

REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE

ANKARA UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

**BETWEEN BORDERS: UNDERSTANDING THE EMERGENCE
AND EVOLUTION OF SYRIAN MEDIA IN TÜRKİYE -
CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES**

Master's Thesis

Ahmet BAYRAKTAR

Ankara, 2025

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I state that all the information in my master's thesis titled “Between Borders: Understanding the Emergence and Evolution of Syrian Media in Türkiye - Conditions and Challenges” (Ankara, 2025), which I prepared under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Haluk Kazım GERAY, was collected and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical behavior principles. I fully indicated the information I received from other sources in the text and in the bibliography. I declare that I have acted in accordance with ethical research standards, and I will accept any legal consequences in case the contrary arises.

Date: 19.02.2025

Ahmet BAYRAKTAR

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A well-known Arabic proverb, which is also highly valued in Turkish culture, states: “Bana bir harf öğretenin kırk yıl kölesi olurum.” This profound saying, emphasizing the significance of knowledge and learning, best encapsulates the deep gratitude I feel at this significant stage of my life. Reaching this point is not merely the result of personal effort but also a product of the guidance, support, and contributions of those who have illuminated my path.

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To Walid Habbal (my father) and Doha Qomqom (my mother):

You have my greetings and all my love...

Walid Habbal (babam) ve Doha Qomqom (annem)'a,

size selamlarımı ve tüm sevgimi gönderiyorum...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	III
LIST OF TABLES.....	V
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VI
LIST OF GRAPHICS	VII
ABBREVIATIONS.....	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO SYRIAN MEDIA

1.1	SYRIA: A RICH PAST AND A FUTURE IN FORMATION	13
1.2	HISTORY OF SYRIAN MEDIA	15
1.2.1	BEGINNINGS IN THE OTTOMAN ERA.....	15
1.2.2	MEDIA DURING THE FRENCH MANDATE PERIOD (1920–1946) ..	17
1.2.3	POST-INDEPENDENCE MEDIA (1946–1970).....	18
1.2.4	MEDIA UNDER HAFEZ AND BASHAR AL-ASSAD (1970–2011) ...	19
1.3	SYRIAN MEDIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION	23

CHAPTER TWO

SYRIAN MEDIA IN TURKEY: CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

2.1	MEDIA MIGRATION AND EXILE	30
2.2	RESEARCH APPROACH: FIELDWORK AND INTERVIEWS	37
2.3	SYRIAN MEDIA FOUNDERS: ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE PLANS	39

2.4	SYRIAN JOURNALISTS IN TURKEY	70
2.5	ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST IN INDEPENDENT SYRIAN MEDIA	85

CHAPTER THREE

SUPPORTING SYRIAN JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

3.1	ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING SYRIAN JOURNALISTS	96
3.2	CHARTER OF HONOR FOR SYRIAN MEDIA PROFESSIONALS	98
3.3	SYRIAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION	102
3.4	THE SYRIAN JOURNALISTS CLUB IN GAZIANTEP	107
3.5	SYRIAN FEMALE JOURNALISTS NETWORK	109
FINDINGS.....		115
CONCLUSION		119
RECOMMENDATIONS		126
REFERENCES		129
EK		136
ÖZET		137
ABSTRACT		138

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Syrian Media Institutions in Türkiye and Their Current Status	34
Table 2 Organizations supporting Syrian media and type of support	53

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Map of Syria https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/syrian-arab-republic	13
Figure 2 Distribution of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Year	14
Figure 3 The Electronic Platform of Enab Baladi	53
Figure 4 Orient TV	67
Figure 5 The Closure of Orient TV	68

LIST OF GRAPHICS

Graphic 1 The Evolution of Syrian Media	22
Graphic 2 Key Observations Status of Syrian Media Institutions.....	35
Graphic 3 Geographic Distribution	35
Graphic 4 Classification of Media Institutions.....	36
Graphic 5 Current Status by Classification	36
Graphic 6 A Timeline of Syrian Journalists Assassinated in Türkiye.....	95

ABBREVIATIONS

JHR	: Journalists for Human Rights
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
HTS	: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	: United States Agency for International Development
NED	: National Endowment for Democracy
EED	: European Endowment for Democracy
IMS	: International Media Support
CFI	: Canal France International
IREX	: International Research and Exchanges Board
SIDA	: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
Danida	: Danish International Development Agency
IWPR	: Institute for War and Peace Reporting
SNHR	: Syrian Network for Human Rights
MICT	: Media in Cooperation and Transition
UNHCR	: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
OSF	: Open Society Foundations
RSF	: Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières)
UNICEF	: United Nations Children's Fund

INTRODUCTION

Delving into the Syrian media landscape, both before the 2011 Syrian revolution and afterward, is not merely an exploration of the authority's influence over communication platforms. It is also an attempt to understand how the public sphere became closed off and later fragmented amid pivotal historical transformations. In the pre-revolution period, Syrian media was firmly under the control of political authority, restrained by strict censorship. Its role was confined to reproducing an official narrative that monopolized the portrayal of reality. Consequently, diversity vanished, and any dissenting voices were silenced. The media became a tool for perpetuating official narratives, stripping it of its higher function as the fourth estate (Taki, 2012, p. 2).

Despite these heavy restrictions, this era was not entirely devoid of attempts to break free from censorship. The newspaper *Al-Domari* exemplified such limited breakthroughs, briefly hinting at the possibility of an independent media voice. However, this hope was short-lived, as journalistic aspirations clashed with entrenched security and regulatory structures, and the state of media suffocation reasserted itself before 2011.

The onset of the Syrian revolution marked a decisive turning point, overturning the established norms. Alternative media platforms, digital tools, and social media spaces emerged, challenging the monopoly of the official narrative. These platforms began documenting protests and exposing violations, breaking free from rigid regulatory frameworks. New media became the voice of a society yearning for liberation, replacing authority-controlled information with content shaped by the pulse of the streets, rooted in the fundamental demands for freedom and justice (Salama, 2012, p. 516).

This transformation coincided with waves of forced displacement of journalists and media organizations to neighboring countries, particularly Türkiye. There, they found broader opportunities to establish independent media platforms or continue their work.

However, this path was fraught with challenges, as journalists and media institutions faced legal obstacles, financial difficulties, and the need to address a diverse audience of refugees and local residents. Despite these challenges, this new environment offered opportunities to develop an independent media discourse that engaged with exile as a collective experience and addressed a broader international community, transcending the boundaries drawn by internal and external constraints (Assaf, 2018, p. 7; Badran, 2020, p. 70; Kovanen, 2015, p. 13).

The alternative media in exile was no longer a mere tactical response to a transient crisis but evolved into a system with a broader vision (Fahrenthold, 2013, pp. 35–36). Emerging platforms leveraged technological innovation and dynamic organization to strengthen a collective Syrian identity. They became tools for supporting humanitarian and political movements both within Syria and in the diaspora. Research reports, such as “Qabd Alzabad” and “Media in Syria: Challenges of Reality and the Future”, highlighted these pivotal moments, showcasing how alternative media reshaped the Syrian media landscape and redefined its boundaries, responding to Syrians’ aspirations and positioning itself at the heart of the post-monopoly transformations (Alhamad, 2016, pp. 4–7; Edlbi, 2022, pp. 13–18). Understanding the transformations in Syrian media requires examining the interplay between closure and openness, the continuous interaction between political censorship and new communication technologies, and the role of migration and exile in reshaping media frameworks. Together, these factors empowered alternative Syrian media to craft a counter-narrative and carve out a space for freedom in a world where media was no longer a hostage to a narrow authoritarian horizon.

Methodology

This research is based on a methodology structured under the umbrella of three carefully selected approaches: historical, descriptive, and analytical. Together, these approaches aim to form a comprehensive vision that penetrates the surface of the studied

phenomenon and situates it within its broader historical and social framework. The historical approach proves its utility by decoding the foundational circumstances that shaped the media landscape before 2011. The descriptive approach enables an examination of the current state of alternative media and its complexities. Meanwhile, the analytical approach completes this picture, providing depth in understanding the driving and constraining factors of this phenomenon, linking historical and contemporary data to formulate a broader perspective.

The journey begins with the historical approach, which seeks to trace the roots of media transformations in Syria over past decades, with particular focus on the critical period leading up to the 2011 Syrian revolution and the disintegration that followed. This approach is not limited to recounting events but sheds light on the paths forged under strict censorship, their eventual loosening, and their role in shaping a media space defined by the interaction of political structures with the demands of a society at a historical turning point.

The descriptive approach goes beyond merely observing the features of Syrian alternative media in exile. It investigates the dynamics of its operations, communication practices, and the values it promotes. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the current state of these media platforms in Türkiye, analyzing their funding mechanisms and engagement with a diverse audience, creating a vivid tableau where aspirations meet challenges, and adaptations coexist with constraints.

The analytical approach draws on its tools to deconstruct the data and explore the complex relationships between different elements: political context, organizational structures, and editorial visions. Through this approach, the study does not settle for merely describing the phenomenon but seeks to understand the factors influencing the sustainability of alternative media, its ability to shape a collective discourse for Syrians

in the diaspora, and whether this discourse can endure pressures and dwindling resources. This approach employs three main research tools:

Source Review and Document Analysis: This work relies on a wide array of academic sources and media reports that serve as layers of knowledge for studying the phenomenon in its historical and contemporary dimensions. Reports from international organizations, such as those by Reporters Without Borders, and studies on Syrian alternative media published in academic journals are central. The analysis extends beyond conveying information to interpreting these texts as mirrors reflecting the transformation of the media space and its social and political functions.

In-depth Interviews: Interviews with founders, managers, media professionals, and target audiences hold special importance. This tool not only gathers descriptive data but also captures the “pulse” of the media scene, enabling the study to understand the motivations, fears, and aspirations behind the alternative media experience. An interview guide will be prepared, covering topics such as funding challenges, survival strategies, and future visions for these platforms. A qualitative analysis of these interviews will be conducted to identify shared patterns.

Case Studies: By focusing on a sample of alternative media outlets in Türkiye, the study can delve into the practical details of media discourse. These outlets are not viewed as static entities but as dynamic communication phenomena adapting to a new environment. Analyzing editorial values, audience interactions, and funding mechanisms will provide keys to understanding the resilience of alternative media and its ability to innovate flexible communication spaces that redefine the role of media in the context of an urgent exile.

Blending these methodologies through these tools is not merely a procedural framework for the study but constitutes an epistemological strategy aimed at forming a

comprehensive and layered understanding. By examining the phenomenon in its historical context, describing its current reality, and analyzing its deeper dynamics, the researcher can capture diverse dimensions: from memories of repression to the challenges of exile, from the constriction of media space to a relative opening through alternative platforms. This framework enables addressing pivotal questions about the motivations for establishing Syrian alternative media in Türkiye, the challenges it faces, its role in shaping a collective identity, and its ability to sustain its discourse amid political and financial pressures.

Temporal and Spatial Framework

Temporal Framework: This study examines the period spanning from 2011 to 2024 as a field for investigating media transformations in the Syrian context. The year 2011 marked a revolutionary upheaval in Syria, reshaping the boundaries of authority and repression and reimagining the roles assigned to media. During this period, alternative media emerged as a bittersweet product of this historical juncture, offering narratives that stem from suffering and aspirations for freedom. It became an essential component of the media landscape despite challenges related to repression, censorship, and lack of resources (Edlbi, 2022, p. 22; Mendel et al., 1998, p. 27). Against this backdrop, Syrian media has undergone a profound transformation, shifting from a government-controlled, univocal tool to a space where multiple narratives converge—some born in exile, others crafted under repression—all interacting with a highly turbulent historical moment. Media practices did not merely escape the grip of traditional authority but also began redefining the roles of journalists and activists, who were compelled to develop a media discourse transcending geographic borders and narrow political interests (Alhamad, 2016, pp. 4–7).

Spatial Framework: Türkiye emerged as an alternative geographical space accommodating the migration of Syrian journalists and media professionals. It is not

merely a neighboring country but a meeting point for intersecting worlds, where the Syrian diaspora gathers with its diverse political and social backgrounds. Within Türkiye, Syrian media professionals benefited from media and technological infrastructure, as well as a relative margin of freedom, enabling them to innovate new media platforms—both digital and radio. These platforms have redefined Syrian media's presence outside the strict censorship they endured back home (Assaf, 2018, p. 44; Badran, 2020, pp. 69–85).

In this context, understanding media transformations, particularly in a turbulent situation like Syria's, cannot be isolated from the historical moment in which they arose or the geographical locations that served as their stage. The temporal framework enables tracking the development of the phenomenon over years of political and social upheaval, while the spatial framework reveals the role geography plays in shaping the identity of alternative media and the complex relationships between the center (Syria) and the periphery (Türkiye and the diaspora). This interplay between time and space deepens our understanding of communicative transformations and allows us to probe the dynamics of crafting a new media discourse. This discourse emerged from the womb of chaos and has sought to establish its place on a global map that knows no stability.

Scope of the Study

It is crucial to define the scope of this thesis with precision, focusing on the institutional aspects of Syrian media. This includes various organizational structures such as television channels, radio stations, websites, content production institutions, and other similar media entities. This precise delimitation ensures the study avoids dispersion by excluding individuals or entities managing personal social media pages—such as those commonly referred to as “YouTubers” or “TikTokers”—and other individual practices. Moreover, the study will encompass media outlets established in Syria or other countries that continued their operations within Turkish territories, as well as those founded directly in Türkiye.

Study Objectives

This study aims to approach the phenomenon of Syrian alternative media in Türkiye within a comprehensive analytical framework that accounts for the political and social complexities accompanying its emergence and development since 2011. Emerging from an era marked by stifling political repression within Syria, alternative media experiments arose outside the homeland, seeking to establish a communicative space liberated from authoritarian constraints. These experiments aim to produce new narratives that transcend singularity and strive to embody the neglected plurality. The main objectives of this study are as follows:

Understanding Foundational Motivations: To explore the driving factors that compelled Syrian media professionals to establish new platforms in Türkiye, overcoming the terrains of fear and intimidation within Syria. This includes the desire to convey independent narratives of events, free from official perspectives, and the search for a media space capable of free expression and resilience in the face of repression.

Analyzing Developmental Phases and Organizational Strategies: To examine the transformative stages these media outlets have undergone, from their initial establishment to their attempts to ensure sustainability while facing numerous challenges such as legal and regulatory restrictions in a foreign environment, financial difficulties, and cultural and linguistic integration challenges. The study investigates the innovative organizational structures implemented and the diverse funding pathways adopted to navigate this challenging reality.

Assessing Impact on the Broader Syrian Media Landscape: To evaluate the impact of these media experiments on the wider Syrian media scene by examining their contributions to shaping alternative narratives that reflect the experiences of war and displacement. These narratives provide a voice for marginalized groups who have been

excluded from official media. In doing so, the study seeks to bridge an existing knowledge gap in the literature, offering an academic perspective that sheds light on this media phenomenon from historical, political, social, and communicative angles.

By achieving these objectives, the study aims to add depth and rigor to ongoing discussions about Syrian alternative media and open new horizons for future research that will enhance understanding of media dynamics amidst current geopolitical and social transformations.

The Study's Significance

This study derives its significance from its ability to shed light on a complex media phenomenon shaped at the intersection of major political and social transformations with the struggles of migration and displacement. It aims to bridge a knowledge gap regarding the emergence and development of Syrian alternative media in Türkiye, within a historical and cultural context where internal repression and forced displacement intertwined with efforts to revive freedom of expression and create an independent media space. This approach is not merely a recounting of events or a documentation of media platforms born in exile but represents an academic contribution to understanding the intellectual structures and historical circumstances that allowed this phenomenon to flourish—albeit cautiously—outside the authoritarian grip of the regimes of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad.

On the academic level, the study enriches multiple fields of research by delving into media terrains where media studies intersect with political science, cultural sociology, and migration and diaspora studies. It offers new research value to the literature on alternative media during crises, presenting a broader perspective on the origins of this media and its relationship with its surroundings, whether within Syria or in exile, which simultaneously represents a new space for both freedom and constraints.

On a practical and societal level, the study goes beyond documenting the phenomenon of alternative media by placing it within an analytical context that assesses the challenges faced by these platforms and examines ways to ensure their sustainability within the complex Turkish environment. This environment combines a relative margin of press freedom with legislation open to varied interpretations and migration policies marked by legal and regulatory hurdles. These platforms face the challenge of shaping their identity in a new world. By exploring this process, the study becomes a reference that can benefit international organizations, donors, and journalists engaged in similar media experiments. It discusses strategies for funding and adaptation and highlights ways to enhance the cultural and linguistic identity of refugees, providing a deeper understanding of the connection between media and identity in diaspora communities.

Most importantly, this study reveals the role of Syrian alternative media in crafting a humanitarian and political narrative shared with the world. It raises international awareness of the circumstances leading to displacement and sheds light on the violations committed by the Assad regime and the realities often obscured by official media. Offering this comprehensive perspective transforms the research from a mere case study into a contribution to a broader global discussion on the role of free media in promoting the values of social justice and human rights, particularly in regions caught between violence and resistance.

In summary, the importance of this study lies in its comprehensive vision that links in-depth academic analysis with practical applications. It places the studied phenomenon of Syrian media in Türkiye at the heart of the historical and cultural contexts that produced it. This study is a qualitative addition to the research field, deserving of thoughtful consideration, and provides researchers and field practitioners with theoretical tools and references to enhance their support for free media in an era of fragmentation and diaspora.

Study Questions

With the evolution of the Syrian media landscape during the 2011 revolution and the subsequent intensive media migration to Türkiye, alternative media has positioned itself as a mirror reflecting broader intellectual, social, and political transformations. Thus, the questions of this study do not emerge in a vacuum but align with a historical trajectory in which Syrian journalism, journalists, and media activists underwent profound transformations—whether at the level of organizational structures or intellectual and cultural impact. These questions aim to deconstruct the complex historical moment in which alternative media was born, explore its connections to the context of exile, and assess its capacity to build a new collective identity that redefines the concept of the “public sphere” away from authoritarian control.

1. What are the underlying motivations behind the establishment of Syrian alternative media outlets in Türkiye?

This question investigates the driving forces that prompted Syrian media professionals to break free from official censorship. It analyzes the historical and political conditions that compelled many to leave their homeland and engage in an “exiled media” experience. It also explores the concepts of freedom within the context of migration and how these motivations shaped the beginnings of an independent media space outside authoritarian power.

2. How have alternative media platforms evolved in terms of organizational structures, funding strategies, and media content within the Turkish context?

This question explores the transformations experienced by these platforms from their inception in a foreign environment to their attempts to establish institutional and professional identities. It examines the dynamics that transformed individual media professionals seeking a space for expression into organizational entities operating in a

complex legal and economic environment, catering to an audience with evolving expectations and knowledge.

3. What is the nature of the challenges (legal, cultural, linguistic, and financial) faced by Syrian alternative media outlets in Türkiye, and how have they responded to them?

This question examines challenges not merely as obstacles but as facets of an integration or resistance process within a political and social exile context that transcends procedural levels. It reflects on how these challenges pushed media professionals to adapt, innovate, and develop survival strategies that add to their historical narratives.

4. What role have Syrian alternative media outlets played in serving Syrian refugee communities in Türkiye, and how have they contributed to creating a cross-border expressive and cultural space?

This question goes beyond examining how media informs refugees about current affairs, delving into the extent to which these platforms have contributed to building shared narratives and fostering a collective dialogue that enhances belonging within the diaspora. It seeks to understand how media assumes social functions that transcend mere news dissemination, serving as a “cultural call” within a complex diaspora context.

5. How have Syrian alternative media outlets interacted with the Turkish media environment and international networks, including knowledge and financial support institutions?

This question addresses the relationships of influence and interaction between alternative media and various reception contexts, whether within the Turkish media environment characterized by national laws and policies or through international organizations and institutions providing expertise and support. Here, media becomes a

negotiation arena where media identities are shaped through the interplay of changing local and international relationships.

6. What impact has Syrian alternative media had on shaping identity for Syrians in Türkiye and producing alternative narratives of the Syrian self in exile spaces?

This question delves into the depths of identity, asking how Syrian media professionals in Türkiye redefined their perceptions of the “Syrian self” following their forced separation from their homeland. It examines how these platforms have created narratives that resist simplification and reduction, striving toward a complex identity that transcends geography and is open to new historical possibilities.

Through all these questions, the study aims to describe the phenomenon, decode its elements, and interpret its social, cultural, and political implications. Rooted in a solid historical foundation, these questions seek to understand the mechanisms of reconstructing the Syrian public sphere outside its borders. They also explore how displaced media professionals rebuilt media platforms as spaces for renewing intellectual and political discourse. Thus, the questions become a key to understanding the power of “Syrian alternative media” and its ability to carve out spaces of freedom and collective expression within an exile that itself transforms into a stage for shaping a new future.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO SYRIAN MEDIA

1.1 SYRIA: A RICH PAST AND A FUTURE IN FORMATION

The Syrian Arab Republic is located in the heart of the Middle East, occupying a strategic geographic position that links Asia, Europe, and Africa. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Türkiye to the north, Jordan and Palestine to the south, and Iraq to the east. The country spans an area of approximately 185,180 square kilometers and boasts diverse natural features, including plains, mountains, deserts, and coastlines. Its flag features three horizontal stripes: green on top, white in the middle with three red stars, and black at the bottom. Historically, Syria has been a crossroads for great civilizations such as the Arameans, Babylonians, and Romans, making it a prominent cultural and civilizational center (Syria Population, 2024).



Figure 1 Map of Syria <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/syrian-arab-republic>

Syria consists of 14 governorates, with a pre-war population of approximately 24 million, comprising diverse religious and ethnic groups, including Sunni Muslims

(the majority), Alawites, Christians, Druze, and Kurds. The country gained independence from France in 1946 but experienced political instability, marked by coups and crises. Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970, ruling until his death in 2000, when his son Bashar al-Assad succeeded him (“The World Factbook,” 2024).

The Syrian revolution began in 2011 as a protest against corruption and oppression, leading to a prolonged conflict involving regional and international powers. The war triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, displacing over half the population due to bombings and forced displacement by the regime. More than 6.5 million Syrians became refugees, with over 2.9 million currently under temporary protection in Türkiye, according to the Turkish Directorate of Migration Management (UNHCR Reports, 2024; Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, 2025). A figure illustrates the decline in the number of Syrians in Türkiye after peaking in 2021.

DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIANS UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION BY YEAR

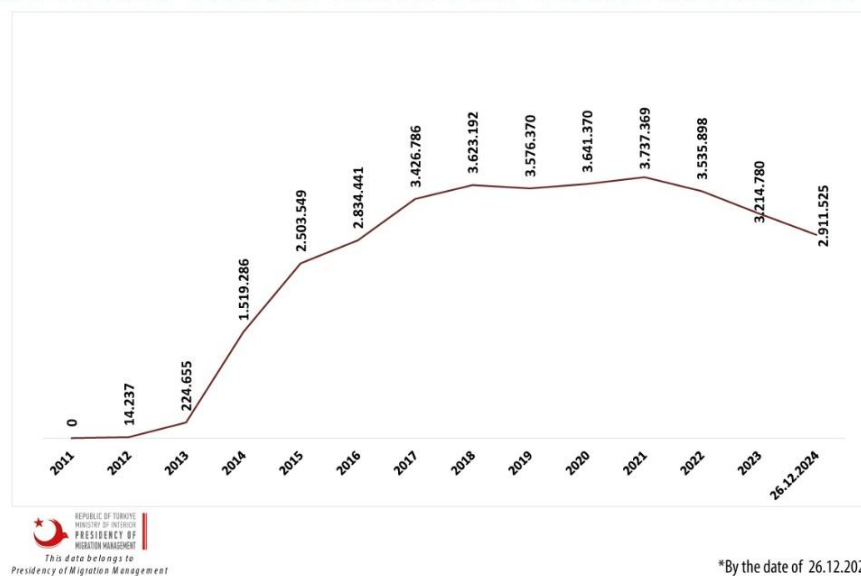


Figure 2 Distribution of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Year <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

The war in Syria has caused widespread destruction of infrastructure and the economy, significantly affecting key sectors such as education and healthcare. According to a Human Rights Watch report in 2020, Syrian and Russian forces targeted civilian

infrastructure in Idlib, including hospitals, schools, and markets, resulting in extensive destruction (HRW, 2020). UNICEF reported in 2021 that around 90% of children in Syria needed humanitarian assistance, with over half a million children under five suffering from stunted growth due to chronic malnutrition (UNICEF, 2021).

