of freedom and job performance.

5- The necessity of working to enact legislation, laws, and proposals that create the appropriate mechanism to secure funding for press and media institutions in a way that prevents them from being influenced by political and electoral money, which deeply affects media freedom as well as journalistic objectivity.

6- The necessity of working to enact laws that guarantee the right to obtain information without any obstacles, and activate legal and administrative means that guarantee this, along with the right of journalists to protect their sources and not be subject to summons, investigation, and trial by security agencies and military courts.

7- The necessity of working to reconsider the mechanism for granting licenses and determining the provisions for the work of media syndicates, by taking into account the right to form syndicates and free media associations through knowledge and news, which removes the influence of the guardianship of the official authority and guarantees the freedom of their work and the exercise of their duties.

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