Despite its wealth of natural resources such as oil and gas, Syria has suffered from corruption and underdevelopment. A 2019 Human Rights Watch report titled “Rigged System: Government Policies to Manipulate Aid and Reconstruction Funding in Syria” highlighted how the Syrian government exploited humanitarian aid and reconstruction funding to serve its interests and punish dissidents (HRW, 2019).

In a historic turn of events, December 8, 2024, marked the fall of Bashar al-Assad's dictatorial regime after years of revolution, signaling the end of a long chapter of oppression and tyranny. This event represents the beginning of a new phase for Syrians, as national and international forces work to rebuild the country on the foundations of freedom and democracy. Syria is not merely a story of conflict and suffering; it is also a symbol of the will of people to confront injustice and their ambition to BUILD A BETTER FUTURE.

1.2 HISTORY OF SYRIAN MEDIA

1.2.1 Beginnings in the Ottoman Era

In the late Ottoman period, Syrian journalism began to take shape as a pivotal cultural and social phenomenon, driven by the intellectual and political dynamism spurred by the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms. These reforms, which were a response to internal and external pressures to restructure the state, opened the door for intellectual elites in Syria to utilize media as a tool for shaping public awareness, despite the challenges posed by authoritarian censorship (Al-Rifa'i, 2006a, pp. 275–280).

Newspapers such as *Hadiqat al-Akhbar* (1858) and *Al-Sham* emerged as early attempts to create a local public sphere capable of addressing national aspirations and confronting the challenges posed by centralized Ottoman authority. These newspapers reflected the local elites' desire to articulate their cultural and political identities within a landscape dominated by the bureaucracy of a vast empire (Tarazi, 2020, p. 18).

Tensions between authority and the press were evident in the strict censorship imposed on all publications. This censorship was enforced through mechanisms such as content review by the *Maktubji*¹, newspaper closures, and even the exile of journalists. Despite these constraints, Syrian journalism persisted by skillfully employing expressions and metaphors to circumvent restrictions.

Notably, some journalists sought refuge in more liberal environments like Beirut and Cairo, where they found greater freedom to express their concerns. This regional interaction enriched Syrian journalism, drawing inspiration from Lebanese and Egyptian counterparts and fostering a shared awareness that transcended the geographical boundaries of the Ottoman Empire (Tarazi, 2020, pp. 25–40).

¹ During the Ottoman period, the “*Maktubji*” was a government official responsible for censoring newspapers and publications. The term originates from the Arabic word “*maktub*” (meaning “written” or “letter”) combined with the Turkish suffix “-ji,” which denotes a profession, thus translating to “writer” or “secretary.” Initially, the *Maktubji* served as a secretary to the provincial governor, but over time, their role evolved to include overseeing published content to ensure it aligned with state policies and to suppress material deemed oppositional or inflammatory. During Sultan Abdul Hamid II's reign, censorship of the press intensified significantly, as journalism was perceived to have the potential to influence public opinion. This led to stringent restrictions on what could be published. The *Maktubji* was tasked with reviewing articles and news items before their publication, wielding the authority to delete or modify any content considered unsuitable. Occasionally, these officials lacked proficiency in Arabic, which sometimes resulted in articles being altered or removed due to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. One of the anecdotes related to the *Maktubji* is recounted by journalist Selim Sarkis in his book *Gharaib al- Maktubji* (The Oddities of the *Maktubji*). Sarkis noted that censorship reached absurd levels, including the banning of specific words like “revolution” or “constitution,” and even certain personal names if they conflicted with the Sultan's policies. For instance, the name “Murad” was prohibited due to Sultan Abdul Hamid II's rivalry with his brother Murad. Consequently, any text containing this name, or its derivatives was subject to removal or alteration (Sarkis, 1896, p. 30).

Syrian journalism during this period was characterized by a dual role of historical documentation and social critique. Newspapers discussed issues such as administrative reform, national identity, education, and economic development. Bold voices emerged, such as Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi in *Al-Shahbaa*, who used journalism as a platform to challenge the Ottomans and advocate for political and social reforms.

However, by the end of the Ottoman period, Syrian journalism found itself at a crossroads. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire did not end the challenges facing journalism; rather, it ushered in a new era of media struggles under colonial domination, which sought to exploit the press to cement its influence. Consequently, Syrian journalism laid the groundwork for a new phase in which media became a central tool in resisting French occupation, as would be evident during the Mandate period (Tarazi, 2020, pp. 25–40).

1.2.2 Media During the French Mandate Period (1920–1946)

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of the French Mandate, Syrian journalism did not develop in a vacuum but became entangled in a dynamic struggle between colonial forces seeking to consolidate their influence and nationalist elites striving to craft a modern Syrian identity. During this period, newspapers loyal to the French, such as *La Syrie*, emerged, reproducing colonial rhetoric to justify the Mandate and promote its so-called reformist image. In contrast, nationalist newspapers like *Al-Istiqlal Al-Arabi*, *Al-Qabas*, and *Al-Ayyam* pursued a different intellectual and political project, resisting colonial authority and articulating a nationalist discourse advocating for independence (Amer, 2014, p. 103).

The relationship between “freedom” and “censorship” grew increasingly complex during this era. French censorship was not merely a tool for suppressing security threats but also a mechanism for reshaping public consciousness to align with colonial interests.

Meanwhile, nationalist journalism sought to overcome this hegemony by wielding its nationalist rhetoric, grounded in political legitimacy and collective memory. French authorities attempted to undermine these efforts through comprehensive censorship measures and shutting down dissenting newspapers.

Despite these restrictions, Syrian journalism during this period succeeded in solidifying new concepts of intellectual and political resistance, becoming a testament to a society's struggle for liberation from colonial chains (Al-Rifa'i, 2006b, p. 33).

1.2.3 Post-Independence Media (1946–1970)

With the end of the French Mandate and the achievement of independence in 1946, Syria entered a new phase filled with hopes for radical transformations in political and social life. These aspirations were quickly reflected in the media landscape, where newspapers multiplied, and diverse voices emerged, creating a mosaic of competing intellectual and political currents.

During this period, newspapers like Al-Baath, representing the socialist nationalist vision, and Al-Ayyam, reflecting the liberal current, became prominent players in shaping the new media discourse (Al-Alabi, 2023). There was a constant tension between the media openness desired by civil elites and the political interests that sought to exploit media as a tool for promoting their ideologies.

Independence allowed for the expression of various visions regarding the identity and future direction of the state. On one hand, nationalist discourse called for Arab unity, led by forces like the Baath Party. On the other hand, liberal and conservative currents aspired to strengthen democratic institutions and national economic development. This plurality of voices reflected the cultural and political dynamism unique to that period (Abdul Razzak, 2011).

However, this pluralism was not immune to the political crises that engulfed the country after independence. Syria experienced a series of successive military coups, starting with the 1949 coup, which intensified political and media polarization.

During this time, journalism became increasingly politicized, serving as a tool for settling political scores and power struggles. Newspapers advocating for freedom of expression faced censorship, either through forced closures or indirect control of their content. Over time, the media came to mirror the unstable social and political structure, with the press turning into a battleground for ideological conflicts. Competing political parties translated their ambitions into headlines and radio broadcasts.

The media was no longer merely a medium for disseminating news but became a reflection of the political and social tensions sweeping the country. Intellectual activity intertwined with instability, gradually shrinking the space for freedom. By the late 1960s, as the influence of military forces grew and the Baath Party consolidated its power, the contours of centralized control over media began to emerge, setting the stage for significant transformations in the Syrian media landscape in the following decades (Al-Dalati, 2020).

1.2.4 Media Under Hafez al-Assad (1970–2000)

With Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1970, Syrian media entered a new phase marked by a sharp departure from the fragile pluralism that characterized the post-independence media landscape. This era was defined by strict centralization, as the regime restructured the media to serve as a pivotal tool for consolidating power and reinforcing the ideology of the Baath Party.

During this period, media transitioned from a platform for diverse viewpoints to a mechanism for promoting political and cultural hegemony. The result was a monolithic media system focused on glorifying the regime and marginalizing dissenting voices.

Independent newspapers disappeared, replaced by state-aligned outlets like Al-Thawra and Tishreen, which became the primary instruments for producing the official media narrative. Radio and television also played central roles, utilized to shape public opinion and bolster the regime's legitimacy through a singular narrative aligned with Baathist ideology.

This transformation went beyond superficial propaganda; it represented a systematic attempt to reshape Syrian collective consciousness. History was rewritten, and national and social concepts were redefined to align with Hafez al-Assad's vision and regime (Edlbi, 2022, pp. 32–34).

The media environment appeared cohesive on the surface but was, in reality, univocal. Alternative voices were marginalized, and any narratives diverging from the regime's perspective were suppressed. Strict censorship stifled intellectual discourse, eliminating the possibility of free public debate. At the same time, media was used to promote the regime's grand projects, such as fostering national unity and addressing regional challenges, giving it a mobilizing role that extended beyond traditional information dissemination.

Over time, this approach entrenched the regime's cultural and political dominance. However, small pockets of resistance emerged on the margins, as some independent voices and foreign media outlets attempted to present alternative narratives. Despite the limited impact due to tight security controls, Syrian media during this era remained a reflection of a highly centralized regime capable of controlling public awareness, albeit at the expense of political openness and diversity (Edlbi, 2022, pp. 32–34).

1.2.5 Media Under Bashar al-Assad (2000–2011)

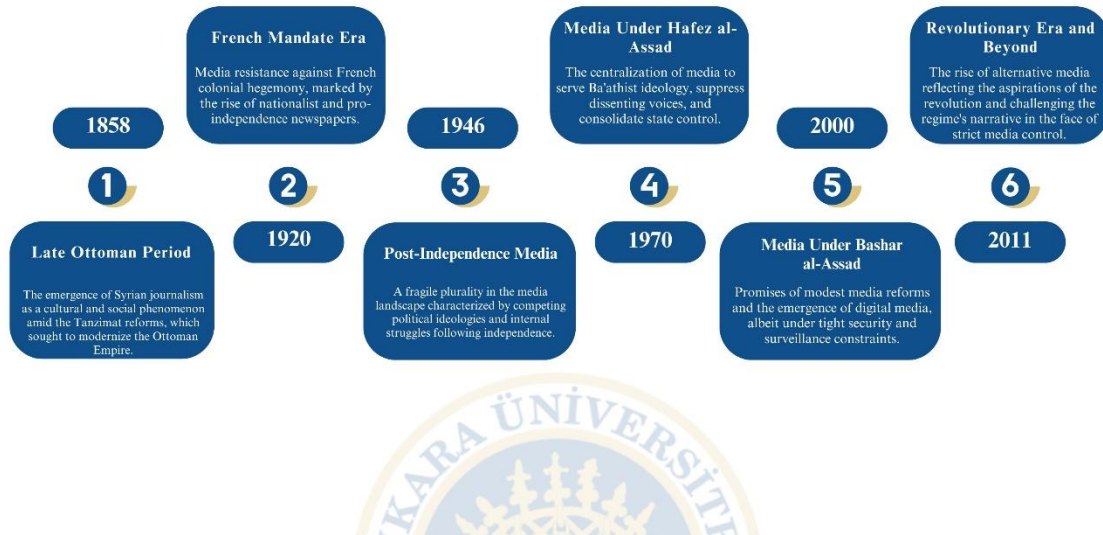
Bashar al-Assad's ascent to power in 2000 ushered in a period filled with promises of comprehensive reforms, with initial signs suggesting a loosening of restrictions in the media sector. During this period, private newspapers such as Al-Domari, Al-Watan, and Kulluna Shuraka were established, giving the impression of a cautious return to the media pluralism lost in previous decades. However, these openings were part of a more complex equation: security censorship mechanisms remained in place, albeit adopting more subtle and flexible forms (Saglier, 2022, p. 137).

The media during this time operated within tightly controlled boundaries, allowing new voices to emerge only if they adhered to “the rules of the game.” While these rules were unofficial, they were implicitly understood by all involved (Bahloul, 2016, pp. 15–20; SNHR, 2024c, pp. 45–50).

This era also witnessed the rise of digital media and internet connectivity, providing Syrians with access to alternative sources of knowledge. The internet became a new outlet for those seeking freedom of expression, with websites and blogs discussing political and social issues with relative boldness. However, this digital space was not immune to state control. Authorities developed electronic surveillance tools, blocking opposition websites and targeting online activists. Thus, censorship remained disguised behind a façade of modernity, preventing digital media from becoming a genuinely free platform (Bahloul, 2016, pp. 18–20).

The Evolution of Syrian Media

A Historical Journey Through Transformative Milestones



Graphic 1 The Evolution of Syrian Media: A Historical Journey Through Transformative Stages

The figure above illustrates the development of Syrian media through its various stages, highlighting key milestones influenced by political and social transformations from the Ottoman era to the Syrian revolution.

In the final phase before the Syrian revolution, the media landscape resembled a closed field. While the surface appeared relatively calm, underlying tensions revealed a deep-seated crisis within the media structure itself. Media during this period was governed by a delicate balance: a limited margin of freedom sufficient to create an illusion of openness, but still tightly monitored to prevent any genuine independence.

This crisis foreshadowed an imminent historical explosion, as the revolutionary movement later exposed the fragility of the media landscape engineered by the regime. It revealed the media's inability to adapt to major transformations or represent the aspirations of the Syrian people.

1.2.6 Syrian Media: A Mirror of Ongoing Conflicts

Through this historical examination spanning over 150 years, Syrian media emerges as a living reflection of deeper conflicts between authority and society. From the bureaucracy of the Ottoman era to the stifled promises of reform under Bashar al-Assad, the media has consistently served as a battleground for fierce negotiations over control of collective consciousness. During the French Mandate, media became a tool of resistance against imposed domination. After independence, it bore witness to the fragility of pluralism, which was soon eroded by military coups. Under the Baath Party, media transformed into a central instrument for ideological domination, managed through a univocal vision crafted by the regime to cement its power.

This historical legacy of restrictions and conflicts did not vanish with the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011. Instead, it fueled the rise of alternative media, which sought to create a new space free from the “media timeline” dictated by censors, giving voice to narratives that had been suppressed for decades. Understanding this legacy is key to grasping the nature of Syrian media today, both within the country's borders and in exile, where this new media strives to establish an identity independent of traditional power metrics.

1.3 SYRIAN MEDIA BEFORE AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION

1.3.1 Monolithism and Propaganda in Pre-Revolution Media

In the decades leading up to 2011, Syrian media represented a tightly controlled communicative space, meticulously designed to reflect the ruling regime’s perspective while ignoring the diversity and complexities of Syrian society. It served as an ideological tributary for the Baathist state, reproducing its political and social narratives while neglecting basic principles of plurality and independence.

Historically, the media under the regime was a symbolic façade showcasing the state's achievements while marginalizing dissenting voices. Since the Baath Party's ascension in 1963, a media vision was established based on the "propaganda function" of the state. Media became not merely a medium for information but a deliberate mechanism to "engineer awareness" and reshape reality according to the party's dictates.

This control was epitomized by the Ministry of Information, which oversaw all aspects of the communicative landscape, from appointing editors-in-chief of official newspapers to dictating editorial lines. The Ministry acted as a "filter" for media discourse, permitting content aligned with the party's agenda while prohibiting dissenting narratives, thus ensuring the coherence of the official narrative.

State-run newspapers like Tishreen, Al-Thawra, and Al-Baath dominated print media, while state television and radio monopolized audiovisual content. Investigative journalism disappeared and attempts to establish independent or private media were quashed before they could mature.

The Baath Party not only controlled media institutions but also co-opted them as ideological incubators, promoting the image of the "eternal leader"—whether Hafez or Bashar al-Assad—as the cornerstone of national identity. This narrative was not merely political propaganda but a deliberate construction of societal myths, redefining patriotism and loyalty to align with the regime's vision.

Pursuing truth became a perilous endeavor. Investigative journalism aimed at exposing corruption or challenging the regime was non-existent, and any attempt to deviate from the official script faced severe consequences, including dismissal, imprisonment, or professional exile.

The Emergence of Private Journalism: Al-Domari as an Example

In the early 2000s, during Bashar al-Assad's initial period in office, a semblance of media "openness" emerged, albeit fragile and conditional. In this environment, Al-Domari, a newspaper founded by artist Ali Ferzat in 2001, briefly carved out a unique space. Al-Domari was not just a private newspaper but a symbol of a hopeful critique, attempting to disrupt the state's monopoly on narratives and introduce a critical tone to the media landscape.

Despite its initial success in attracting an audience hungry for a different voice, this project quickly became a fleeting chapter in Syrian media history, as the newspaper was shut down under the weight of political and legal censorship (Edlbi, 2022, p. 35).

Other platforms, including radio stations like Sham FM and Rotana and private magazines, emerged during the same period. However, these outlets remained under the shadow of heavy censorship, focusing on entertainment and cultural content while avoiding substantial political or social discussions. These pre-defined "red lines" turned private media into a polished version of state media, adhering to the same controlling logic (Al-Aridi, 2017, p. 45).

The Internet: A New Window Under Surveillance

With the introduction of the internet to Syria in 2000, a new avenue for freedom of expression opened. Activists and independent journalists used this space to document violations and raise issues taboo in state media. However, the regime quickly adapted to this new dynamic, imposing strict surveillance on the digital sphere, blocking opposition websites, and targeting digital activists. This censorship was not just overt but also covert, involving hidden monitoring of online interactions.

Additionally, structural and economic barriers, such as lack of independent financial support and the requirement for security approval to attract advertising, stifled

attempts to create independent media narratives capable of competing with or challenging official discourse (Al-Aridi, 2017, p. 52; Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2022, p. 22).

Disillusionment and Lack of Genuine Independence

Over time, it became evident that these media experiments could not escape the regime's grip on all aspects of public space. Continuing in private media required internalizing the "red lines": avoiding political criticism and refraining from challenging the regime's "constants."

This realization turned private media into a new game with old rules. Many recognized that "independence" was an illusion, and these outlets were merely fragile extensions of the traditional media landscape (Taleb Al-Nasser, 2023).

In such an environment, journalists became "soldiers in a weaponless battle," facing the threat of arbitrary arrest for exposing corruption or criticizing figures within the regime. Prominent cases, such as the arrest of Mazen Darwish in 2008, founder of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, exemplify this repression (Mazen Darwish | Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, 2015).

The 2001 Press Law granted authorities broad powers to ban content under vague justifications such as "national security" or "national unity." Additionally, emergency laws were used to detain journalists and shut down media outlets without transparency (SNHR, 2024a, p. 78).

As a result, self-censorship became the norm, driven not just by external pressures but by an internalized culture of fear. This dynamic created a univocal media landscape managed through silent threats and fear (Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, 2022, p. 88).

While the regime allowed limited space for cultural and artistic journalism, such outlets operated under strict surveillance to ensure that no theatrical discussion or art exhibition became veiled criticism of the regime.

In conclusion, this tightly controlled media environment, characterized by repression and pervasive surveillance, laid the groundwork for the emergence of alternative media during the revolution. This new media was a natural response to the regime's attempts to silence dissenting voices.

1.3.2 Evolution of Media Post-Revolution

With the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, the media landscape was turned upside down. For years, the official media, aligned with Bashar al-Assad's regime and its authoritarian traditions, had monopolized discourse and directed it through ideological narratives and entrenched bureaucratic tools. The revolution disrupted this dynamic, "liberating" many truths that had been confined to closed corridors and exposing the official media to a historic crisis of trust.

At the onset of the revolution, the regime's media adopted a repetitive and limited narrative, focusing on conspiracy theories and portraying popular protests as "terrorist acts." In contrast, alternative platforms and independent media emerged, providing real-time coverage from the field and revealing the contradictions in the official narrative. According to a study titled *Syrian Media After Ten Years*, government media lacked flexibility and responsiveness in covering events, leading to a significant loss of trust among an audience increasingly exposed to alternative accounts via social media and modern platforms (Hammou & Mauvais, 2021).

The End of Narrative Monopoly

The Syrian revolution marked the beginning of the end for the official media's monopoly on the narrative it sought to impose. For decades, the regime claimed to be the

“engineer of collective awareness,” but the rise of new platforms and diverse information sources exposed the limitations of its ability to keep pace with on-the-ground realities.

The gap between what government media broadcast and what people experienced on the ground eroded its popularity and influence. A notable example was the Houla Massacre in 2012, where the official media denied responsibility and blamed “terrorists,” while independent media broadcast testimonies and videos that revealed the truth. This specific case highlighted the disconnect between official media and reality, deepening its credibility crisis (Hammou & Mauvais, 2021).

In this shifting landscape, alternative media emerged as a key player in Syria’s media scene. Initially starting as small individual initiatives on social media, it evolved into independent media institutions. According to the report Syria’s New Media Landscape, alternative media played a pivotal role in documenting events and amplifying Syrian voices globally, bypassing the restrictions imposed by government censorship (Issa, 2016, p. 12).

Alternative media leveraged technological advancements, using mobile phones and digital platforms like YouTube and Facebook to broadcast images and videos instantly. This immediacy lent greater credibility to its narratives. These platforms also documented human rights violations and war crimes, serving as a living memory of the Syrian conflict (Kozman et al., 2021b, p. 45).

Challenges Facing Alternative Media

Despite its successes, alternative media faced numerous challenges, including security threats, repression attempts, and difficulties securing funding. These platforms paid a high price for delivering the truth, with independent journalists subjected to arrests and assassinations, which affected the continuity of some media projects.

As the official media retreated in the face of these alternatives, it became evident that Syria's media landscape required comprehensive restructuring. The Syrian revolution exposed a deep crisis in the structure of traditional media and underscored the importance of platforms that reflect the diversity and complexities of Syrian society.

Alternative media remains an important model in Syria's media landscape, demonstrating how media can serve as a tool for change against oppressive regimes that have long controlled the truth (Bailey et al., 2008b, p. 67).

CHAPTER TWO

SYRIAN MEDIA IN TÜRKİYE: CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

2.1 MEDIA MIGRATION AND EXILE

In light of the historical review presented in Chapter 1, which explored the evolution of Syrian media from Assad’s authoritarian grip to the emergence of “alternative media” during the revolution, it is essential to delve deeper into the phenomenon of media migration to Türkiye. Several significant factors—including legal and security restrictions, escalating violence, and a growing desire among journalists for greater freedom—pushed many Syrian media professionals to neighboring countries, particularly Türkiye (Bahloul, 2016).

The Syrian revolution witnessed the rise of citizen journalists and field photographers who created alternative channels to convey the truth. Despite their lack of professional media experience, these individuals successfully documented violent events and popular protests, bringing them to the global stage. This led to a sharp increase in the number of media workers, both inside and outside Syria (Qabd Alzabad, 2016, p. 3).

As regime control receded in certain areas, new platforms emerged. Between 2011 and 2015, 298 independent media outlets were established, according to the Syria’s New Media Landscape report (Issa, 2016, p. 3). This number grew to approximately 600 platforms by 2017 (Alhamad, 2016, p. 3). Through this research, over 70 institutions based in Türkiye have been documented as part of this expansion, with Türkiye becoming the primary destination due to its relatively supportive environment during the early years of the conflict (Syria Media Map, 2013, p. 9).

2.1.1 Organized Media Migration

Media migration was not merely a forced decision but part of a structured process, influenced by varying levels of repression and the availability of suitable geographic

options. Cities such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Şanlıurfa became key hubs for Syrian journalists, offering a more flexible legal and media environment than Syria. However, the experience was not without challenges. Journalists faced legal complexities related to registration and licensing, as well as cultural and linguistic barriers that hindered communication with the Turkish audience (Badran, 2020, p. 112).

Additionally, deteriorating economic conditions and the collapse of the media job market in Syria prompted many to migrate. Numerous journalists lost their workplaces and equipment due to bombings or confiscation, forcing them to rebuild their projects abroad (Issa, 2016, p. 14).

Most newly established media institutions relied on international funding, which often came with conditions and agendas, raising concerns about maintaining editorial independence (Assaf, 2018, p. 44).

2.1.2 Transformative Impact of Media Migration

Despite these challenges, media migration marked a significant transformation in the Syrian media landscape. These platforms evolved beyond mere news outlets, playing a central role in documenting events and reshaping collective awareness. They became repositories of Syrian cultural memory, highlighting values of freedom and dignity, and addressing issues neglected by official narratives.

These institutions have turned into living archives, chronicling modern Syrian history and reflecting the struggle against oppression (Brownlee, 2017, p. 45). However, exile was not without risks. Journalists faced security threats, including assassination and persecution. Notable cases include the assassination of journalist Naji Jerf in Gaziantep in 2015 and the targeting of media activists like the Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently group (Daily Sabah, 2015). With 717 journalists killed since 2011, including 53 under

torture, Syria remains one of the most dangerous places globally for journalists (SNHR, 2024b).

2.1.3 Syrian Media Institutions in Türkiye

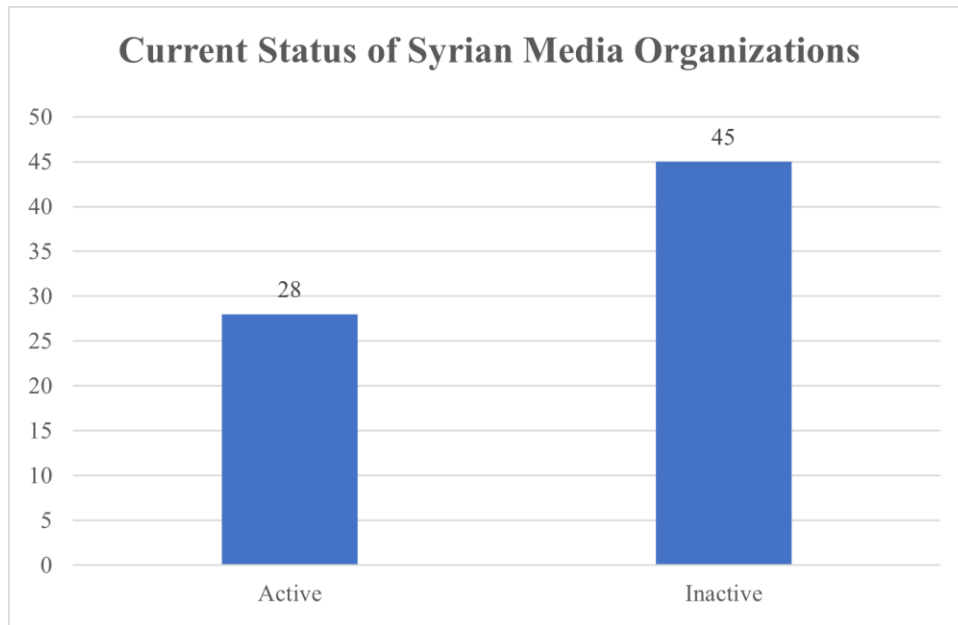
The following table documents the active and inactive Syrian media institutions in Türkiye since 2011, providing details on their classification, main locations, and current status.

ID	Media Organization Name	Headquarters	Classification	Current Status
1	Enab Baladi	Istanbul	Newspaper	Active
2	Rozana	Gaziantep	Radio	Active
3	Ain Al-Madina	Gaziantep	Magazine	Active
4	Nasaem Syria	Gaziantep	Radio	Active
5	Syiran Press Center	Reyhanlı	News Agency - Online News Platform	Active
6	The Syrian Journalists Association	Istanbul	Media Consortium	Active
7	Qasioun	Gaziantep	News Agency	Active
8	Baladi News	Gaziantep	News Agency	Active
9	Halab Today	Gaziantep	Television	Active
10	Hibr press	Gaziantep	Newspaper	Active
11	Shaam news	Istanbul	News Agency	Active
12	Horrya Press	Gaziantep	Online News Platform	Active
13	Radio Al-Kul	Istanbul	Radio	Active
14	Syria Press	Istanbul	Online News Platform	Active
15	Algherbal	Gaziantep	Magazine	Active
16	Alsharq News	Şanlıurfa	News Agency	Active
17	Ana press	Gaziantep	News Agency	Inactive
18	News Center	Istanbul	Online News Platform	Inactive
19	Aleppo Media Center	Gaziantep	News Agency	Inactive

20	Sada Al-Sham	Istanbul	Newspaper	Inactive
21	Geiroon	Istanbul	Online News Platform	Inactive
22	Shahed ayan Aleppo	Gaziantep	News Agency	Inactive
23	Althouraya	Istanbul	Newspaper	Inactive
24	Alwan	Istanbul	Radio	Inactive
25	Souriatna	Istanbul	Newspaper	Inactive
26	All Syrian	Istanbul	Magazine	Inactive
27	Lamba Media Production	Gaziantep	Media Production Center	Inactive
28	Yasmeen Syria	Gaziantep	Magazine	Inactive
29	Ain Infographic	Gaziantep	Magazine	Inactive
30	Zaitoun and Zaitouna	Mersin	Newspaper	Inactive
31	Albawsala	Gaziantep	Online News Platform	Inactive
32	Al-Katayb	Gaziantep	Newspaper	Inactive
33	Pro Media Syria	Gaziantep	Media Production Center	Inactive
34	Hentah	Gaziantep	Magazine	Inactive
35	Syria Today	Gaziantep	Newspaper	Inactive
36	Syria Live Network	Gaziantep	Online News Platform	Inactive
37	Hara FM	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
38	Sout Raya	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
39	Tamadoun	Istanbul	Newspaper	Inactive
40	Alnbaa	Gaziantep	Newspaper	Inactive
41	Hawa Smart Radio	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
42	Fajr Radio	Gaziantep	Radio	Active
43	Ninar Press	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
44	Zaitoun Agency	Istanbul	News Agency	Inactive
45	Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently	Şanlıurfa	Online News Platform	Inactive
46	Syria TV	Istanbul	Television	Active
47	Orient	Istanbul	Television	Inactive

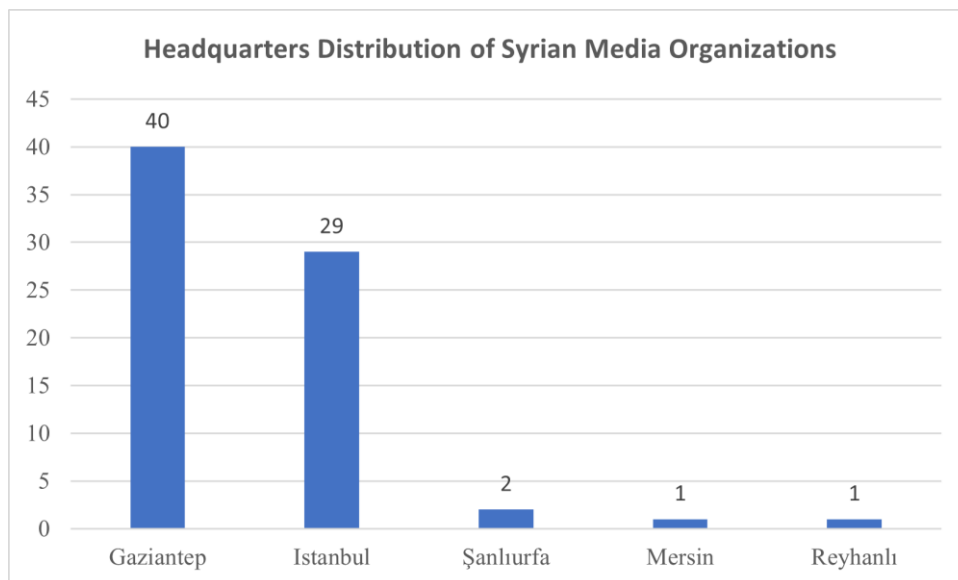
48	Jeeroon	Gaziantep	Online News Platform	Inactive
49	Al-Ayam	Gaziantep	Online News Platform	Inactive
50	Liwan Radio	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
51	Syrian Data	Gaziantep	Media Production Center	Active
52	Colors Radio	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
53	Syrian Publications Archive	Istanbul	Media Consortium	Inactive
54	Syrian Print Media Network	Istanbul	Media Consortium	Inactive
55	Harmoon	Istanbul	Research Center	Active
56	Jusoor	Istanbul	Research Center	Active
57	Syrian Dialogue	Istanbul	Research Center	Active
58	Watan FM	Istanbul	Radio	Inactive
59	Ana Radio	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
60	Spirit of Syria Radio	Gaziantep	Radio	Inactive
61	Sout Raya Radio	Istanbul	Radio	Inactive
62	Syrian Media Honor Charter	Gaziantep	Media Consortium	Active
63	Syrian Women Journalists Network	Gaziantep	Media Consortium	Active
64	Syrian Journalists Club	Gaziantep	Media Consortium	Inactive
65	4K Production	Gaziantep	Media Production Center	Active
66	Aljir	Istanbul	Television	Inactive
67	Dar Aliman	Istanbul	Television	Inactive
68	Brocar Press	Gaziantep	Online News Platform	Inactive
69	Alsouria	Istanbul	Online News Platform	Inactive
70	Aram Media	Istanbul	Online News Platform	Inactive
71	SIRAJ	Istanbul	Investigative Journalism	Active
72	Verify sy	Gaziantep	Countering Disinformation	Active
73	Sokoon Media	Istanbul	Media Production Center	Active

Table 1 Syrian Media Institutions in Türkiye and Their Current Status



Graphic 2 Key Observations Status of Syrian Media Institutions

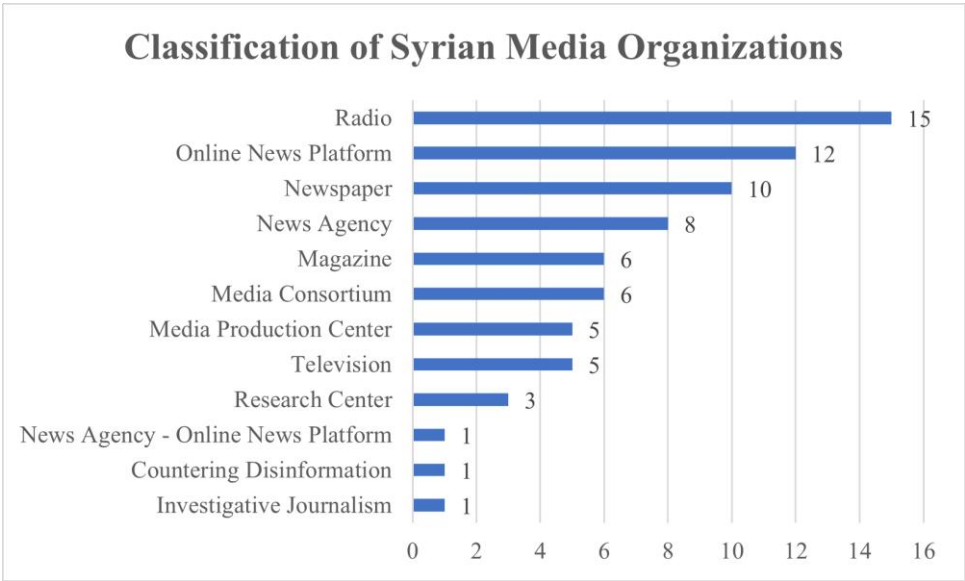
Out of 73 Syrian media institutions, only 28 remain active, while 45 have ceased operations. This reflects financial, legal, and political challenges that threaten media sustainability in exile. Addressing these issues is crucial for their continuity.



Graphic 3 Geographic Distribution

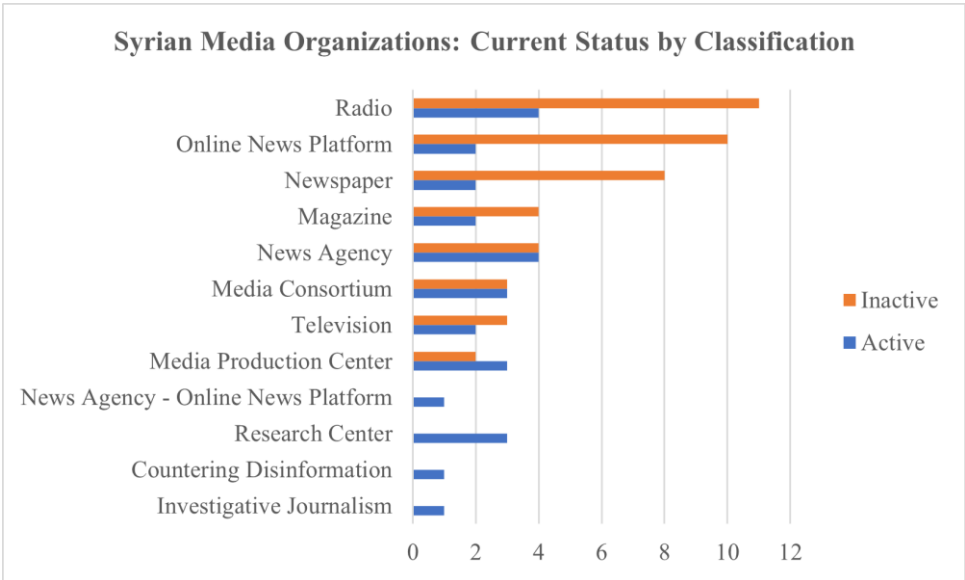
Most Syrian media institutions are concentrated in Gaziantep (40) and Istanbul (29), with fewer in Şanlıurfa, Mersin, and Reyhanlı. This distribution is influenced by

economic opportunities, proximity to Syria, and the presence of large Syrian communities.



Graphic 4 Classification of Media Institutions

Radio stations (15), online news platforms (12), and newspapers (10) dominate the media landscape, while research centers and investigative journalism are less common. This highlights both the diversity and gaps in Syrian media activities.



Graphic 5 Current Status by Classification

Indicates that radio stations, online platforms, and newspapers are the most affected by inactivity, while research centers and media production hubs demonstrate

relatively higher resilience. These observations suggest the need for targeted support strategies to strengthen vulnerable categories while learning from the resilience of others.

2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH: FIELDWORK AND INTERVIEWS

In light of the historical and analytical framework presented in the previous chapters, it becomes imperative to approach the experience of Syrian media in exile from a more field-specific perspective. This is achieved by gathering testimonies from journalists and founders who relocated their media activities to Türkiye or established new institutions there following the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011.

Under the suffocating security and regulatory restrictions, these media professionals found in Türkiye a relatively freer space to realize their professional visions, though this came with intertwined legal, financial, and cultural challenges. Accordingly, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with Syrian media founders and journalists. The interviews employed a semi-structured approach, with a set of core questions designed to explore their motivations for migration, professional organizational strategies, and the constraints they face in the new working environment.

Some participants agreed to disclose their identities and roles, while others' identities were kept confidential to protect their privacy and safety. Organizing these interviews presented several challenges, most notably scheduling conflicts due to participants' demanding workloads, as many were actively engaged in covering Syria's liberation from the Assad regime and Bashar al-Assad's subsequent flight to Russia. Coordinating interview times was difficult, and some participants canceled at the last minute due to work obligations.

2.2.1 Participant Selection Criteria

Participants were selected based on several criteria, including professional experience, media specialization, and geographic distribution. Journalists with more than

five years of experience in media were prioritized, and participants included founders, managers, and journalists from various types of media outlets (television, news, digital platforms) to ensure diversity in specializations. Additionally, journalists from different Turkish cities were chosen to capture a range of experiences and perspectives.

The data was analyzed using a thematic analysis method, identifying main and sub-themes from the testimonies and linking them to the theoretical framework outlined in previous chapters. The analysis employed manual coding techniques to detect recurring patterns among the testimonies.

2.2.2 Interview Objectives

The interviews aimed to achieve the primary objectives of the research, which include understanding the motivations behind media professionals' migration to Türkiye and how field conditions influenced their professional independence. They also sought to identify the legal, financial, and cultural challenges facing Syrian media institutions in exile and examine how these institutions address these challenges.

Additionally, the research explored the relationship between these institutions and their Syrian audience, investigating how they reflect cultural and national identity in their media discourse. In this context, the study aimed to combine quantitative analysis (numbers and statistics) with qualitative analysis (journalists' testimonies) to achieve a deeper understanding of the interaction between historical and field realities.

In order to contextualize these objectives and ensure a grounded analysis, it is pertinent to highlight the researcher's professional and ethical stance within the media field. Embarking on his journalism career in 2011, the researcher gained initial professional experience amidst significant transformations in the media landscape, working with television channels such as "Halab Today," as well as various newspapers and online news platforms. He currently leads a team of correspondents and teaches

courses in journalism, media ethics, and content production, thereby enriching his academic pursuits with practical insights. Moreover, as a Board Member of the Syrian Journalists' Code of Honor, he actively supports initiatives aimed at reinforcing professional standards and ethical values. By integrating field-based expertise with a strong sense of ethical responsibility, the researcher seeks to foster a more genuine, transparent, and inclusive media environment—adding a holistic dimension to his academic and professional endeavors in journalism.

2.3 SYRIAN MEDIA FOUNDERS: ENVIRONMENT AND FUTURE PLANS

2.3.1 Motivations for Establishment

The initial step in analyzing the Syrian media institutions' relocation or establishment in Türkiye after the 2011 revolution focuses on the driving factors. Despite variations in individual experiences, interviews and collected documents reveal common overarching themes encompassing political-security, professional, legal, and personal dimensions. Below is a detailed exploration of these factors:

Political and Security Context: “Searching for Impossible Safety at Home”

Accounts such as that of Akram Al-Ahmad (Syrian Press Center) indicate that repeated exposure to bombings during fieldwork in northern Hama and southern Idlib, coupled with the inability to ensure a safe environment for journalists, prompted a decision to relocate outside Syria. In his interview, Al-Ahmad emphasized that “moving to Türkiye meant professional and legal stability” after he and his brother were injured during bombings.

Similarly, Yasser Khairallah of Radio Al-Kul highlighted that “killings, arrests, and targeted attacks were primary motivators,” as producing free media content was impossible amidst security chaos.

In addition to bombings, restrictions imposed by the regime's apparatuses and some armed factions in liberated areas constituted a secondary reason for the exodus. Al-Ahmad explained how "security restrictions by military factions in Idlib made work unstable" and how journalists struggled to adapt to the de facto authorities, which did not tolerate criticism.

Legal Motivations: "We Need Licensing Unavailable at Home"

Interviewees like Al-Ahmad frequently mentioned the "need for legal licensing... a bank account... etc." International partners often required legally registered entities, which was impossible under Syrian law. The Assad regime offered only two choices: affiliation with the state-controlled journalists' union or nothing.

For instance, in an interview with Enab Baladi, Jawad Sharabaji stated that securing external funding or international training partnerships required a licensed entity, which was unattainable in Syria, as the regime would never license institutions suspected of opposition.

Geographically close and not requiring visas for Syrians at the time, Türkiye adopted an "open-door policy"². Moreover, the ability to open bank accounts and sign funding contracts with international organizations made it the primary destination. Most interviews, including that with Lina Al-Shawaf of Rozana, confirm that "licensing" was a major driving factor. Al-Shawaf specifically noted that the lack of a legal environment inside Syria rendered genuine media activities precarious and unrecognized internationally.

² The "Open Door Policy" in the Turkish context refers to the approach adopted by the Turkish government since 2011 toward Syrian refugees, allowing them to enter the country without restrictions, which resulted in Türkiye hosting a significant number of refugees (Hawasli, 2021). Over time, as the number of refugees increased and the challenges associated with hosting them grew, the Turkish government began to modify this policy. It can be said that Türkiye's Open Door Policy for Syrian refugees commenced in 2011 and continued until 2015, with some adjustments and new directions introduced during this period.

Professional and Technical Motivations: “Resuming Journalistic Work in a Stable Environment”

Several interviewees, such as Khalil Agha from Halab Today, lamented frequent power and communication outages in Syria, which made continuing journalistic work at even a basic level of quality nearly impossible. For Radio Al-Kul, Khairallah recounted their initial attempts to broadcast via FM from Aleppo, only to be forced to relocate after “the regime’s control of Aleppo in 2016” led to the complete collapse of infrastructure.

The primary enabler was the availability of stable internet, rentable studios, and technical support from organizations or companies specializing in content production. Founders highlighted cities like Gaziantep and Istanbul as hubs with advanced media infrastructure, including production companies and small studios. This environment facilitated experimenting with broader formats, such as television and radio programs or animated productions, which were nearly impossible to achieve inside Syria.

Personal and Social Factors: “Family Presence and Personal Determination”

Interviews, including those with Al-Ahmad and Agha, mentioned that having family members in Türkiye facilitated the decision to migrate. The presence of a large Syrian community in Türkiye also eased hiring and engaging with the target audience (Arabic-speaking Syrians), as noted by Al-Shawaf.

Al-Ahmad shared that he had studied journalism before the revolution and returned to his core profession during the revolution to meet the urgent need for journalists. This blend of personal passion and professional commitment mirrored the experience of Sharabaji (Enab Baladi), who expressed enthusiasm for fostering alternative, independent journalism.

Evaluation

The confluence of bombings, arrests, and repressive measures by both the regime and armed groups rendered “leaving Syria” nearly inevitable for those seeking independent media work. Safe reporting became impossible, transforming departure into a matter of survival rather than a mere professional decision. Simultaneously, the need for legal licensing, banking services, and formal recognition propelled Syrian outlets toward more accommodating environments. Compared to Lebanon or Egypt, Türkiye offered a relatively flexible legal framework in the early years of the revolution, allowing these exiled media institutions to form on an institutional rather than purely individual basis.

The collapse of infrastructure after 2012—manifesting in unreliable electricity, internet, and broadcast facilities—further compelled media professionals to seek stable working conditions elsewhere. Türkiye, with its more advanced facilities, quickly became the practical choice for continued media development. Additionally, familial ties and a sizeable Syrian diaspora in Türkiye smoothed the transition, while the fundamental goal of establishing an independent media voice aligned with exile media theories, which posit that such migration is not just an escape from oppression but also a pursuit of creative freedom.

Ultimately, these security, legal, professional, and social factors converged on a single reality: “Independent media operations inside Syria became virtually impossible after 2012.” In response, dozens—if not hundreds—of Syrian media platforms emerged in Türkiye during the early years of the revolution, illustrating an unprecedented institutional shift in the history of Syrian media.

2.3.2 Organizational Structure and Professional Development

After exploring the primary motivations that led to the establishment of alternative Syrian media in Türkiye, this section delves into the internal frameworks of these media

institutions and their evolution from spontaneous or rudimentary initiatives to more professional organizations aiming for sustainability. The relative stability provided by Türkiye has enabled these entities to develop organizational structures, albeit with persistent challenges in funding and recruitment.

This analysis highlights how Syrian media institutions have adapted to a new environment while striving to maintain their mission and operational efficiency amidst external pressures and internal limitations.

Origin Between Volunteerism and Professionalism

According to Ahmed (Syrian Press Center), before relocating to Türkiye, the institution primarily consisted of a group of volunteer media activists providing field news coverage and modest photographic and video content shared through platforms like Facebook and Skype. A similar account was provided by Sharbaji (Enab Baladi), who mentioned that the newspaper began as a “single-page flyer pasted on walls in Daraya,” later evolving into a clandestine newspaper with hundreds of copies printed and distributed secretly.

Transition to Institutional Models During Migration

Upon arriving in Türkiye, the need to “hire professional journalists and pay salaries” became apparent, as noted by Ahmed and Agha (Halab Today). The expansion of media production and the diversification of programs (radio broadcasts, TV shows, advanced websites) made it challenging to maintain a volunteer-driven model. For instance, Radio Al-Kul shared that between 2013 and 2014, they had to establish defined editorial departments (news, programming, preparation) with specific roles, such as news directors, program managers, anchors, and technicians.

Main Departments

Syrian media institutions in Türkiye, despite their varying scales and scopes, share several common organizational structures. These departments were created to address the diverse demands of modern media production and to align with international standards. The main departments include:

- **News Department: The Backbone of the Institution**

Often described as the “backbone” of the institution, the news department is a vital component. For instance, the Syrian Press Center divided its editorial work into “breaking news, TV programs, and publishing and promotion.” Other institutions, such as Halab Today, rely heavily on their news department for preparing news bulletins and political content.

- **Programs Department: Engaging the Audience**

For radio and television, dedicated departments were established to produce talk shows, variety programs, and content targeting the Syrian audience in Türkiye. Enab Baladi, being a newspaper, created specific sections for writers, investigative editors, and field reporters. It also explored podcasting, similar to Rozana Radio.

- **Publishing and Promotion Department: Amplifying the Reach**

With the increasing reliance on social media and digital marketing, institutions like the Syrian Press Center created independent “social media teams” for content promotion and audience interaction. Al-Ahmad emphasized the necessity of such teams to handle publishing and engagement.

Operations and Training Department

Many founders referenced the “operations” or “administrative” departments, which oversee project management and planning, particularly in institutions dependent on international funding.

Institutions like the Syrian Press Center and Enab Baladi established dedicated training and development departments. These departments organized training programs for new staff, and as Al-Shawaf explained, focused on training citizen journalists and involving them in radio programs.

Broadcasting Platforms and Production Studios

Institutions like Radio Al-Kul and Halab Today established technical and engineering divisions to manage studio setups and satellite or radio broadcasting. For online newspapers, developers and web editors became essential. This technical/engineering department has become crucial for quality control.

In the case of the Syrian Press Center (Al-Ahmad), the organizational structure includes a Board of Directors overseeing general policies and an Executive Body led by a CEO managing daily operations. Similarly, Enab Baladi employs a structure resembling that of non-profit organizations, with a General Assembly (comprising founding members) and an Executive Team for operational management.

Some institutions opted for registration as non-profit organizations or associations, while others registered as commercial entities in Türkiye. These choices significantly influenced their administrative structure. For instance, Radio Rozana (Al-Shawaf) transitioned from an association to a company to secure an FM broadcasting license, altering their administrative leadership framework.

Administrative Structure: Board of Directors or General Assembly?

The administrative frameworks of Syrian media institutions in Türkiye varied based on their operational scale and funding sources. While some adopted a board of directors to oversee strategy and decision-making, others operated with more flexible structures resembling a general assembly, allowing broader participation in governance.

Board of Directors: Institutions with international funding often formed structured boards of directors responsible for setting policies and ensuring compliance with donor requirements.

General Assembly: Smaller organizations, or those with more grassroots origins, favored a general assembly model, allowing greater involvement from all team members in decision-making processes.

Recruitment and Attracting Journalists

Al-Ahmad emphasized the difficulty of securing qualified journalists, citing a lack of experience among many activists and the loss of talented professionals who migrated to Europe. Yasser Khairallah (Radio Al-Kul) noted that the “brain drain to Europe during the peak of the refugee crisis” led to a significant loss of talent. Additionally, professional journalists often preferred higher salaries offered by international organizations.

To address the skills gap, many institutions adopted “volunteer and training programs.” Al-Ahmad mentioned that the Syrian Press Center relied on young volunteers for six months, selecting the most capable for employment. Another founder highlighted the approach of “one week of theoretical training followed by six months of practical application,” which helped cultivate a new generation of journalists.

Flexible Structures in Response to Funding Shortages

Testimonies from Al-Ahmad and Al-Shawaf indicate that institutions often expand departments during periods of funding but downsize to small teams (3-4 employees) when grants diminish. This “flexible structure” allows them to adjust to resource availability.

Institutions like the Syrian Press Center and Halab Today reported closing offices in cities like Reyhanlı or Gaziantep due to high costs, maintaining symbolic offices in

Türkiye while managing operations remotely. This reliance on short-term funding underscores the instability of their organizational structures.

Evaluation: A Professional Structure in Need of Stability

Over time, Syrian media institutions in Türkiye transitioned from youth-led, volunteer-based initiatives—often born amid the revolutionary fervor—to more formal entities with defined editorial departments, training units, and technical production teams. Türkiye’s relatively flexible legal environment and its technical infrastructure facilitated this professionalization, allowing activists to become contracted journalists, establish specialized departments, and explore advanced formats that would have been nearly impossible in the volatile setting inside Syria.

However, this process was neither straightforward nor without obstacles. Limited expertise among recruits, combined with the legal requirements for official registration and funding, often forced these outlets to adopt hybrid administrative structures—ranging from non-profit entities to for-profit companies—to comply with regulations and secure donor support. In practice, founders typically retained a central leadership role, balancing the need for professionalism with the realities of legal uncertainty and intermittent funding.

Funding shortages remain a persistent challenge. Institutions frequently expand their teams when short-term grants are available, then downsize once those funds expire, highlighting the ongoing fragility of their operations. Although volunteerism remains integral—both as a cost-saving strategy and a means of capacity-building—excessive reliance on unpaid staff can hamper consistent quality and continuity. Moreover, competition with international media, licensing pressures, and the prospect of hiring Turkish staff only add further complexity to maintaining stable, long-term structures.

Despite these constraints, the shift from improvised efforts to organized frameworks represents a significant advancement compared to pre-revolution Syrian journalism. New managerial models, specialized departments, and collaborative approaches have emerged, indicating a substantial step forward in cultivating independent media. Yet the absence of stable financial foundations continues to threaten the long-term sustainability and cohesion of these professional teams, underscoring the precarious balance between growth and survival in the context of media exile.

2.3.3 Legal and Financial Challenges

Following the exploration of foundational motivations (security, professional, and legal) and the organizational structures developed in Türkiye, the third section addresses two critical challenges: legal issues (related to licensing, work permits, etc.) and financial challenges (securing resources and managing funds). The interviews with founders and directors reveal the extent of the disruptions these challenges cause in maintaining and stabilizing their media institutions.

Legal Challenges: “Interaction Between Turkish Reality and Syrian Media Work”

Several founders (e.g., Al-Ahmad, Al-Shawaf, and Khairallah) encountered the requirement that for every foreign employee, five Turkish employees must be employed in the same institution. This was described as the “biggest obstacle” since most of their teams consisted of Syrian journalists. Institutions like the Syrian Press Center attempted to officially register Syrian employees but were rejected—either due to incomplete documents or because the employee lacked temporary residency/protection permits in the same province.

Many journalists hesitated to register with Turkish social insurance out of fear of losing benefits such as the Red Crescent Card or other aid programs. This preference for

“informal” work undermines the ability to build stable journalistic teams and places institutions in legal jeopardy if the situation persists.

Structure of the Institution: NGO or Commercial Company? Legal

Some sought to establish non-profit organizations (NGOs) in Türkiye, but they encountered obstacles such as refusal to license a media institution on the grounds that it is a “content producer.” Radio and TV stations complained about their inability to operate as NGOs. Agha (Halab Today) noted, “The Turkish government did not accept licensing us as a civil society organization because we are a media outlet,” forcing them to register as for-profit companies.

Others resorted to registering as companies but were classified as “for-profit entities,” requiring them to pay taxes even if they were not generating profits. For instance, Al-Shawaf (Rozana) explained that they had to establish a company to rent an FM frequency, which led to issues with taxes and high financial costs, as grants were considered “commercial revenue” and subject to taxation.

Financial Documentation and Oversight

Many founders mentioned difficulties in documenting expenses and transactions in compliance with Turkish regulations, particularly when dealing with remittances for operations in Syrian conflict zones. Al-Ahmad noted that the nature of media work in these regions often prevents obtaining official invoices, exposing them to legal scrutiny.

Financial Challenges: “When Funding Ends, So Does the Work”

Interviews (Syrian Press Center, Radio Al-Kul, Enab Baladi, etc.) revealed that primary funding comes from European or American organizations supporting free media. However, these grants are typically short-term (6–12 months). Once a project concludes, salaries for a large portion of the team cease.

Some, like Rozana and Enab Baladi, reported no editorial pressures from donors, while others mentioned “guidelines” regarding program content or restrictions on funding certain projects, such as focusing only on awareness or solutions journalism. Political shifts in international agendas concerning Syria have also led to reduced support.

Lack of Local Advertisements or Support

Al-Shawaf (Rozana) attempted to attract advertisements from Syrian and Turkish merchants but faced challenges due to the fragmented Syrian landscape. Many merchants feared associating their names with opposition-aligned media. Similarly, Khairallah (Radio Al-Kul) acknowledged the absence of a viable advertising market for Syrian exiled media, leaving them heavily reliant on grants.

Self-Funding?

A few founders (e.g., Halab Today) mentioned efforts to secure self-funding, but these proved insufficient to cover satellite broadcasting costs or team salaries. The fallback options remain grants, partial volunteering, and shutting down departments when necessary.

International Support for Independent Syrian Media: Challenges and Key Entities

My research reveals that the Syrian independent media sector heavily relies on international organizations for funding due to the absence of local financial resources and the challenges associated with commercial advertising. These organizations range from global grant-giving entities to institutions specializing in media project development, all aimed at promoting independent journalism and press freedom. However, challenges such as the short duration of funding, often tied to political agendas or specific programs, render this support insufficient for sustainable operations.

Prominent Supporting Organizations

Several organizations have played a crucial role in supporting Syrian media through financial aid, training, and capacity-building initiatives. Key contributors include:

- **USAID, Free Press Unlimited, and Open Society Foundation**, which have provided grants to bolster free media.
- **International Media Support (IMS), National Endowment for Democracy (NED), and European Endowment for Democracy (EED)**, which focus on financial and technical assistance to strengthen institutional capabilities.
- Organizations like **CFI Media Development, IREX, MediaLibre, and Adopt a Revolution**, which emphasize project development through specialized training programs.
- **Journalists for Human Rights (JHR)**, which prioritizes journalism related to human rights, has become a key partner in fostering responsible reporting.

Other institutions like **Internews, MICT, ARK, IWPR, and COSV** have also significantly contributed to this sector. A notable case is **Creative Associates International**, which provided substantial support to Syrian media but later ceased funding due to shifting U.S. priorities, negatively affecting many media projects (Eid, 2024).

Organization	Type of Support
IREX	Training programs and institutional development for media
MEDIALIBRE	Programs supporting free and independent media

ADOPT A REVOLUTION	Support for developing independent media projects
JHR (JOURNALISTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS)	Support for journalism focused on human rights
CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL	Funding media projects (currently inactive)
INTERNEWS	Training and technical programs to support media
MICT	Media cooperation and capacity building
ARK	Conflict mitigation and promoting stability and growth
IWPR	Support for war and peace journalism
COSV	Volunteer programs supporting media
EUROPEAN COMMISSION	Funding for independent media institutions
SIDA	Support for media development
DANIDA	Funding for international media projects
UNESCO	Media support through cultural and educational projects
HIVOS	Supporting social movements for inclusive and sustainable societies
RNW Media	Digital media for youth and social change
Reporter Without Borders	Advocacy and support for press freedom
ICIJ	Cross-border investigative journalism support
ICFJ	Training and resources for empowering journalists

The Asfari Foundation	Supporting education and civil society development
INTERNEWS	Training and technical assistance for media
CFI	Media capacity building and ethical journalism
Free Press Unlimited	Supporting independent media in challenging environments
European Endowment for Democracy	Funding for democracy and independent media
UNDEF	Funding projects for democracy and independent media development

Table 2 Organizations supporting Syrian media and type of support

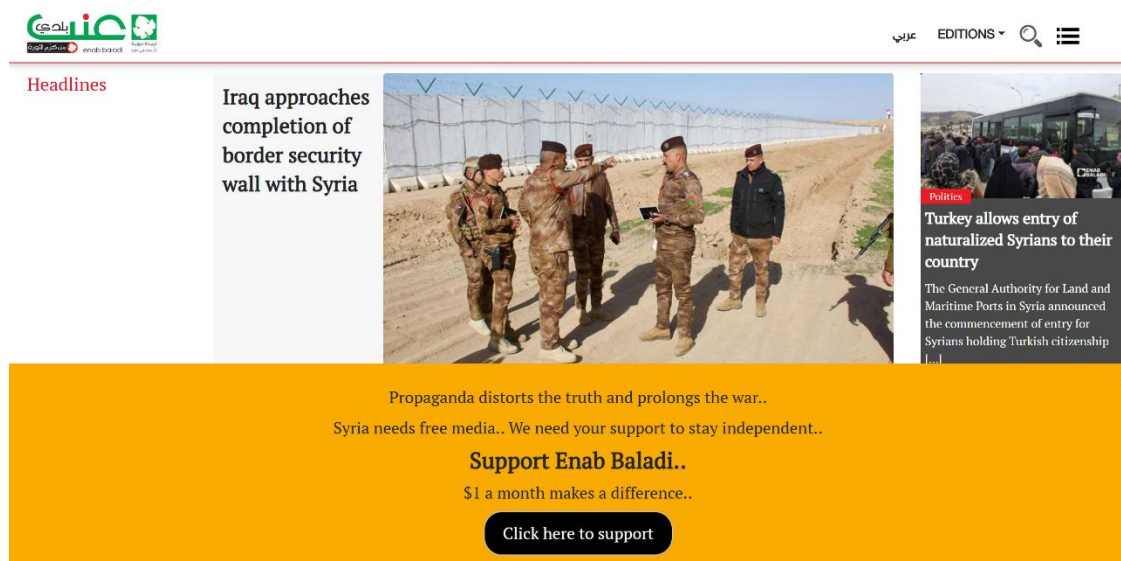


Figure 3 The Electronic Platform of Enab Baladi

The image features the homepage of “Enab Baladi,” one of the most prominent Syrian independent media institutions established in exile following the Syrian revolution. The platform provides news coverage and analyses on Syrian issues, focusing on the political and social aspects affecting Syrians within and outside the country.

The image also showcases an initiative by the newspaper to request support from Syrians in and outside Syria through symbolic monthly contributions as low as \$1. This local funding approach reflects efforts to foster self-sustained financing for the sector and reduce dependence on international aid. However, the effectiveness of this method remains unclear, as the significant financial gap in the sector persists. Success in such initiatives depends on factors like public awareness of independent journalism's importance, trust in media institutions, and the economic conditions of potential contributors.

The Role of Syrian Investors Abroad

In addition to direct audience support, Syrian investors abroad have made attempts to fund independent media. These investors have played a pivotal role in establishing and financing some of the independent media institutions that emerged in recent years. Initially, these ventures exhibited flexibility, with investors providing temporary financial support that enabled the launch or continuity of these institutions. However, most of these efforts have failed to achieve the desired sustainability.

The experience of Syrian investors abroad demonstrates the potential of private capital in supporting independent media, emphasizing the need for more structured and long-term strategies to ensure its survival and growth.

Models of Adaptation and Resilience

Many media institutions, such as the Syrian Center for Media and Radio Rozana, rely heavily on volunteer teams and offer free training programs. This approach significantly reduces expenses by avoiding the need to pay substantial salaries. However, it also impacts the quality of professional output.

Some institutions have adopted strategies to diversify their funding sources by collaborating with multiple donors simultaneously. For example, in 2019, Enab Baladi

and the Syrian Center for Media sought subsidiary licenses in France and other countries to facilitate agreements with organizations supporting press freedom outside Türkiye.

When a grant is obtained for a particular type of content, such as producing animated media, the institution directs all its efforts toward that specific project. According to Al-Ahmad's interview, these organizations fully specialize in such ventures, which, while potentially exhausting their resources, provide temporary financial security.

Evaluation: A Difficult Path to Sustainability

The interplay of legal ambiguity and financial volatility underscores the fragile reality in which Syrian media organizations operate in Türkiye. Because Turkish law does not clearly categorize non-profit media work, these outlets must register either as NGOs—risking content restrictions—or as commercial entities, which taxes their grants. This ambiguity gives rise to a chronic “financial fragility”: new staff are hired when funding becomes available, only to be laid off once grants end. As a result, building a durable, cumulative journalistic practice becomes nearly impossible.

Reliance on international donors further compounds the issue. Shifting agendas can abruptly cut off grants, forcing media founders to juggle paperwork and funding negotiations more than content production. Some organizations opt for a second relocation—often to European countries like France or Germany—hoping to find a more accommodating legal framework. Yet these moves may simply replicate similar hurdles under different regulations. Additionally, the looming threat of legal repercussions and job insecurity places significant psychological strain on journalists.

Although these institutions have achieved tangible outcomes, sustainability remains a major challenge. Constantly grappling with unstable funding, opaque legal requirements, and potential second migrations diverts considerable effort away from journalistic innovation. Consequently, while their contributions to independent Syrian

media are vital, the path to a truly stable and enduring media infrastructure remains fraught with uncertainty.

2.3.4 Impact on Syrian Audience and Alternative Media

After examining the legal and financial dimensions that constrain the trajectory of Syrian media institutions in Türkiye, this section shifts focus to their impact on the Syrian audience within Türkiye and, at times, beyond. These platforms not only deliver news and political opinions but also play a significant role in shaping a new collective identity in exile, fostering an expressive space that contributes to the social cohesion of the Syrian diaspora.

The Role of Media in Addressing the Daily Needs of Syrians in Türkiye

Interviews conducted with members of the Syrian community indicate a heavy reliance on Syrian channels, such as *Halab Today*, *Radio Al-Kul*, and *Rozana Radio*, for “service-oriented” information related to Turkish residency, work permits, and municipal announcements. Founders of platforms like *Halab Today* highlighted programs designed for refugees, such as *Sistem*, which explains Turkish laws and provides guidance on the job market.

When asked why they prefer Syrian media over Turkish outlets, many respondents cited their primary need to stay informed about events inside Syria and issues related to exile. Syrian platforms provide content in Arabic and from a Syrian perspective, fulfilling this need. According to Ahmed from the Syrian Press Center, the audience in Türkiye is keen to follow updates from regions they fled, maintaining cultural and linguistic ties to their homeland.

Interaction and Dependency: Building Trust or Competing with Traditional Media?

User testimonials reveal varying levels of trust. During the early years of the revolution, “alternative media” enjoyed widespread popularity due to its credibility compared to official outlets. However, as the number of institutions grew, competition over credibility and quality intensified.

Limited outreach to the Turkish-speaking audience raises the question of whether this media has effectively influenced Turkish society. Most platforms (*Enab Baladi*, *Halab Today*) have made modest attempts at creating translated content or Turkish-language podcasts. However, financial constraints have hindered these efforts. Consequently, their primary audience remains Arabic-speaking Syrians in Türkiye or inside Syria, solidifying their role as a “community media” serving a specific diaspora.

As noted in an interview with Shawaaf from *Rozana*, they have introduced entertainment and artistic programs to cater to Syrian refugees, compensating for their lack of recreational resources in exile. These media outlets also provide a platform for free political discourse and discussions about refugees' daily struggles, elevating their role beyond merely reporting news—they become a hub for community interaction and identity exploration.

Impact on Building a Syrian Collective Identity in Exile

Most media institutions in this study oppose the regime's narrative, exposing its violations and documenting events ignored by official channels. This creates a “collective awareness” among refugees, affirming that platforms exist to represent them and challenge the regime's propaganda. For instance, *Enab Baladi* has produced investigative reports on “violations in regime-controlled areas,” reinforcing exiles' sense of connection to ongoing struggles at home.

Many reports document testimonies of victims of detention and bombing, serving as historical records and visual/audio archives of Syrian suffering. This helps preserve a shared national identity and prevents crimes from being erased over time.

Challenges in Audience Reach and Expanding Influence

Despite aspirations to reach a broader audience, these platforms face budgetary constraints that limit their ability to invest in major advertising campaigns. Many rely on “viral sharing” via social media or their base of revolution supporters, which restricts their appeal to a more diverse segment of the Syrian population.

The Syrian audience is inherently divided. Pro-regime individuals often avoid opposition media, while some Syrians in Türkiye engage more with Turkish or global media. Consequently, alternative media primarily attracts an “opposition-aligned” audience or those seeking specific services (e.g., legal aid programs).

Evaluation: Serving Refugees and Shaping National Identity

Syrian alternative media in Türkiye simultaneously addresses two major needs. On one hand, it acts as the voice of an afflicted homeland, offering crucial updates on Syrian affairs and reinforcing a cross-border collective identity. On the other, these outlets serve as an indispensable guide for refugees, clarifying legal processes, living conditions, and integration challenges, thereby cultivating a measure of trust—albeit inconsistently—with their audience.

Yet these platforms also stir mixed reactions. They are a primary source of news and support for many Syrians, while others fault them for their limited outreach, restricted resources, and insufficient engagement with Turkish society. Most of these outlets operate under financial and professional constraints, curbing both content quality and long-term impact. Nonetheless, exile affords them a powerful stage to address the world

on behalf of Syrians, reinforcing refugees' sense of belonging and preserving narratives otherwise silenced by oppressive forces.

Ultimately, despite their fragmented reach—given the myriad political, economic, and social factors that divide Syrians—these media channels remain a lifeline. By preserving collective memory and forging a vital link to home, they not only provide practical services for those displaced but also champion a unifying national cause that underscores the resilience of the Syrian community in exile.

2.3.5 Relationship with the Turkish Media Landscape and Society

After exploring the impact of Syrian media institutions in Türkiye on the Syrian refugee audience, the question arises regarding their interaction with Turkish society: Have these platforms attempted to engage Turkish audiences in their language? Have they successfully forged partnerships with Turkish journalists or institutions? And have they aimed to foster understanding between the two peoples, or has their role been primarily confined to serving refugees? The answers vary based on the nature of each institution and the extent of their resources. The following analysis sheds light on this aspect based on interviews and available sources.

Attempts to Engage the Turkish Audience

According to Shawaaf (*Rozana*), they attempted to launch a media project targeting Turkish society with programs showcasing the positive impact of the Syrian presence, particularly its economic and social contributions. However, this initiative did not continue due to a lack of funding and the difficulty of finding a journalistic team fluent in Turkish and familiar with the local context. Similarly, Shurbaji (*Enab Baladi*) noted their efforts to produce Turkish-language podcasts, such as *Sınır Etkisi*, aimed at fostering cultural dialogue and promoting migrant rights in Türkiye. However, limited resources prevented the expansion and sustainability of such programs.

These initiatives highlight the difficulty of creating Turkish content capable of competing in a saturated local media landscape. Most Syrian journalists lack advanced Turkish proficiency and a deep understanding of Turkish culture. As a result, platforms like *Halab Today* and *Enab Baladi* often relied on Turkish presenters or translators, which required additional funding or competitive salaries that were not always available.

Partnerships with Turkish Media Outlets or Entities

Interviews (e.g., with Ahmed and Khairallah) reveal that “we have not received any financial, technical, or training support from Turkish entities.” Instead, these institutions have relied on European and American organizations. There are currently no clear Turkish government programs dedicated to supporting independent Syrian media, although some major Turkish television channels have cooperated with Syrians in limited ways.

Some institutions have made connections with Turkish organizations to coordinate training or service initiatives. For instance, *Radio Al-Kul* organized Turkish language courses for Syrian journalists in collaboration with Ankara’s media directorate, while *Rozana* hosted radio segments featuring Turkish guests. However, such collaborations remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Addressing Hate Speech and Integration

Some Syrian channels considered launching “bridge programs” to improve relations with Turkish society or debunk myths about Syrian refugees. However, most interviewees highlighted the failure of such initiatives to persist due to funding shortages. Producing content for Turkish audiences requires professional language skills and appealing programs, which demand resources that are often unavailable.

Syrian journalists noted that Turkish media itself rarely engages in genuine partnerships to highlight Syrian refugees' success stories. As a result, no robust media alliance has emerged to combat racism or bridge cultural gaps effectively.

Tangible Impact or “Broken Bridges”?

Although many attempts have failed, some minor successes are worth noting. For example, when Syrian platforms shared stories of refugee integration and economic contributions, they provided a space for Turkish guests to participate in discussions. However, no comprehensive research exists to measure whether such initiatives altered Turkish public perceptions.

A recurring statement was, “We couldn't carry out the project to engage with Turkish society.” Most efforts ended at their inception due to resource constraints. Thus, Syrian alternative media neither fully succeeded nor entirely failed; rather, it lacked the financial and legal environment to create Turkish or bilingual content effectively.

Evaluation: An “Exiled Space” with Limited Host Integration

Despite occasional attempts to produce Turkish-language content or partner with local institutions, Syrian media outlets in Türkiye have generally struggled to break beyond Arabic-speaking audiences. This limited reach stems from factors such as divergent political agendas, insufficient resources, and a legal framework that does not facilitate collaboration with Syrian opposition channels. Consequently, most Syrian journalists find themselves operating on the fringes of Türkiye's media landscape, reinforcing what can be described as a “media bubble” primarily focused on refugee communities.

In practice, these outlets remain largely disconnected from Turkish society, providing refugees with news, commentary, and services that reinforce their sense of community but do not substantially engage the local environment. As a result, Syrian

media and Turkish media often function in parallel spheres, with minimal points of intersection or influence. While these platforms have been instrumental in amplifying Syrian voices internationally, they have not evolved into major channels of dialogue with Turkish society, leaving their impact on the host media landscape relatively modest and their position firmly that of outsiders.

2.3.6 Future Prospects and Desired Strategies

Following the examination of the limited relationship between Syrian media institutions and the Turkish context, this section explores the perspectives of these institutions' leaders regarding their future: Are they considering returning to Syria after a potential political shift? Do they have plans for Arab or international expansion? How realistic are these visions given the fragmented funding and legal challenges? Below, the interviews' insights into these institutions' future horizons are discussed, with detailed analysis.

Prospects of Returning to Syria: A “Deferred Dream or a Practical Plan?”

Some institutions, such as *Radio Al-Kul* and *Halab Today*, have expressed a desire to “return to Syria and operate from within.” Khairallah (*Radio Al-Kul*) mentioned “future plans to gradually relocate to liberated Syrian territories,” especially after the fall of the regime, while Agha (*Halab Today*) echoed a similar aspiration.

Other institutions, such as *Enab Baladi* and *The Syrian Press Center*, have maintained a “network of correspondents” or a “small office” in areas outside the regime's control. However, these offices are not officially recognized under international law and can be described as partial returns involving limited on-ground presence, with major decisions and administration remaining in exile.

International Expansion: “Training Arab Journalists” or Opening Branches in Europe?

According to Shurbaji (*Enab Baladi*) and Ahmed (*The Syrian Press Center*), there are ongoing plans to obtain licenses in France or Germany to facilitate financial and legal transactions and sign broader media partnerships. Europe is viewed as a freer environment where these institutions could transform into Arab-international platforms reaching wider audiences. For instance, *Enab Baladi*'s licensing in France enables collaboration with French or Arab media in Europe.

The Syrian Press Center has proposed “providing training to Arab journalists in other conflict zones, such as Yemen, Sudan, and Palestine,” leveraging its extensive experience in covering the Syrian war. Ahmed emphasized that this approach “keeps the institution financially and professionally active” by offering training services or competing for grants related to “media in crisis regions.”

Diversifying Funding Sources: “Hopes to Escape Short-Term Grants”

Rozana has considered launching fee-based training programs for journalists and activists, potentially generating additional income. However, success depends on market conditions, as Syrian journalists often face financial hardships. Some institutions have discussed selling content or forming advertising partnerships with Arab organizations, though no major successes have been reported.

Certain channels, such as *Radio Al-Kul*, have considered offering production services for documentaries or investigative reports to foreign organizations for a fee. This approach, described as potentially reducing dependence on grants, requires high professionalism and international networks, which are not universally accessible.

Critical Assessment: The Realism and Effectiveness of These Strategies

Statements from founders indicate that none have clear timelines for a full return to Syria or transferring operations to Europe. The situation has “turned into a long wait,” with developmental plans (e.g., achieving financial independence or international expansion) often faltering under legal and funding challenges. While one or two institutions may secure external licenses, most struggle to stay afloat.

Interviews reveal a common priority: “ensuring survival and minimal continuity.” Ahmed summarized this as “no grand strategy... just short-term projects to cover salaries.” Building a robust media ecosystem with a long-term vision remains a daunting challenge in this unstable context.

Evaluation: A Future Suspended Between Aspirations and Constraints

Although many Syrian media founders aspire to return home, their exile in Türkiye remains more of a temporary necessity than a voluntary choice. The ongoing conflict has forced them to maintain operations abroad, ensuring their editorial independence in case freedom of expression remains limited under any future political changes. At the same time, these institutions now view themselves as potential transnational outlets, seeking to expand regionally or even globally—a strategy consistent with “transnational media” theories. However, such ambitions require significant funding and legal support, resources that are not always readily available.

In an effort to reduce dependence on short-term grants, some platforms explore diversified revenue streams, such as offering production services or developing international partnerships. Yet the practical execution of these plans is hindered by a lack of market opportunities, competition from established broadcasters, and legal obstacles to deploying field teams inside Syria. While international expansion may offer an alternate path to sustainability, it does not eliminate the long-standing hope of returning

once conditions permit. Between these two possibilities lies a stark reality: Syrian media outlets may remain in Türkiye for months or years to come, relying on stopgap measures and ad hoc projects. Ultimately, their future remains suspended, with no clear resolution to the precariousness of exile, nor any immediate breakthrough guaranteeing a safe and free media environment inside Syria.

2.3.7 Comprehensive Analytical Conclusion

The detailed analysis above illustrates that the establishment of Syrian media institutions in Türkiye since the outbreak of the revolution in 2011 resulted from a complex interplay of security, legal, professional, and personal factors. Direct threats such as bombings and arrests, along with restrictions imposed by the regime and armed factions, strongly motivated Syrian media professionals to seek safer and more stable environments for their work outside Syria. This step was not merely a professional migration but a “survival migration” aimed at preserving the independence of free media amidst war and chaos.

From a legal perspective, these institutions faced significant challenges in obtaining official licenses within Syria, making Türkiye—due to its relatively straightforward procedures and support for independent media—the ideal destination for Syrian media exile. Furthermore, Türkiye's infrastructure and services provided a stable environment where media professionals could resume their work, producing high-quality content and diversifying media formats, such as radio, satellite television, and advanced online platforms.

On the organizational level, these institutions evolved from simple, volunteer-driven structures into more professional entities with integrated organizational frameworks, including editorial departments, programming, training, and technical production. However, this evolution was constrained by fragile financial and legal factors,

resulting in flexible employment practices and structural downsizing during funding shortages. This reflects the fragility of institutional work in exile.

Legal and financial challenges posed significant barriers to the sustainability of these institutions. The discrepancies between Turkish laws and the requirements of Syrian media work, combined with excessive reliance on short-term external grants, created financial instability and institutional uncertainty. Additionally, the lack of local support within the Turkish environment and linguistic and cultural barriers hindered these institutions' ability to effectively reach the Turkish audience.

Regarding their impact on the Syrian audience, these media outlets met the daily informational and social needs of refugees, contributing to the formation of a new collective identity that strengthened the cohesion of the Syrian diaspora. However, their influence was relatively limited in expanding their reach to Turkish audiences or achieving effective media integration with the host society.

Concerning their future vision, these institutions face significant challenges in achieving sustainability, expanding their activities internationally, or returning to Syria due to ongoing legal and financial constraints. Their future strategies depend on flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances, yet their prospects remain suspended between ambitious aspirations and realistic constraints.

In conclusion, the experience of Syrian media in exile reflects multiple challenges requiring innovative and sustainable solutions to enhance the independence and continuity of free media. Achieving sustainability demands overcoming legal and financial barriers through diversifying funding sources, building strategic partnerships, and developing advanced technical and organizational capabilities. Moreover, these institutions should aim to expand their influence to include not only the Syrian diaspora in Türkiye but also the broader Turkish community. This would strengthen their role as a

genuine bridge of communication between the two cultures and enhance their ability to address future challenges more effectively.

2.3.8 The Closure of Orient TV: Political Environment's Impact on Syrian Media

Orient TV was established in 2008 by Ghassan Aboud, who described it as “a platform to revive the spirit of freedom in the conscience of the Syrian people.” According to Aboud, the channel's advanced technical capabilities enabled it to operate three television channels, two radio frequencies, and multiple social media platforms. Aboud claimed that Bashar al-Assad attempted to take over the channel in 2009 but failed, prompting the channel to wage a “war against him and his regime.”



Figure 4 Orient TV: Stages of Establishment and Initiatives to Support the Syrian People (Aboud, 2024)

Relocation to Türkiye

According to Aboud's personal statements, Orient relocated from Dubai to Türkiye due to the challenges its Syrian employees faced in obtaining official documents from the Assad regime and their desire to seek new citizenship opportunities. Aboud identified Türkiye as a suitable alternative. Initially, Türkiye provided support; however, the relationship deteriorated over time. Aboud claimed in his posts that the channel's

refusal to bow to pressure from Turkish political parties and extremist groups, particularly its criticism of racist campaigns against Syrians, escalated tensions.

This led to legal prosecutions and the arrests of some employees. Aboud further alleged that Orient faced political pressures from unnamed entities linked to the Turkish Ministry of Interior. These mounting security and political challenges made it impossible for the channel to continue operating in Türkiye. Consequently, Orient ceased its operations, with some employees placed under house arrest or forced to leave the country illegally due to worsening conditions.

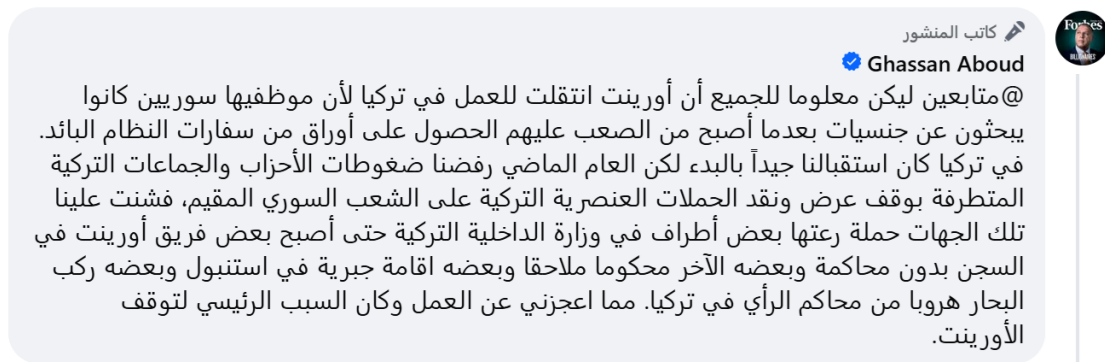


Figure 5 The Closure of Orient TV: Political Pressures and Turkish Restrictions (Aboud, 2024)

Implications of the Closure

The closure of Orient TV represents a significant loss for Syrian independent media, as the channel was a vital voice for Syrians and their causes on the global stage. This case reflects the precarious nature of independent media in exile, especially in politically volatile environments. Orient's experience serves as an essential case study for understanding the impact of the political environment on independent media.

2.3.9 Takkad Platform: The First Syrian Initiative to Combat Misinformation

Takkad, founded by Ahmad Primo, represents a unique experience in the history of contemporary Syrian media. Although it was established in Syria, its main

administration and operational system were based in Türkiye due to the complex circumstances surrounding the Syrian landscape since 2011. According to Primo, the idea for the platform emerged from the urgent need for a media body to confront the spread of misinformation, whether propagated by the Assad regime to distort facts or within opposition ranks and citizen media. *Takkad* thus developed as the first Syrian platform exclusively dedicated to fact-checking and verifying news at a time when truthful information was scarcer than ever.

Primo emphasized that the decision to base the platform in Türkiye was more strategic than merely necessary. Operating in Syria was impossible due to the lack of a legal framework supporting the establishment of independent media institutions. Türkiye offered a more stable and geographically proximate environment, enabling the establishment of *Takkad* as a privately owned entity initially due to the lack of capacity to register it as a nonprofit organization. This legal framework allowed the platform to operate but also imposed complex legal challenges related to registering the institution and its staff, including work permits and residency issues.

As it developed, the platform played a significant role not only in combating fake news but also in expanding the concept of media education among Syrian journalists. Primo noted that the support *Takkad* received was not limited to financial assistance but also included administrative consultations and institutional backing. This support enabled the platform to build flexible organizational structures, improve team performance, and introduce advanced technologies aligned with international fact-checking standards. Notably, *Takkad* joined an international fact-checking network, elevating its status and placing it among globally recognized and trusted institutions.

Despite its success, *Takkad* faced numerous challenges, as identified by Primo. These included difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel, with financial constraints and licensing pressures leading to a reduction in the workforce and occasional

reliance on volunteer efforts for continuity. Efforts to engage the Turkish audience through translated media materials were hindered by funding shortages, leaving the platform primarily focused on the Syrian audience.

Takkad remains a pioneering experience in Syrian media, not only for its unique specialization but also for its demonstrated ability to adapt and persist in the face of political, legal, and financial challenges. Today, the platform serves as a model for media committed to the principles of transparency and independence, underscoring the importance of fact-checking as an integral part of the media process, particularly amidst the complex crises faced by Syrians both at home and abroad.

2.4 SYRIAN JOURNALISTS IN TÜRKİYE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Beneath the umbrella of media institutions established in Türkiye, the stories of Syrian journalists unfold as they transform these institutions into genuine platforms for media struggle. Journalists working in exile have not only faced legal and professional challenges imposed by their new working environment but have also been on the frontlines of confronting security risks and psychological pressures resulting from leaving their homeland behind. Hence, this section focuses on Syrian journalists as individuals rather than merely as parts of these institutions. They represent driving forces for media work in Türkiye, reflecting through their individual efforts narratives of adaptation, professional development, and commitment to the mission of free media. Unlike institutions that reflect collective organizations, the experiences of journalists carry a more human dimension closer to daily realities, illustrating how their individual roles have shaped the image of Syrian media in exile.

This study examines the experiences of seven Syrian journalists who have worked in Türkiye, presenting their responses to a broad set of questions about their professional

journeys, the challenges they faced, and the impact of the refugee environment on their work. The analysis is divided into several sections, covering background and motivations, daily work experiences, information verification, professional development, security and pressures, and additional challenges, as well as exploring the reasons behind the closure of Syrian media outlets in Türkiye and the future aspirations of journalists. Through this analysis, we explore how Syrian journalists have adapted to a new working environment filled with legal and professional challenges and how they have continued their mission despite all difficulties. Additionally, we highlight the opportunities Türkiye has offered for developing their professional skills and supporting alternative Syrian media.

2.4.1 Background and Motivations

The professional beginnings of Syrian journalists participating in this study reflect significant diversity in their experiences and backgrounds. Some began their careers in media at an early age, while others entered the field gradually due to the political and social events that shook Syria since 2011. For example, “Journalist Participant 1” began his media career in Syria, working for local newspapers like “Al-Sanabel Sports” and “Al-Watan” before transitioning to television. On the other hand, “Journalist Participant 2” entered the world of media driven by a passion for truth and a desire to support the Syrian revolution, utilizing his technical expertise to provide media support during the early events of the revolution. Meanwhile, “Journalist Participant 3” found herself in the field by chance through a job advertisement for a Syrian radio station during her time in Türkiye, which allowed her to develop media skills through practical experience. Some also had academic or artistic backgrounds, such as “Journalist Participant 4,” who started as a caricature artist for a student newspaper, which helped him develop a unique media vision.

The reasons for migration to Türkiye were varied, with most participants finding themselves compelled to leave Syria due to deteriorating security and political conditions.

“Journalist Participant 5” and “Journalist Participant 6” spoke about the severe risks they faced in Syria, including threats from the Assad regime and armed groups, making it impossible to continue media work. Türkiye became the first choice for many journalists due to its geographic proximity, ease of access, and the presence of a large Syrian community providing a support base for working journalists. Türkiye also offered a relatively stable media environment, allowing journalists to continue their work while reducing the immediate risks they faced inside Syria.

Despite the positives found in Türkiye, journalists faced significant challenges that impacted their professional journeys. Migration distanced them from direct events in Syria, complicating the process of obtaining information and field sources. “Journalist Participant 7” stated that this distance led to a loss of the ability to interact instantly with events, affecting the quality and diversity of media reports. On the other hand, some journalists noted that migration opened up opportunities to develop their professional skills, enabling them to work with international media institutions and gain new experiences in journalism.

The Syrian experience significantly influenced the journalists' professional approach while working in Türkiye. All participants noted that this experience formed a reference framework for their media vision, as they continued to focus on Syrian issues both inside and in exile. “Journalist Participant 5” and “Journalist Participant 6” spoke about the difficulty of transitioning from a conflict environment to a refugee environment, where they had to adapt to the new work nature and language challenges while continuing to address Syrian revolution issues and convey the suffering of Syrians inside and abroad.

In summary, these backgrounds and motivations demonstrate that Syrian journalists in Türkiye face complex and intertwined challenges. However, their experiences combine professional commitment and the ability to adapt to new work

environments, enabling them to produce media content reflecting the complexities of the Syrian issue in all its details.

2.4.2 Daily Work and Procedures

Regarding the nature of daily tasks, Syrian journalists in Türkiye described dealing with diverse responsibilities largely dependent on the type of media outlet they work for and the roles they occupy. These tasks include news gathering, report writing, preparing and presenting political and social programs, and supervising content production and management. One journalist explained, for example, that he works daily on analyzing global and local news related to Syria to identify the most critical topics for coverage. Another mentioned focusing on preparing reports and field investigations.

Topic and report selection relies on several factors, primarily the importance of issues and their impact on the Syrian audience both inside Syria and in exile. Journalists noted that proximity to audience interests and the ability to explore social and humanitarian issues are crucial elements guiding their media efforts. Political developments, humanitarian crises, and sudden events often become focal points. One participant stressed that topic selection requires a delicate balance between the importance of a story and the accessibility of sources and necessary information.

Journalists face numerous daily challenges ranging from logistical and professional to security issues. Accessing sources remains one of the biggest obstacles, especially for journalists covering issues inside Syria or in areas difficult to reach due to security restrictions or a lack of trust. One participant mentioned that communicating with individuals in regime-controlled areas requires complex security measures to ensure source safety. Additionally, the geographical dispersion of Syrians across various Turkish provinces complicates field information access, requiring additional resources to ensure comprehensive coverage.

Political influences on media work were evident in journalists' experiences. Political developments in Syria and media policies in Türkiye forced journalists to adjust their methods to align with local and international political contexts. One journalist noted that despite these challenges, he maintained his commitment to the fundamental principles of the Syrian revolution, requiring a careful balance between the editorial direction of his media outlet and his personal commitment to the issues he believes in.

The pressures of maintaining content balance were also a prominent topic among journalists. Many spoke about the ongoing challenge of presenting objective content that serves the Syrian audience while avoiding political or social sensitivities in the Turkish context. One participant stated that he relies on transparency with the audience as a fundamental principle for maintaining the credibility of his media work while ensuring that basic principles are not compromised.

In summary, the daily work experience of Syrian journalists in Türkiye reflects a balance between the challenges of working in exile and the commitment to producing media content that reflects the Syrian reality in all its dimensions. These experiences have enabled them to develop their professional skills while courageously and innovatively addressing daily challenges.

2.4.3 Verification and Credibility of Information

Verification of information is a cornerstone of journalistic work, particularly in a complex environment like exile. Syrian journalists in Türkiye rely on various methods to ensure the accuracy of information and the credibility of the reports they produce. The importance of this process is heightened by the spread of rumors and media disinformation associated with the Syrian situation. Journalists noted that the verification process typically starts with confirming the primary source of information. They rely on official sources, such as international organizations or local authorities, as well as

communication with eyewitnesses or trusted activists on the ground. One participant explained that cross-referencing techniques are often employed, comparing information from different sources to determine its credibility. In areas difficult to access within Syria, journalists depend on local networks of activists and correspondents who serve as primary data sources.

Technological tools have become an integral part of the verification process. Journalists spoke about using image and video analysis tools, such as those that help determine the location and timing of events. Social media is also used as a tool for gathering information, with care taken to verify the credibility of accounts and posted content. One participant emphasized that modern technology not only provides faster means of verification but also assists in real-time event tracking.

Journalists highlighted that the political and security environment poses a significant obstacle to verification. Fear of retaliation from the Assad regime or armed groups makes many sources hesitant to provide information. Additionally, journalists face challenges in maintaining the safety and confidentiality of their sources, which they regard as a fundamental professional responsibility. One journalist explained that revealing the identity of sources could endanger their lives, requiring journalists to take preventive measures to protect all parties. In a media environment rife with political and social divisions, maintaining credibility is a constant challenge. Some journalists noted the importance of giving all parties associated with a story the opportunity to express their perspectives, which helps present a balanced and comprehensive picture. Providing strong evidence in reports, such as documents or recorded testimonies, also enhances audience trust in the published content.

Despite the difficulties, the experiences of Syrian journalists in Türkiye have demonstrated their ability to adapt to these challenges. Verification emerges as a comprehensive and complex process requiring the integration of technology, personal

relationships, and editorial skills. The journalists' commitment to these processes reflects their pursuit of credible media content that genuinely represents the issues of the Syrian people.

2.4.4 Professional Development and Collaboration

The experiences of Syrian journalists in Türkiye highlight a diverse trajectory of professional growth and new opportunities that have helped enhance their media skills and capabilities. Moving to a new environment offered these journalists the chance to interact with various media outlets and learn different journalistic standards. However, this development was not without challenges associated with exile. Since arriving in Türkiye, Syrian journalists have benefited from various training programs organized by media institutions and international organizations. These programs covered editorial skills, investigative journalism, and social media management. Some participants mentioned that professional courses, such as “Al Jazeera Ambassadors,” helped them enhance their media capabilities. Additionally, some organizations provided training on professional safety for journalists, especially given the risks they face while covering sensitive events.

Professional collaboration was a key part of Syrian journalists' experiences in Türkiye. Many noted that they worked with both local and international media outlets, granting them access to new resources and expertise. This collaboration extended not only to journalists within Türkiye but also to colleagues working inside Syria or in other countries. These professional networks contributed to improving the quality of media content and enhancing comprehensive event coverage.

2.4.5 Professional Challenges

Despite the opportunities available, media work in exile faces numerous challenges. One of the most prominent is the lack of financial resources, as most Syrian

media institutions in Türkiye rely on limited and unsustainable external support. The absence of formal employment contracts exposes journalists to exploitation and professional instability. Other challenges mentioned by journalists include editorial pressures linked to donor policies, which may impact the independence of media work. Despite these challenges, professional opportunities have contributed to journalists' development and the improvement of their work quality. One participant noted that training in investigative journalism helped him produce deeper and more objective reports. Another mentioned that collaborating with international media outlets gave him a new perspective on presenting Syrian issues to a global audience. The working environment in Türkiye served as an incubator for skill development, enabling journalists to use advanced technological tools and apply global journalistic standards.

The professional development of Syrian journalists in Türkiye reflects high resilience and a readiness to adapt to new working environments. Despite challenges related to funding and editorial policies, ongoing collaboration and training contribute to enhancing their media capabilities and their role in shedding light on Syrian issues.

2.4.6 Security and Pressures

Syrian journalists in Türkiye face multiple security threats, ranging from direct pressures from political and armed groups to indirect threats, such as targeting their families inside Syria. Some journalists explained that the Assad regime remains a threat even abroad, exposing them to electronic hacking attempts or death threats from entities associated with the regime. Additionally, extremist groups and other armed organizations pose risks to their safety, especially for those covering issues related to the violations or policies of these groups.

To mitigate security risks, journalists in Türkiye follow various strategies characterized by extreme caution. For example:

- **Using aliases:** Many journalists rely on pseudonyms when publishing reports or appearing in the media.
- **Concealing identities:** They avoid appearing in public places and periodically change their residence locations.
- **Enhancing information security:** Using encryption tools for communications and protecting digital data to prevent account breaches or source disclosures.
- **Source confidentiality:** Avoiding the disclosure of source identities in any way to protect them from retaliation.

Security risks and threats place significant pressure on journalists, affecting their freedom and independence in their work. One journalist noted that the fear of harm has led them to avoid covering certain sensitive topics, particularly those related to host country policies or armed groups inside Syria. Such self-imposed constraints limit the scope of journalistic coverage and weaken their ability to address issues with full objectivity.

Alongside security risks, Syrian journalists in Türkiye face significant psychological and social challenges, including the stress of living in a new country as refugees, separation from their families in Syria, and ongoing threats. All these factors lead to constant anxiety and stress, with many experiencing psychological exhaustion as they balance personal safety with fulfilling their professional duty. Despite these challenges, some journalists mentioned receiving specialized safety training, which has helped them better manage risks.

Security and pressures form a complex aspect of Syrian journalists' experiences in Türkiye. Despite multiple risks, journalists show great resilience in adapting to these circumstances, relying on advanced strategies to protect themselves and their sources.

2.4.7 Additional Challenges

Legal Challenges

One of the most prominent challenges faced by Syrian journalists in Türkiye is the legal challenges associated with their status as refugees or residents. Many do not have official work permits that allow them to practice journalism legally, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by some media organizations. The lack of a clear legal framework for Syrian journalists in Türkiye results in an absence of necessary legal protections, whether in terms of work contracts or professional rights such as leave and social security. Additionally, journalists face difficulties in traveling between Turkish provinces due to the need for special permits, which hinders their ability to efficiently cover field events.

Lack of Funding and Resources

Funding is one of the biggest obstacles facing Syrian media outlets in Türkiye, according to all the participants. Most alternative media organizations rely on external support from international donors, which is often temporary or conditional. The sudden cessation of funding leads to the closure of media institutions or a significant reduction in their activities. Additionally, journalists suffer from a lack of resources necessary to conduct field reports, such as technical equipment or covering the costs of travel and accommodation during journalistic assignments.

Political Influences

According to the respondents, Turkish media policies play a significant role in determining the nature of journalistic work in the country. Syrian journalists report that covering sensitive issues, such as the relationship between Türkiye and the Assad regime or Türkiye's internal political matters, can be fraught with risks. Some media

organizations are compelled to comply with the editorial policies imposed by donors or local laws, which may affect journalists' independence.

Social Challenges

Syrian journalists in Türkiye also face social challenges, such as increasing racism and discrimination against Syrians, especially in recent periods. This phenomenon not only affects their personal lives but extends to their media work, where they face difficulties in building reliable professional relationships with Turkish parties or obtaining community support for their media projects.

Media Work in Exile

In addition to all of the above, working in exile adds pressure on journalists. The distance from events inside Syria forces them to rely heavily on secondary sources, creating additional challenges in verifying information. Moreover, the absence of supporting entities or professional unions representing them in Türkiye weakens their ability to collectively address these challenges.

Ultimately, the additional challenges faced by Syrian journalists in Türkiye constitute a significant obstacle to their ability to produce independent and reliable media work. Nevertheless, these journalists display remarkable resilience and determination in dealing with these obstacles by relying on collaboration, innovation, and the development of professional support networks.

2.4.8 Syrian Media Outlets: Reasons for Closure and Migration

The reasons behind the closure or migration of Syrian media outlets from Türkiye are varied, with political, economic, and social factors all contributing to this phenomenon. Journalists indicated that the primary reason is the lack of sustainable funding, as most Syrian media outlets in Türkiye rely on external support from international donors or non-governmental organizations. This funding is often temporary

or conditional on specific political agendas, leading to a loss of independence and making these institutions vulnerable to closure once support ceases. Additionally, significant political pressures from various parties to change editorial policies or content have led some institutions to cease operations rather than compromise their principles. The increasing racism and societal pressures against Syrians have also constrained the media environment, prompting some institutions to reduce their activities or relocate to other countries.

Journalists pointed out that the experiences of closure and migration provide important lessons for the remaining Syrian media outlets. Among these lessons are:

1. **The importance of financial sustainability:** Building alternative and sustainable funding models, such as relying on advertisements or subscriptions, instead of full dependence on external funding.
2. **Diversification of support sources:** Reducing reliance on a single donor by seeking multiple funding sources.
3. **Improving relations with authorities:** Enhancing dialogue with Turkish authorities to facilitate legal and regulatory procedures.

The journalists also proposed several recommendations to ensure the sustainability of Syrian media outlets in Türkiye, including:

- Promoting transparency and governance within media institutions to avoid financial and administrative corruption.
- Investing in training young staff to improve skills and enhance the quality of media production.
- Developing content that meets the needs of the Syrian audience in Türkiye and the diaspora, increasing their loyalty and willingness to support these institutions.

The crisis of closure or migration of Syrian media outlets in Türkiye serves as a warning for the remaining institutions, highlighting the importance of enhancing financial and professional independence to face future challenges.

2.4.9 Technology in Journalism

Technology plays a vital role in the lives of Syrian journalists in Türkiye, with digital tools becoming essential for media-related tasks. Journalists heavily rely on laptops and smartphones to gather information, prepare reports, and organize content. Tools such as Adobe Suite for video and photo editing and Canva for design are widely used to enhance the quality and professionalism of media materials. Some journalists have also adopted voice transcription tools, which expedite the process of editing interviews and preparing reports. A few have begun exploring artificial intelligence tools for data analysis and content improvement, though these remain limited due to the need for specialized training and high costs. Modern digital tools are also used for geolocation and analyzing images and videos to verify the accuracy and origin of information.

Social media platforms are a cornerstone for reaching Syrian audiences both in Türkiye and abroad. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are used to share news and interact with the audience. These platforms also serve as tools for research and information gathering, enabling journalists to track audience interests and identify significant events. One participant highlighted that these platforms help journalists connect with sources, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

Thus, technology and digital tools have become integral to the lives of Syrian journalists in Türkiye, providing essential means to overcome challenges and keep pace with developments in the media industry. However, limited resources and weak infrastructure remain significant barriers to fully leveraging these tools.

2.4.10 General Questions and Future Aspirations

The Syrian revolution marked a pivotal turning point in the careers of participating Syrian journalists. It drove them to document the suffering of the Syrian people and shed light on the violations they endured. One participant described the revolution as “the greatest inspiration” for journalistic work, as it represented the true beginning of their professional journey. Furthermore, tragic events such as chemical massacres, the fall of Aleppo, and the martyrdom of prominent figures like Abdul Baset Al-Sarout were transformative moments in their professional and personal lives. Many journalists noted that these experiences deeply influenced their editorial approaches and professional motivations.

Despite the challenges, Syrian journalists expressed their determination to continue their media work and achieve their professional aspirations. Among their stated goals were:

1. **Returning to Syria:** Many dream of returning to their homeland to work in a free and independent environment where they can cover Syrian issues without restrictions.
2. **Investigative Journalism:** Some journalists aim to specialize in this field to expose violations and highlight overlooked issues.
3. **Launching Independent Media Projects:** Some aspire to establish independent media outlets focusing on Syrian issues, contributing to building professional journalism in a post-conflict era.
4. **Training and Education:** Many expressed a desire to train the next generation of Syrian journalists and share their experiences to advance independent media.

Journalists also highlighted critical observations about the challenges and opportunities they face, including:

- **Enhancing International Support:** They emphasized the need for increased support for Syrian media in terms of funding and training to ensure sustainability and independence.
- **Syrian-Turkish Collaboration:** Strengthening ties between Syrian and Turkish journalists, as well as those abroad, to collectively address challenges.
- **Focus on Journalist Safety:** They stressed the importance of implementing strategies to protect journalists and their sources from various risks.

2.4.11 Comprehensive Analytical Conclusion

This study provides a thorough examination of the realities faced by Syrian journalists in Türkiye, shedding light on their experiences, challenges, and professional growth. Despite numerous obstacles, these journalists have displayed exceptional resilience, adapting to new environments and enhancing their skills. Key insights from the interviews include:

Adapting to a New Environment: Syrian journalists have navigated the challenges of exile by utilizing available training opportunities and addressing critical issues such as funding, legal frameworks, and security risks. Their adaptability has been crucial in sustaining their media efforts under difficult circumstances.

Risks and Pressures: Working in exile entails significant political and security risks, affecting the independence and objectivity of their content. However, these journalists have shown remarkable determination, employing innovative methods to ensure their safety and uphold their professional principles.

Role of Technology: Technology and social media are indispensable tools for Syrian journalists, enabling them to gather information, verify its accuracy, and connect

with their audience. Despite these advancements, limited resources and infrastructure pose ongoing challenges.

Future Aspirations: Syrian journalists remain committed to their professional ambitions. Many aspire to return to Syria and work in a free media environment, specialize in investigative journalism, establish independent media platforms, and train the next generation of Syrian journalists to uphold journalistic excellence.

Lessons Learned: Their experiences underscore the need for financial sustainability, robust professional networks, and strategic approaches to overcome legal and social barriers. These lessons offer valuable guidance for strengthening Syrian media in exile and beyond.

The perseverance and dedication of Syrian journalists in Türkiye reflect their unwavering commitment to giving voice to the Syrian people. Their work acts as a bridge between Syria and the global community, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable support to ensure the continuity of their vital efforts. By overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities, these journalists continue to champion the principles of free and independent media, inspiring resilience in the face of adversity.

2.5 ENGAGEMENT AND TRUST IN INDEPENDENT SYRIAN MEDIA

In the face of significant challenges faced by Syrians in Türkiye as refugees, independent Syrian media has played a critical role in their lives. These outlets have served to preserve cultural identity and facilitate social and cultural integration into the host Turkish society. This study aims to explore the interaction and trust of Syrians in Türkiye with independent Syrian media by analyzing their media consumption habits, perceptions of its impact on their daily lives, and its role in helping them adapt to their new environment.

The research involved collecting and analyzing the responses of three participants who represent diverse backgrounds and media needs. This approach shed light on various aspects of media consumption, including preferences for specific outlets, objectives for media engagement, and the level of trust and credibility granted to these outlets. The study also addressed the challenges consumers face in accessing diverse, high-quality media content that meets their practical and social needs.

Additionally, the study examined participants' perceptions of Syrian media's role in fostering cultural identity, engaging with national issues, and aiding in the integration process within Turkish society. It also analyzed their level of interaction and actual participation with these outlets, alongside concerns regarding credibility and transparency in Syrian media. Based on the findings, practical recommendations are proposed to enhance the role of Syrian media in serving the Syrian community in Türkiye. These include developing diverse and comprehensive content, improving transparency and impartiality, and fostering interactive dialogue with audiences. These recommendations aim to bridge current gaps in media coverage, meet the diverse needs of the Syrian diaspora, and foster trust, credibility, and a positive, lasting impact on the lives of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

This study underscores the significant potential of Syrian media to support the Syrian diaspora in exile. However, it also highlights the urgent need to address existing challenges and adopt developmental strategies to achieve desired objectives, such as strengthening cultural identity and facilitating social integration.

2.5.1 Media Consumption Habits

The participants' responses revealed diverse media consumption habits, reflecting varying interests and levels of interaction with Syrian media in Türkiye. All participants

reported following Syrian media outlets, with differences in preferred platforms and objectives for engagement:

- **Participant 1** preferred social media platforms and specific channels such as *Orient* and *Halab Today*, which provided tailored content meeting the interests of the Syrian diaspora. They focused on news, education, and cultural content, showing a strong desire to stay informed, maintain ties to Syrian culture, and acquire knowledge.
- **Participant 2** showed greater interest in news websites described as reliable and unbiased, with a noticeable inclination toward cultural content. This preference reflects their desire to explore issues relevant to the Syrian refugee community without political or ideological bias.
- **Participant 3** utilized a mix of Syrian and Turkish television channels, news websites, and social media. This diverse approach aimed to offer a comprehensive perspective on developments in Syria and Türkiye. Their primary interest was in educational, health-related, and service-oriented content that addressed the daily challenges of Syrians in exile.

Shared Patterns and Divergences

The three participants shared a common preference for content addressing practical and daily needs, such as news, health services, and education. However, notable differences emerged in preferred platforms:

- Some leaned toward social media and television channels.
- Others focused on news websites.

This diversity in preferences likely stems from personal and social factors, such as differences in age, educational background, and goals for media engagement. These findings emphasize the need for Syrian media in Türkiye to provide diverse, inclusive content that caters to varying interests.

2.5.2 Perceptions and Impact

Participants' responses illustrate that Syrian media in Türkiye plays a multifaceted role in their lives, contributing variably to their connection to their homeland and engagement with Syrian issues. However, criticisms have been directed at its ability to meet their needs and interests. Overall, participants rated Syrian media as moderately significant in their daily lives, primarily using it to access news and information about issues concerning Syrians in Türkiye and Syria. This underscores its role in addressing basic informational needs but also highlights its limited influence on other aspects of their lives.

- **Participant 1** noted that Syrian media strengthens cultural identity and a sense of belonging to the homeland, reinforcing cultural ties despite the distance. However, they criticized the lack of sufficient coverage of important issues and its inability to meet all their informational needs.

- **Participant 2** highlighted that Syrian media helps preserve cultural identity but criticized its tendency toward bias and lack of neutrality, which undermines its positive impact.

- **Participant 3** shared that media enhances their sense of belonging to some extent but fails to provide a comprehensive and balanced portrayal of the situation in Syria, often not reflecting reality directly.

The participants' views on the role of Syrian media in aiding integration into Turkish society were mixed:

- **Participant 1** mentioned that media initially helped them understand Turkish laws and culture, facilitating their integration.

- **Participants 2 and 3**, however, felt that Syrian media was insufficient in supporting their adaptation to Turkish society. They noted that, in some cases, it even exacerbated the gap between Syrian and Turkish communities rather than bridging it.

These responses highlight the urgent need for Syrian media to go beyond news reporting and act as an effective tool for education and cultural and social integration. The criticisms indicate a gap between the aspirations of the Syrian diaspora and the content provided. To address this, Syrian media should focus on producing more inclusive content that reflects the real challenges faced by Syrians in Türkiye and promotes cultural understanding.

2.5.3 Interaction and Participation

Participants' engagement with Syrian media in Türkiye varied, reflecting their personal interests and how they used media platforms:

- **Participant 1** interacted occasionally by commenting on news and discussing topics within a small circle of friends. Their engagement was relatively limited and localized, focusing on issues like human rights, education, and the economy. They emphasized the importance of cultural content to preserve Syrian heritage.

- **Participant 2** demonstrated more active interaction, often commenting on social media platforms like Facebook and "X" (formerly Twitter), engaging in public discussions about Syrian issues, particularly cultural topics.

- **Participant 3** primarily interacted with Syrian media by following news related to administrative decisions affecting Syrians in Türkiye. Their engagement was more practical than social or cultural, though they expressed a desire for more content related to education, health, and services relevant to the Syrian community.

2.5.4 Trust and Credibility

Participants expressed varied opinions about the level of trust they place in Syrian media in Türkiye, though they agreed that these outlets face challenges related to credibility and transparency:

- **Participant 1** reported moderate trust, relying on credible sources but noting instances of news exaggeration or bias. Transparency, balance, and fact-checking were identified as key factors affecting their trust. They also mentioned that the closure of Syrian channels like “Orient,” due to political pressures, negatively impacted their confidence in the sustainability and independence of Syrian media.

- **Participant 2** also expressed moderate trust, citing the use of emotional language and political bias as factors that weaken credibility. They pointed out the lack of balance and depth in analysis and the reliance on unverified testimonies as barriers to fully trusting these outlets. They noted that events such as the closure of “Orient” raise questions about the independence and sustainability of Syrian media in Türkiye.

- **Participant 3** displayed a relatively higher level of trust, acknowledging that Syrian media often relies on official and credible sources, enhancing its credibility. However, they also noted that closures of outlets like “Orient” had somewhat affected their confidence, as the remaining media became less comprehensive in covering Syrian issues.

2.5.5 Challenges in Media Consumption

Participants' responses reveal several challenges in consuming Syrian media in Türkiye, despite its availability and ease of access:

- **Participant 1** reported no significant difficulties in accessing Syrian media but noted that weak coverage of important topics and repetitive content diminish

their interest. They suggested that Syrian media needs to diversify and refresh its content to meet audience expectations effectively.

- **Participant 2** also did not face technical or linguistic barriers in accessing media. However, they highlighted a lack of engaging topics and the absence of in-depth discussions that add real value to public discourse. They felt that media outlets fail to offer programs tackling issues from more analytical perspectives, leading to frustration among viewers seeking high-quality content.

- **Participant 3** confirmed the ease of accessing Syrian media, whether through social media or television channels, but criticized the lack of topic diversity and comprehensive coverage of service and social issues relevant to Syrians in exile. They emphasized the need for more attention to educational and service-oriented content that could practically improve the living conditions of the Syrian diaspora.

2.5.6 Additional Observations

Participants provided a range of additional comments highlighting their needs and expectations from Syrian media in Türkiye, which point to key areas requiring improvement:

- **Participant 1** stressed the importance of focusing more on human rights issues and educating Syrians about their rights and responsibilities. They emphasized the need for objectivity and transparency in media coverage, as well as developing media skills to keep pace with advancements in the field. These observations underscore the necessity of building more responsible and professional content, empowering the audience with better understanding and fostering civic awareness.

- **Participant 2** called on journalists to ensure accuracy in the information they present to avoid negative societal impacts. They highlighted the need for objectivity and transparency in reporting and developing media dialogue to enhance professional

accountability. They also noted the importance of improving media ethics to prevent divisions within the Syrian diaspora. These comments reflect a strong demand for integrity and neutrality in media work to ensure a sustainable and positive impact.

- **Participant 3** focused on the importance of the independence of Syrian media, emphasizing that it should not be influenced by political or ideological entities, whether within or outside Syria. They argued that Syrian media should act as a tool for building trust and unity among Syrians and called for content that authentically and objectively reflects their realities. They also highlighted the need for educational and healthcare-focused content and for expanding media influence to address all aspects of Syrians' lives in Türkiye.

2.5.7 Comprehensive Analytical Conclusion

The findings from Section 2.5 underscore the pivotal yet evolving role of independent Syrian media in Türkiye, highlighting both its importance and its current limitations in serving the Syrian diaspora. Despite offering content directly addressing refugees' practical needs—such as news, health services, and education—these outlets often struggle to meet the broader social, cultural, and analytical expectations of their audience. Participants' diverse consumption habits reveal a clear preference for reliable, in-depth, and balanced reporting, coupled with innovative and interactive formats that foster engagement and community-building.

Crucially, the research highlights persistent challenges undermining media credibility and sustainability. Political pressures, including the closure of channels like Orient, raise concerns about independence and balanced coverage, while repetitive or superficial content dilutes audience interest and trust. Moreover, although participants acknowledge the potential of Syrian media to facilitate cultural preservation and support integration into Turkish society, many feel that existing coverage only partially addresses

these objectives. Topics such as human rights education, detailed service information, and interactive discussions on social issues remain underrepresented.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that independent Syrian media can be a powerful tool for preserving cultural identity, fostering community cohesion, and supporting social integration—provided it addresses the current gaps in content diversity, objectivity, and engagement. By investing in professional development, emphasizing transparency and impartiality, and strengthening editorial independence, Syrian media outlets in Türkiye can more effectively meet the multifaceted needs of their audience and bolster trust, ultimately enhancing the daily lives of Syrians in exile.

2.5.8 The Battle of Words: Sacrifices of Syrian Journalists in Exile

In the context of the migration of Syrian media outlets and their establishment in Türkiye, the heavy price paid by some Syrian journalists in performing their professional duties cannot be ignored. Over the past few years, four Syrian journalists lost their lives in Türkiye, highlighting the significant risks faced by media professionals who fled the war in their homeland, only to find themselves under continued threats in exile.

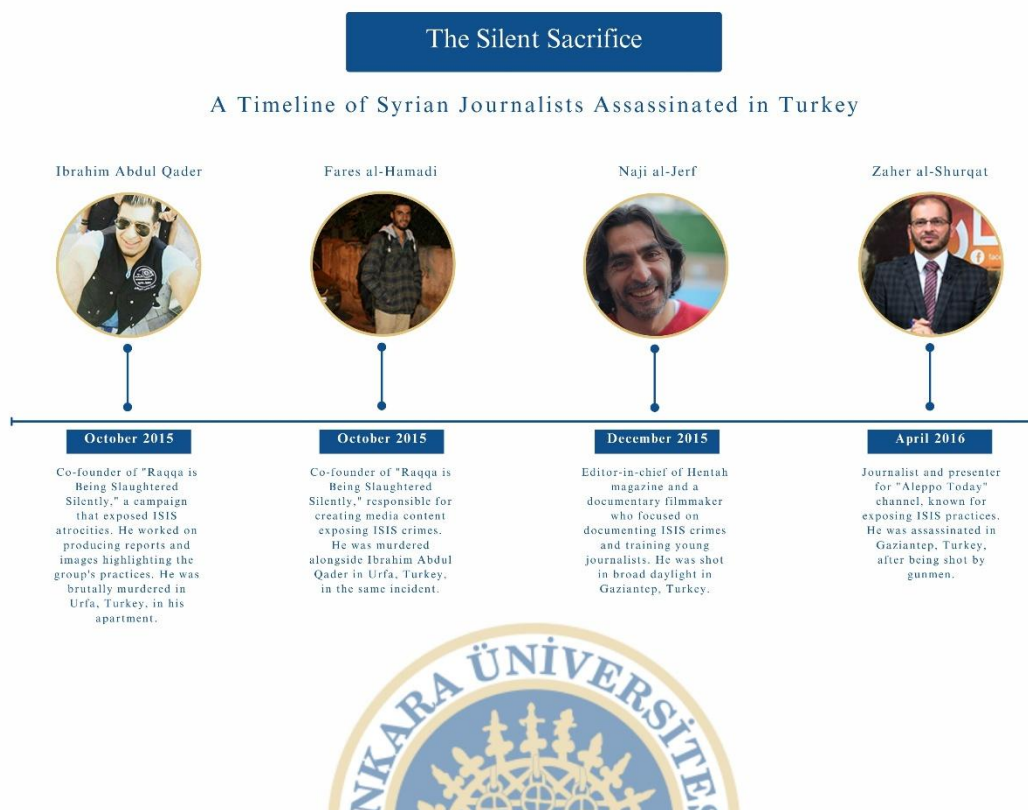
Among these journalists was Zaher Al-Shurqat, a presenter and journalist at Halab Today, known for his reports and programs exposing the brutal practices of ISIS. Al-Shurqat was targeted in April 2016 in the Turkish city of Gaziantep when gunmen shot him in broad daylight. He later succumbed to his injuries, becoming a symbol of journalists' courage in confronting terrorism and extremist ideologies ("Zaher Al-Shurqat," 2016). His assassination sent a chilling message to Syrian journalists working in Türkiye, emphasizing the persistent dangers they face.

Another prominent journalist was Naji Jerf, editor-in-chief of Hentah magazine and a documentary filmmaker dedicated to documenting ISIS crimes and the suffering of Syrian civilians. Beyond his investigative work, Jerf played a crucial role in training young Syrian journalists, helping them develop the skills needed to report on human rights violations and war crimes. In December 2015, he was assassinated in broad daylight in Gaziantep, a murder that shocked media circles and underscored the reach of extremist threats beyond Syria's borders (Al-Omari, n.d., p. 7; "Anti-Islamic State Journalist Murdered in Türkiye," 2015; "Naji Jerf," 2015; RSF, 2015).

Additionally, Ibrahim Abd Al-Qader and Fares Hamadi, co-founders of the Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently campaign, were also killed in Türkiye. Their campaign was one of the most critical independent media initiatives exposing ISIS's crimes in Raqqa. Ibrahim was a journalist and activist who focused on producing reports and visual documentation of the extremist group's abuses, while Fares specialized in creating media content that revealed the group's systematic violence. In October 2015, both were brutally murdered in a residential apartment in the Turkish city of Urfa, a targeted assassination that signaled the far-reaching efforts of terrorist organizations to silence Syrian journalists ("Fares Hamadi," 2015; "Ibrahim Abd Al-Qader," 2015).

These assassinations highlight the ongoing security challenges for Syrian journalists, even in exile. While many fled their country seeking safety, they remain direct targets due to their commitment to exposing the truth. The risks they face extend beyond threats of physical harm; they also endure intimidation, surveillance, and psychological pressure. Despite these adversities, those who remain continue to strive for professional, independent, and honest coverage.

Recognizing these dangers, various media organizations and press freedom advocates have intensified efforts to protect Syrian journalists in Türkiye. These initiatives include security training programs, emergency relocation assistance, legal support, and mental health services. However, challenges persist, as many journalists operate in precarious conditions with limited institutional backing. Solidarity among media professionals, support from international organizations, and sustained public awareness remain essential to ensuring that Syrian journalists can continue their work without fear of persecution.



Graphic 6 The Silent Sacrifices - A Timeline of Syrian Journalists Assassinated in Türkiye

Highlights the immense sacrifices made by Syrian journalists in exile, showcasing a timeline of the assassinations of four prominent journalists in Türkiye between 2015 and 2016. This serves as a poignant reminder of the grave dangers faced by journalists committed to uncovering the truth.

CHAPTER THREE

SUPPORTING SYRIAN JOURNALISTS IN EXILE

3.1 Organizations Supporting Syrian Journalists

In this context, the importance of organizations dedicated to supporting Syrian journalists becomes evident. These entities represent more than just legal or administrative umbrellas; they reshape the concept of Syrian journalism in exile and open new horizons for advancing media work amid the professional, ethical, and cultural challenges imposed by forced displacement. This chapter does not merely address the organizations supporting Syrian journalists in Turkish exile as procedural phenomena, but rather as indicators of a deeper social and professional movement. It carves out new paths within a complex historical narrative that intertwines the legacy of persistent repression inside Syria with the development of journalists and their institutions both inside and outside the country, alongside the open-ended future challenges in exile.

Operating within a complex historical and cultural framework necessitates a rethinking of the essence of Syrian journalism, its ethical boundaries, and the moral constraints of the profession in a coercive context. These organizations not only provide administrative support or legal frameworks but also strive to establish a strong ethical horizon that adheres to professional standards while illuminating the shadows cast by years of official monopoly over voice and narrative. If exiled media is experiencing a heightened awareness—an awareness of escaping authoritarianism and of navigating cultural and linguistic plurality in a new space—then these organizations serve as pivotal guides. They transition Syrian journalists from the phase of “individual survival” to the era of “collective institutionalization.”

This transformation is not limited to ethical dimensions alone; it also manifests in the shift from simple, spontaneous, and scattered work methods to well-planned

professional practices that integrate efforts and accumulate expertise. By elevating professional standards and fostering advocacy for media workers, these organizations create stronger foundational infrastructures and amplify the voices of Syrian journalists—and their cause—within regional and international professional forums. In doing so, they redraw the map of moral authority, providing media professionals with opportunities for organization and empowerment. This shift propels their work from reactive measures to strategic planning, and from mere resistance to establishing a sustainable presence in a highly competitive global media landscape.

Through this chapter, we will explore four pivotal entities engaged in this mission, each serving as a nexus within a broader network of ethical values, professional practices, and social connections. These are not merely professional organizations or trade unions; they are vital platforms for redefining the journalist's relationship with authority, the audience, and exile itself. Through their efforts in developing ethical codes, fostering professional networks, and enhancing the unique role of women journalists, these institutions do more than simply “adapt” to a temporary political condition. Instead, they articulate a new identity for Syrian journalism—an identity that resists fragmentation, sharpens collective memory, and establishes a professional path resilient to domination, whether local or external.

In this framework, every element of this landscape—ranging from codes of ethics to organizations with steadfast values, from local professional clubs to the Syrian Female Journalists Network—emerges as a rich semantic entity. Together, they transform suffering and diaspora into creative momentum that contributes to rebuilding the Syrian media field on more robust and conscious foundations. This narrative serves as a prelude to delving into the specifics of each entity, uncovering the extent to which their roles influence the intellectual and social formation of the media profession in the era of exile and radical transformations.

3.2 Charter of honor for Syrian media professionals

The Syrian media landscape has undergone significant transformations over the past decade, driven by political and social upheavals that forced a large number of Syrian journalists and media professionals to operate in exile. This shift occurred in the absence of a legislative and regulatory environment that could ensure journalistic independence and uphold professional and ethical standards. Against this backdrop, the “Charter of Honor for Syrian Media Professionals,” established in June 2015 in Istanbul, Türkiye, emerged as a serious initiative to reinforce the values of ethical and professional journalism. It sought to establish a self-regulatory accountability system amidst the considerable challenges and diverse perspectives characterizing the Syrian media scene.

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the founding of the Charter, its mechanisms, challenges faced during its inception, its impact on the Syrian media landscape, future development plans, and the ongoing international collaborations aimed at strengthening ethical and professional journalism.

The Executive Director of the Charter emphasized that for over five decades, Syrian media had been dominated by the regime's control, leaving no room for independent, professional, and objective journalism. Strict censorship led to a media environment that merely echoed the regime's official narrative, erasing the essential role of the press as the “Fourth Estate.”

The onset of the Syrian revolution in 2011, followed by escalating conflict, resulted in increased hate speech and the spread of misinformation and fake news. Simultaneously, the concept of the “citizen journalist” or “media activist” emerged—individuals without formal media education or academic experience who began covering events on the ground using basic tools. In the absence of media infrastructure within Syria and any regulatory authority setting professional and ethical standards, the media

landscape urgently needed a unifying charter to establish principles of professional journalism and promote integrity and objectivity.

Additionally, the Director noted that the Syrian media sector lacked accountability mechanisms, both domestically and in exile. This underscored the necessity of an independent entity to set shared ethical guidelines and implement self-regulation through clear mechanisms for handling complaints. The founders envisioned the Charter as a means to protect the credibility of the profession and voluntarily regulate media practices, free from political or partisan interference.

The founders of the “Charter of Honor for Syrian Media Professionals” faced numerous structural and organizational challenges. Bringing together independent media organizations, each with diverse geographical and ideological backgrounds, to discuss and adopt the Charter’s draft proved difficult. The varying experiences, operational contexts, and funding sources of these organizations required extensive trust-building and constructive dialogue.

The Executive Director explained that many Syrian journalists and institutions lacked prior experience in establishing and managing such collaborative or syndicate-like structures. Most previous attempts had been government-led initiatives with limited effectiveness in advancing the media sector. Securing funding for foundational meetings and discussions was another tangible challenge, requiring the founders to find a sponsor willing to support the project financially and logistically.

Since its launch in 2015, the Charter’s most significant achievement has been uniting Syrian independent media organizations under a single umbrella. This union facilitated the exchange of expertise and the development of ethical and professional frameworks for journalistic work.

The Executive Director highlighted that membership in the Charter fostered a stronger commitment to journalistic independence and strengthened the values of transparency and self-regulation among participating organizations. The Charter has promoted ethical journalism and responsible media through training sessions and workshops targeting journalists and executives from member organizations.

Moreover, it has focused on producing content free from violations, combating hate speech, and addressing misinformation. The Charter has also emphasized fostering a culture of “peace journalism,” which prioritizes neutral and socially responsible coverage of conflicts without resorting to bias or incitement.

A notable development is the complaints mechanism introduced by the Charter. This mechanism allows audiences, journalists, and stakeholders to file complaints about media content, helping to rectify mistakes, address potential violations, and create an environment conducive to shared learning among member organizations.

The Executive Director explained that ensuring member organizations adhere to the Charter’s principles requires a comprehensive framework involving awareness, training, monitoring, and accountability. Key elements include:

1. **Training and Workshops:** These focus on editorial ethics, impartial reporting, and professional integrity.
2. **Regular Meetings:** Members discuss updates and practical challenges in implementing the Charter’s principles, sharing successful experiences and addressing common issues.
3. **Joint Awareness Campaigns:** Periodically conducted to highlight ethical standards and media accountability to both journalists and the public.
4. **Content Monitoring:** A dedicated team reviews the media output of member organizations to identify any ethical or professional breaches.

5. **Complaints Committee:** This committee investigates complaints about media content, communicates with relevant parties, and provides recommendations for rectification.

In cases of potential violations, the Charter encourages dialogue with the offending organization to explain the issue and offer guidance, prioritizing collaboration over punitive measures. However, repeated violations may necessitate stricter actions or public disclosure of breaches.

Looking ahead, the Charter aims to expand its membership base by including new organizations from various Syrian regions, including the north, south, and areas controlled by different factions. This expansion seeks to diversify journalistic experiences under the Charter's umbrella and extend its ethical principles to more regions.

Proposed initiatives include opening an office within Syria to facilitate access to local journalists and conducting on-the-ground training and awareness activities. The Charter also seeks to enhance the Complaints Committee's role, granting it greater independence and broader authority to address complaints.

Strengthening public engagement through awareness campaigns is another priority, aiming to educate citizens about the Charter's purpose and encourage them to utilize the complaints mechanism. As public awareness of the importance of ethical journalism grows, so does the potential for constructive criticism and the rectification of mistakes.

Since its inception, the Charter has pursued partnerships with international media organizations to exchange expertise and enhance its members' capabilities. Notable collaborations include:

- Ethical Journalism Network (EJN)
- Reporters Without Borders

- National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
- Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives
- European Union

These partnerships are expected to continue and deepen, particularly as Syrian media organizations require international expertise in areas such as fact-checking, conflict-sensitive reporting, investigative journalism, and sustainable financial support.

The “Charter of Honor for Syrian Media Professionals” represents a pioneering effort to organize the Syrian independent media sector and enable it to play a central role in supporting freedom of expression and defending human rights. Despite ongoing political and economic challenges, the Charter has succeeded in uniting media institutions, fostering a culture of self-regulation, and promoting ethical journalism.

However, achieving financial sustainability and expanding awareness activities within Syria and abroad remain contingent on securing international and local support. By continuing efforts to expand collaboration, establish in-country offices, and engage audiences, the Charter aims to elevate Syrian journalism to meet global standards and address critical issues of misinformation, bias, and media independence. Through these efforts, the Charter aspires to make Syrian journalism a credible, ethical, and impactful voice in the pursuit of freedom and justice for Syria.

3.3 Syrian journalists association

Since 2011, the Syrian media landscape has undergone rapid transformations driven by complex political, security, and social circumstances. Amid these changes, independent journalists increasingly recognized the need for an organization that would embody their professional aspirations and protect their interests, separate from the official journalists’ union under the regime’s control. This need led to the establishment of the “Syrian Journalists Association” (SJA) in 2012, serving as an independent professional

and trade union framework committed to the values of freedom of expression and ethical journalism.

According to the Executive Director of the SJA, who was interviewed for this research, the primary motivation for its creation was to “respond swiftly to severe violations faced by Syrian journalists by various actors amidst the militarization of the conflict and the deterioration of public security.” Journalists needed an independent body to provide essential services such as legal representation, monitoring, and documenting violations, as well as establishing channels with international organizations dedicated to protecting media workers.

The first step in building the association involved attracting a broad spectrum of journalists who chose to distance themselves from the regime-affiliated “Journalists Union.” Many journalists viewed the latter as biased and ineffective in addressing the abuses inflicted on media professionals. The SJA’s commitment to maintaining independence from any government or political party strengthened its reputation as a union dedicated solely to media freedoms and professionalism.

However, the SJA faced significant early challenges, including security risks to its members, attempts to undermine its international recognition, and difficulties obtaining legal licenses in countries where Syrian journalists sought refuge. Despite these obstacles, the association charted a path focused on enhancing professional safety and supporting journalists under threat.

The SJA has prioritized providing legal support to journalists through volunteer consultants and partnering with legal organizations. For example, the association offers direct access to lawyers who provide free consultations to journalists facing legal prosecution or harassment.

Additionally, the SJA has emphasized training and educational programs. It organizes workshops and specialized courses on writing, editing, fact-checking, and combating hate speech. These efforts aim to elevate the professionalism of journalists who often operate in unsafe conditions and lack institutional resources.

The association's expansion of partnerships with international and regional organizations advocating for press freedom and human rights has enhanced its global stature. A key milestone was its membership in the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), one of the most prominent global organizations representing and defending journalists. Securing IFJ membership was met with opposition, particularly from the regime's journalists' union. However, with substantial international support, the SJA gained recognition as a representative body for a wide range of Syrian journalists.

This recognition enabled SJA members to obtain internationally recognized press credentials, offering them a measure of protection and official acknowledgment of their work.

To address the financial demands of its operations, the SJA has adopted a solidarity model among its members, collecting flexible annual dues tailored to the challenging economic circumstances of Syrian journalists. Many members still reside in Syria or refugee camps, making financial contributions difficult. To mitigate costs, the association has often relied on volunteer efforts and streamlined its operations to avoid dependence on funding with political strings attached.

The SJA has also developed relationships with global institutions supporting press freedoms to secure short-term grants or project-based partnerships. These collaborations ensure the continuation of its training and documentation activities without compromising its independence.

Despite security obstacles, the SJA has sought to connect with journalists across various regions in Syria, including areas under regime control. Initially, this was achieved through diverse electronic communication channels. Some journalists were invited to participate in joint activities under semi-secret arrangements due to the severe risks of public involvement. The association remains committed to ensuring no geographic region is excluded, emphasizing that media freedom is a universal responsibility that transcends political or sectarian considerations.

To this end, the SJA has launched extensive campaigns addressing press freedom and professional ethics in Syria in collaboration with civil society organizations and human rights groups.

The SJA provides a clear mechanism for filing complaints against members suspected of professional misconduct or engaging in hate speech. Such complaints are referred to internal committees that review them transparently and rigorously under a strict internal regulatory framework approved by the General Assembly.

The Executive Office does not have unilateral authority over sensitive decisions and is itself subject to oversight by a supervisory body, ensuring balance within the association. This structure safeguards the SJA's professional integrity and neutrality in addressing violations.

The association documents laws in various Syrian regions, whether issued by the regime or other de facto authorities, to identify gaps and restrictions hindering press freedom. This documentation builds a legislative database accessible to journalists and legal researchers, serving as a reference for advocacy campaigns and future legal reforms once the political situation stabilizes.

Despite its achievements, the SJA continues to face significant challenges, primarily a lack of funding and ongoing security risks to journalists. Political and regional

divisions also hinder its ability to represent all segments of Syrian journalists. Nevertheless, the association remains determined to uphold its independence and inclusivity.

The SJA emphasizes the importance of maintaining a neutral stance amidst political polarization and prioritizing the development of free and professional journalism. This commitment has been crucial to its survival and relevance in a highly fragmented media environment.

While public engagement has not historically been a core aspect of the SJA's activities, its leadership recognizes the importance of producing ethical, accurate, and credible reporting to win public trust. The association also works on joint campaigns with civil society to demonstrate that media is not an isolated entity but a critical driver of political and social change.

The SJA acknowledges that it has not met all the needs of Syrian journalists or resolved all the challenges they face. The media sector suffers from financial constraints and ongoing security threats, limiting journalists' ability to engage fully in union activities. However, the SJA has provided training programs, facilitated connections with international institutions, and prioritized the inclusion of female journalists in leadership roles, reflecting a commitment to gender empowerment in the media sector.

The “Syrian Journalists Association” represents a pioneering union initiative in the Syrian context. It plays a vital role in preserving press independence, protecting journalists, and equipping them with the skills necessary to work in a complex environment. Despite security, financial, and political obstacles, the SJA continues to create organizational alternatives that pave the way for cohesive Syrian journalism. Its credibility stems from adhering to ethical principles and fostering a free and responsible press.

The SJA's ability to unite journalists under its banner and secure independent funding brings it closer to transforming Syrian journalism from an ad-hoc and marginalized field into a professional model that prioritizes accountability and transparency.

3.4 The Syrian journalists club in Gaziantep

Amid the profound transformations in the Syrian media landscape, especially among exiled journalists, the need arose for a framework that could bring together Syrian media professionals in a supportive professional and social environment. This environment aimed to foster collaboration and provide assistance in overcoming the challenges associated with working in exile. Responding to this need, the "Syrian Journalists Club in Gaziantep" was established in 2017 as a direct initiative to enhance solidarity and offer professional and social support to Syrian journalists in Türkiye.

In an interview with one of the club's founders, it was revealed that the idea for its creation was inspired by a poignant event: the martyrdom of academic journalist Ammar Al-Bakkour, who worked as a correspondent for Orient TV in liberated areas of Syria. During his memorial service, colleagues proposed pooling funds to support Ammar's family, sparking the idea of establishing an organization to support Syrian journalists or their families during such difficult circumstances. This concept laid the foundation for the club's establishment.

The initial steps to establish the club began with creating a WhatsApp group comprising fewer than ten journalists to discuss the idea and set its foundations. Organizational committees were later formed to coordinate efforts, including a membership committee and a preparatory committee for the founding conference. Membership criteria were established, and on the day of the conference, 93 membership applications were approved. The conference, held in Gaziantep, elected a five-member

board of directors and approved the club's bylaws, incorporating amendments based on members' suggestions.

The founder emphasized that the club was established to achieve several key objectives, including:

1. Creating a social solidarity fund to support members in cases such as bereavement, marriage, or medical emergencies.
2. Organizing cultural and training activities to enhance journalists' professional skills.
3. Building a bridge between Syrian journalists and Turkish authorities and media organizations.

Although the club was not officially registered as a legal association in Türkiye—a limitation that hindered its ability to officially collect donations—it managed to raise small amounts to support humanitarian cases among journalists. The club also signed agreements with Turkish entities to organize training courses that improved members' capabilities.

Despite its accomplishments, the club faced significant challenges. Legal obstacles, such as the lack of official registration as an association, were among the most prominent barriers, impeding the regular collection of donations or membership fees. Financial and administrative difficulties compounded these issues, especially as many journalists moved from Gaziantep to other cities like Istanbul or even to Europe, reducing the club's activities in Gaziantep.

The club relied heavily on the personal contributions of board members to fund its activities, supplemented by limited support from external donors. One notable achievement was organizing specialized training courses for its members in partnership with entities such as the Directorate of Media and Publishing in Ankara. These included

advanced Turkish language courses for over 80 members. The club also organized workshops led by experienced members and external professionals.

On the humanitarian front, the club played a role in advocating for journalists facing violations in Türkiye, such as helping overturn a deportation decision for a Syrian journalist working as a correspondent for Al Arabiya.

The club also engaged in international collaboration, forming partnerships with organizations such as the “Arab Media House” and “Baytna Syria.” These partnerships funded small activities, such as celebrating journalists on Press Day, and provided opportunities for professional training courses. These efforts enhanced the journalistic skills of the members and elevated the club’s standing in the media community.

According to the founder, the club contributed to fostering communication among Syrian journalists and organizing them within a unified entity. It also played a role in representing Syrian journalists at various refugee-related conferences, amplifying their voice on international platforms. While the club’s activities gradually ceased due to financial and legal challenges, its legacy remains an inspiration for similar initiatives aimed at supporting Syrian media professionals in exile.

The story of the “Syrian Journalists Club in Gaziantep” is a living example of the importance of professional and social solidarity among exiled journalists. Its establishment was driven by humanitarian motives, inspired by the tragic martyrdom of journalist Ammar Al-Bakkour. Despite its cessation, the club stands as a model illustrating how collective organization can play a pivotal role in overcoming challenges and achieving a positive, long-lasting impact.

3.5 Syrian Female Journalists Network

The Syrian media landscape has undergone profound transformations since the popular uprisings began in 2011. The previous era was marked by chronic

marginalization of women in journalism and a dominant authoritarian discourse that deprived the media of diversity and pluralism. Amid these challenges, several exile-based initiatives emerged to create a supportive environment for independent media and promote gender equality in the field. Within this context, the **Syrian Female Journalists Network (SFJN)** was established in 2012 through the efforts of a group of female journalists and activists. Since its inception, the network has sought to elevate the professional and societal standing of Syrian female journalists and highlight their potential to shape a more inclusive and diverse discourse.

According to a member of the network interviewed for this study, the initiative began as a “women’s media collective” aimed at uniting efforts and providing training, material, and moral support to female journalists. Over time, the network transformed structurally into a civil society organization with more comprehensive and independent programs, formally registered in the Netherlands in 2013 and headquartered in Amsterdam. This shift allowed SFJN to expand its scope to include specialized training programs, psychological and social protection, and support for women’s rights defenders.

The interviewed member highlighted several core motivations for establishing SFJN, including:

1. **Combatting Marginalization:** Female journalists often found themselves constrained by cultural and institutional barriers. These included societal norms opposing women’s engagement in journalism and organizational limitations reserving leadership and editorial roles for men.

2. **Providing Safe Spaces:** The absence of a safe environment was a central issue, as Syrian female journalists faced significant security and societal pressures. This necessitated creating a supportive space where they could openly discuss challenges and share experiences.

3. **Filling Training Gaps:** Many female journalists lacked access to specialized training in investigative journalism, creative writing, and digital verification tools—especially amid displacement and the absence of systematic training programs within Syria.

4. **Advocating for Gender-Sensitive Media:** From its inception, the network adopted a clear feminist approach, aiming to foster a media discourse sensitive to gender issues and to advocate for policies ensuring equitable representation for women.

SFJN initially operated as an informal network of volunteers, providing training and facilitating knowledge exchange among female journalists and activists. Over time, it evolved into a structured civil society organization with dedicated programs. Today, SFJN operates through distinct departments focusing on training, technical and legal consulting for media institutions, and a protection program for journalists at risk.

The network's goals are divided into several primary areas:

1. **Capacity Building:** Through workshops and training courses, SFJN enhances skills in investigative journalism, creative writing, and digital tools for information verification, particularly in combating misinformation.

2. **Ensuring Safe Spaces:** By offering psychological and social support, SFJN helps journalists navigate the pressures of exile and security challenges.

3. **Promoting Gender-Sensitive Media Policies:** SFJN collaborates with various media institutions to develop editorial guidelines that incorporate gender equity and represent marginalized groups, such as children and persons with disabilities.

4. **Advancing Protection Programs:** Programs like SFJN's "Protection" initiative monitor potential violations against female journalists, providing legal and psychological support and establishing mechanisms to safeguard their rights—especially in conflict areas such as northern Syria.

5. **Monitoring Gender Representation:** SFJN’s “Gender Radar” program evaluates the sensitivity of alternative Syrian media outlets to diverse social categories, particularly women and marginalized groups. The findings are published annually, offering a benchmark for progress in gender-sensitive media practices.

Despite its achievements, SFJN faces significant challenges:

1. **Funding Instability:** The network relies on grants from international donors supporting women’s empowerment and independent media, but shifting donor priorities complicate sustainable financing.

2. **Cultural Resistance:** Some media institutions and local communities resist addressing women’s issues or adopting feminist approaches, often rejecting gender-sensitive discourse outright.

3. **Security Risks:** Operating in conflict zones like northern Syria poses logistical and safety challenges for SFJN members, exacerbated by administrative instability in these areas.

SFJN addresses these challenges through various programs and activities:

- **Professional Training:** The network provides workshops on creative writing, solutions journalism, and gender-sensitive conflict reporting in Türkiye and northern Syria.

- **Dialogue Forums:** These forums allow female journalists to discuss challenges and needs in exile or conflict zones, ensuring the network remains responsive to their requirements.

- **Emergency Support:** During crises like the 2023 Türkiye/Syria earthquake, SFJN offered logistical and psychological support to affected journalists and activists.

Achievements and Future Directions

SFJN has made tangible contributions to advancing gender equity in Syrian media. Its accomplishments include producing editorial guides, such as one focused on ethical and professional coverage of detainees' stories, and advocating for women's issues in media discourse. Programs like "Gender Radar" have inspired several media institutions to adopt fairer representation of women and address their issues with greater sensitivity and transparency.

Looking ahead, SFJN envisions expanding its reach to include journalists and activists in neighboring countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. However, shifting realities in Syria have necessitated a reassessment of priorities. Current efforts focus on responding to emerging challenges, such as preparing journalists to cover issues related to detainee releases or restructuring official media.

SFJN continues to provide platforms for Syrian journalists in exile and within Syria's northern regions. Through meetings and training sessions in Türkiye's border areas, the network enables female journalists to amplify their voices, share experiences, and publish their work via SFJN's website and partner platforms.

The Syrian Female Journalists Network plays a pivotal role in reshaping Syria's media landscape to be more equitable and inclusive. Despite major challenges—including financial instability, societal resistance, and security concerns—SFJN remains committed to empowering female journalists, creating safe spaces, and fostering partnerships with alternative media institutions. Programs like "Gender Radar" and the Protection Initiative have significantly raised awareness among media outlets about the importance of gender-sensitive journalism.

As Syrian media enters a new phase, the need for collaborative efforts to sustain such initiatives is more critical than ever. SFJN exemplifies the transformative potential

of women-led initiatives to redefine the role of female journalists and to inspire broader change in the Syrian media sector.

FINDINGS

The study highlights that Syrian alternative media in exile, particularly in Türkiye, has undergone a complex and intertwined transformative journey since the Syrian revolution began in 2011. This journey has seen significant qualitative developments across institutional, productive, technological, and security dimensions. These changes extended beyond establishing new media institutions to reshaping the Syrian media identity in diaspora and defining future prospects that could influence the Syrian media landscape. Syrian journalists have managed to turn threats and obstacles into opportunities for rebuilding an alternative media system that strives for integrity and objectivity despite facing legal, financial, and security pressures. Türkiye emerged as a central destination for these journalists, offering a legal framework and advanced infrastructure that enabled approximately 70 independent media³ institutions to operate free from the control of the Assad regime.

Despite this growth, the study revealed several organizational and financial challenges faced by these institutions. These challenges include:

- **Dependence on External Funding:** Transitioning from volunteer work to institutional foundations created a need for sustainable financial resources. Institutions have largely relied on short-term international grants, making them vulnerable to funding fluctuations and hindering long-term strategic planning.
- **Legal Challenges:** Adapting to Turkish regulations requiring a specific percentage of Turkish employees created additional pressures on human and financial resources. Moreover, the unclear legal framework for operating as independent, non-

³ The number may actually be higher, but this is what I was able to compile from various credible sources and references, such as the study “Qabd al-Zabad” and “Alternative Media Broadcasts” (Asi, 2018, p. 16). Additionally, this estimate is supported by my own detailed knowledge and careful review of these media outlets and platforms.

profit organizations posed significant barriers to securing sustainable funding and developing long-term plans, leading to institutional fragility.

- **Organizational Weakness:** As funding decreased, many institutions were forced to downsize their staff and departments, negatively impacting the quality and diversity of media output.

Security Concerns

Despite the opportunities provided by exile, Syrian journalists and media institutions have faced alarming security risks, including assassinations and unexpected closures of prominent outlets such as “Orient.” These incidents reflect ongoing political challenges and pressures from Turkish security authorities. They have directly affected the general sense of security and the ability to sustain operations while highlighting the absence of adequate protective environments for independent journalists.

Financial Challenges

More than half of the media institutions established in Türkiye faced severe financial difficulties, leading to their closure. This resulted from declining external funding and a lack of alternative, sustainable local financing models. These economic challenges significantly hindered long-term planning and financial independence, leaving institutions almost entirely dependent on external support.

Social and Cultural Impact

Despite these challenges, alternative media played a crucial role in preserving the collective identity of Syrian refugees and strengthening their connection to their homeland. Media institutions documented war crimes and violations, contributing to a collective memory rooted in verified facts. They also provided refugees with reliable information to help them understand events in Syria and abroad, focusing on human

rights, forced displacement, and cultural identity, while steering clear of the Assad regime's narratives.

Limited Outreach Beyond the Syrian Community

The study revealed the limited reach of these institutions beyond the Syrian community. Content often remained targeted at Syrians within and outside Syria, without building an effective cultural bridge to the broader Turkish society. The lack of content translated into Turkish and weak partnerships with local institutions restricted the potential for broader impact. Consequently, narratives and dialogues remained confined to narrow circles, limiting the overall influence compared to the untapped potential.

Technological Dependence and Challenges

Syrian media institutions in Türkiye heavily relied on technology and social media to reach their audiences. While this allowed them to bypass bureaucratic and legal obstacles and connect with a diverse Syrian refugee audience, certain technological challenges emerged:

- **Content and Interaction Gaps:** Despite the widespread use of social media platforms, the quality of content did not always meet audience expectations, leading to lower engagement rates compared to audience size. This indicates a need for more interactive, analytical, and comprehensive content tailored to a diverse, multilingual audience.
- **Need for Advanced Digital Strategies:** Competing in a digital environment requires developing comprehensive digital analysis strategies, diversifying platforms, and investing in artificial intelligence tools and fact-checking technologies to enhance content quality and efficiency.

Strategic Potential

The findings demonstrate that alternative Syrian media in Türkiye holds significant strategic potential for positive change. To realize this potential, institutions should focus on:

1. **Developing Organizational and Financial Structures:** Building robust internal frameworks to ensure sustainability and adaptability.
2. **Adopting Modern Technologies:** Leveraging advanced tools to cater to a diverse audience and remain competitive in the digital age.
3. **Strengthening Local and International Collaborations:** Partnering with local and international organizations to expand reach and influence.

Building a sustainable and independent media model will not only facilitate truth-telling but also empower the Syrian community to confront future challenges. It will help redefine their identity in exile, reflecting their aspirations for freedom and justice.

CONCLUSION

The overarching objective of this thesis was to investigate the emergence and evolution of Syrian alternative media outlets in Türkiye, particularly from 2011 through 2024, examining how these outlets have shaped the Syrian media landscape in exile. Grounded in a historical, descriptive, and analytical methodology, this study traced the factors compelling Syrian media professionals to establish new platforms in Türkiye and the ramifications of that move for organizational development, audience engagement, and sustainability. In addressing the following research questions, the conclusion highlights the thesis's primary contributions and insights:

Research Questions Revisited

1. What are the underlying motivations behind the establishment of Syrian alternative media outlets in Türkiye?

Motivations:

Political/Security: Targeted bombings, arrests, and media repression by the Assad regime and various armed factions made it nearly impossible for independent journalists to remain safely in Syria.

Legal: A formal, recognized license and institutional status were unachievable under the regime's stringent regulations, compelling founders to seek locations where they could register their organizations.

Professional/Technical: Constant power outages and lack of reliable broadcast infrastructure in conflict zones meant that Türkiye's relatively stable environment, studios, and internet access were crucial for sustaining media work.

Personal/Social: Family ties and large Syrian communities in Turkish cities (Istanbul, Gaziantep) smoothed the path for relocation.

2. How have alternative media platforms evolved in terms of organizational structures, funding strategies, and media content within the Turkish context?

Organizational Structures: Outlets transitioned from small volunteer initiatives to more formal institutions, often adopting boards of directors or NGO-style assemblies. They established specialized editorial, technical, and administrative departments.

Funding Strategies: Most rely heavily on short-term international grants (European, American, and other donors). The discontinuity of these grants forces periodic layoffs and downsizing, revealing a pressing need for diversified funding (e.g., local advertising, subscription models).

Media Content: Platforms ventured beyond basic news coverage to produce investigative journalism, talk shows, podcasts, and service-oriented programming, addressing issues from legal processes for refugees to cultural identity in exile.

3. What is the nature of the challenges (legal, cultural, linguistic, and financial) faced by Syrian alternative media outlets in Türkiye, and how have they responded to them?

Legal: Outlets struggle with Turkish labor laws requiring a fixed ratio of Turkish to foreign employees and complex NGO/company registration requirements. Many register as commercial enterprises—incurring higher taxes—even though they operate as non-profit media.

Cultural & Linguistic: Most produce Arabic-only content, limiting engagement with Turkish audiences. Attempts to create Turkish-language programs often falter due to resource constraints.

Financial: Over-dependence on short-term donor funding undermines sustainability. Grant expiration frequently leads to outlet closures or staff reductions.

Responses: Some have diversified funding by providing production services to NGOs, experimenting with local advertisements, or pursuing membership-based donations from the Syrian diaspora. Others have introduced in-house training for new journalists, improving the skill base while reducing costs.

4. What role have Syrian alternative media outlets played in serving Syrian refugee communities in Türkiye, and how have they contributed to creating a cross-border expressive and cultural space?

Service Provision: Outlets supply crucial updates on laws affecting Syrians, from residence permits to job markets, bridging informational gaps.

Cultural & Social Connection: Programs addressing diaspora identity, refugee experiences, and war documentation have preserved collective memory and strengthened cultural ties.

Cross-Border Dialogue: By sharing on-ground events in Syria and hosting discussions on displacement, these outlets offer a transnational “public sphere” connecting refugees in Türkiye to their homeland.

5. How have Syrian alternative media outlets interacted with the Turkish media environment and international networks, including knowledge and financial support institutions?

Collaboration with Turkish Media: Such partnerships remain limited; most outlets lack the linguistic and financial capacity to produce Turkish-language content, restricting their influence on Turkish public opinion.

Engagement with International Donors: Organizations like USAID, NED, IMS, EED, and Internews provide essential grants and training. However, shifting donor agendas and short project cycles threaten stability.

Advocacy & Training Networks: Partnerships with press freedom organizations (e.g., Reporters Without Borders, Ethical Journalism Network) have supported training and self-regulation initiatives, including the development of charters and codes of ethics.

6. What impact has Syrian alternative media had on shaping identity for Syrians in Türkiye and producing alternative narratives of the Syrian self in exile spaces?

Collective Identity: Broadcasting war atrocities and chronicling human rights violations reinforced a unifying narrative among Syrians, countering regime propaganda.

Cultural Preservation: Outlets document stories of ordinary Syrians, bridging diaspora communities and offering platforms for cultural expression in Arabic.

Empowerment & Agency: Journalists, particularly women, found new avenues for professional growth and activism, exemplified by initiatives like the Syrian Female Journalists Network, which promotes equitable media coverage.

Synthesis of Key Findings

Transition from Spontaneous Activism to Structured Media

Syrian media institutions in Türkiye have moved from grassroots, volunteer-driven activism to more formal administrative and editorial structures. This evolution fosters higher professional standards but is constrained by an unstable funding environment.

Critical Role in Refugee Advocacy and Cultural Continuity

Outlets have acted as an information lifeline and cultural connector for Syrians in Türkiye, shaping identity, promoting human rights discourse, and preserving collective memory.

Challenges of Sustainability and Integration

Chronic financial precariousness and limited engagement with Turkish audiences hamper broader social impact. While some outlets have attempted Turkish-language programs or established training partnerships with local organizations, these efforts require consistent funding and qualified bilingual journalists.

Emergence of Professional and Ethical Frameworks

Entities such as the “Charter of Honor for Syrian Media Professionals,” “Syrian Journalists Association,” and “Syrian Female Journalists Network” illustrate a drive toward self-regulation, ethical journalism, and collective protection, reflecting institutional maturity within the Syrian media diaspora.

Security Vulnerabilities in Exile

Despite relocating, journalists remain targets for threats, exemplified by assassinations in Türkiye and political pressures culminating in outlet closures. Security remains an ongoing concern.

Answering the Research Questions: Concluding Reflections

Establishment Motivations: Deeply rooted in political repression, legal constraints, and infrastructural breakdowns in Syria, the exodus of journalists to Türkiye reflects a survival imperative.

Organizational & Content Evolution: Alternative media has progressed toward professionalized structures, yet ongoing reliance on short-cycle funding undermines institutional stability and editorial independence.

Challenges & Responses: A lack of robust local support, complex Turkish laws, and limited bilingual programs inhibit larger-scale integration. Nonetheless, resourceful strategies—like harnessing volunteerism and forging new funding avenues—show promise.

Service & Cultural Role: By offering critical information, preserving heritage, and documenting war crimes, exiled outlets function as communal media spaces, connecting Syrians worldwide.

Interaction with Turkish Media & International Networks: While international donor support remains vital, limited ties to mainstream Turkish media hinder cross-cultural exchange and broader social influence.

Impact on Syrian Identity & Narratives: These outlets provide alternative stories that challenge regime propaganda and invigorate a diaspora identity grounded in human rights, pluralism, and resilience.

Looking Ahead

The research underscores that Syrian media in Türkiye stands at a pivotal crossroads. Strengthening cross-sectoral collaborations, refining multilingual content, and institutionalizing robust governance mechanisms are essential if these outlets are to transcend short-term survival and foster deeper, long-lasting impacts—both within Turkish society and across the broader international sphere. Sustained support from donors, improved legal frameworks from the Turkish authorities, and growing professional solidarity among journalists can transform exiled alternative media from a temporary refuge into a cornerstone of democratic development and cultural continuity for Syrians worldwide.

In essence, this thesis concludes that while alternative Syrian media in Türkiye has successfully carved out spaces of freedom and representation beyond the Assad regime's control, its ultimate ability to shape the future Syrian media sphere hinges upon resolving profound financial, legal, and security challenges. The ongoing determination of journalists and founders, combined with strategic support from local and international partners, can ensure a more independent, inclusive, and enduring media presence—a

vision that not only narrates the Syrian story but also safeguards its authenticity for generations to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the detailed findings highlighting the transformative journey of alternative Syrian media in Türkiye and the challenges faced on institutional, financial, legal, technological, and security fronts, it is evident that achieving sustainability and broader impact requires well-planned, integrated strategies. These challenges, while daunting, also reveal untapped potential and strategic opportunities. Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are proposed as pivotal steps to transition from the current state to a sustainable and influential media future. This future should support Syrian refugees' identity, enhance cultural communication with Turkish society, and achieve higher levels of independence and quality in media work.

Recommendations for Syrian Media Institutions in Türkiye

Syrian media institutions in Türkiye should prioritize diversifying their funding sources and enhancing sustainability by adopting a mixed financing model that combines external grants with local resources, such as subscriptions, paid services, and partnerships with the private sector. This approach will help reduce dependence on short-term aid. In parallel, principles of transparency and good governance should be applied through the implementation of clear financial and administrative systems, including the publication of periodic financial reports to ensure donor and audience trust. In terms of content development and audience expansion, producing multilingual media materials—particularly in Turkish alongside Arabic—will enhance cultural understanding and reach a broader segment of Turkish society. Advanced digital tools, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, can also be employed to improve content quality and increase audience engagement. At the same time, raising the professional standards of media personnel requires specialized training programs in investigative journalism and documentary filmmaking. Sustaining these efforts calls for building flexible, balanced organizational structures that rely on small, interdisciplinary teams and uphold

responsible governance in decision-making. Equally important is ensuring professional security, which entails offering training in digital security and encrypted communication to protect journalists and their sources from potential security and political threats.

Recommendations for Supporting Organizations and Regional Bodies

A key priority is providing sustainable financial and technical assistance to Syrian media institutions in the form of long-term grants geared toward strengthening infrastructure and financial stability, while allowing sufficient editorial independence. Institutional capacities should be enhanced through the provision of administrative consultations and specialized training in investigative journalism, digital media, and human rights, thereby improving overall professional performance. To facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange, strategic partnerships with regional and international media organizations are advisable, as they enable the sharing of expertise and the provision of technical and consultative support to elevate professional standards. In the same vein, educational and training programs can be bolstered by funding long-term initiatives that help journalists develop skills in modern technologies and fact-checking. Regarding the promotion of alternative funding initiatives, crowdfunding platforms offer a promising solution to reduce reliance on traditional grants and foster community engagement in media projects. Ongoing financial and technical support is also recommended to modernize equipment, adopt digital analytics tools, and tap into administrative consulting services, thereby enhancing institutional efficiency and resilience in the face of future challenges.

Recommendations for the Turkish Government and Its Institutions

These recommendations emphasize the need for developing the legal and regulatory environment to streamline licensing procedures for foreign media entities and reconsider requirements for hiring Turkish citizens, in addition to offering tax and

financial incentives that encourage institutions embracing media pluralism and recruiting Syrian professionals. In terms of infrastructure and technology support, the establishment of shared technology centers in collaboration with local companies should be encouraged to provide advanced solutions in broadcasting and media production. It is also essential to make available financial incentives and discounts that enable media institutions to access modern studios and digital equipment at reasonable costs. To further promote dialogue and cultural integration between Syrians and Turks, there should be diverse cultural exchange programs that bring together Syrian and Turkish journalists in joint events, thereby deepening mutual understanding and leveraging cultural diversity to create balanced media content. Moreover, supporting shared cultural initiatives—such as activities and festivals—can help ease social tensions and highlight the role of Syrian media as a bridge fostering communication and engagement within Turkish society.

Conclusion

Taken together, these recommendations outline a practical roadmap for advancing Syrian media in Türkiye across institutional, professional, and financial dimensions, while also considering legal, cultural, and technological aspects. Sustainable media work depends on genuine collaboration and integration among Syrian media institutions, supporting organizations, and the Turkish government, creating fertile ground for a free and diverse media environment capable of meeting the needs of Syrian communities and supporting their coexistence with Turkish society. Implementing these recommendations is a direct response to the challenges faced by alternative Syrian media, as well as an opportunity to shape a media identity that reflects the aspirations of Syrian refugees and enables their active contribution to Türkiye's media and cultural landscape.

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"Sınırlar Arasında: Türkiye'de Suriyeli Medya Kuruluşlarının Ortaya Çıkışı ve Gelişimi - Koşullar ve Zorluklar" başlıklı yüksek lisans teziniz ile ilgili olarak Ankara Üniversitesi Etik Kurulunun 15.11.2024 tarihli toplantısında alınan 20/322 sayılı kararın bir örneği ilişikte gönderilmektedir.

Bilgilerinizi saygılarımla rica ederim.

ANKARA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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KARAR ÖRNEĞİ

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Karar Sayısı : 322

322- Üniversitemiz İletişim Fakültesi öğretim üyelerinden Prof.Dr.Haluk Kazım GERAY'ın danışmanlığını yaptığı, Ahmet BAYRAKTAR'ın "Sınırlar Arasında: Türkiye'de Suriyeli Medya Kuruluşlarının Ortaya Çıkışı ve Gelişimi - Koşullar ve Zorluklar" başlıklı yüksek lisans tezi ile ilgili 31.10.2024 tarihli "İnsan Üzerinde Yapılan Klinik Dışı Araştırmalar Başvuru Formu" Etik Kurulumuzca incelendi.

Üniversitemiz İletişim Fakültesi öğretim üyelerinden Prof.Dr.Haluk Kazım GERAY'ın danışmanlığını yaptığı, Ahmet BAYRAKTAR'ın "Sınırlar Arasında: Türkiye'de Suriyeli Medya Kuruluşlarının Ortaya Çıkışı ve Gelişimi - Koşullar ve Zorluklar" başlıklı yüksek lisans ile ilgili araştırma protokolüne uyulması ve etik onay tarihinden itibaren geçerli olması koşuluyla uygulanmasının etik açıdan uygun olduğuna oy birliği ile karar verilmiştir.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Arap Baharı'nın ardından 2011 yılında başlayan Suriye Devrimi'nin ardından, Suriye medya manzarasındaki köklü dönüşümü ele almaktadır. Bu süreç, alternatif medyanın ortaya çıkmasına yol açmıştır. Bir dizi zorluk, gazetecileri ve medya kuruluşlarını "sınır ötesinde" çalışmaya itmiş, Türkiye'yi özgürlük payı ve altyapı sağlayan bir merkez haline getirmiştir. Bu durum, bu kuruluşların, örgütsel, mali ve hukuki zorluklara rağmen, gönüllü faaliyetlerden profesyonel kuruluşlara evrilmelerine olanak tanımıştır. Çalışma, dış hibeye dayalı finansmanın kırılganlığını, Türkiye'deki istihdam koşulları ve sınırlı lisanslar gibi hukuki zorlukları ve bu durumun operasyonel yapıyı nasıl etkilediğini tartışmaktadır.

Bu engellere rağmen, alternatif medya, işlediği suçları belgeleme ve gerçekleri aktarma noktasında merkezi bir rol oynamış; mülteci kimliğini koruma ve onların vatanla olan bağlarını güçlendirme konusunda katkıda bulunmuştur. Araştırma, sürdürülebilir finansman modellerinin geliştirilmesini, kültürel ve dilsel çeşitliliği yansıtan medya içeriğinin çeşitlendirilmesini ve yerel ile uluslararası aktörlerle iş birliğinin artırılmasını önermektedir. Bu öneriler, Suriye alternatif medyasının sürekliliğinin sağlanması için gereklidir. Alternatif medya, Halep'den Haseb'e kadar olan süreçte El-Assad ailesinin resmi anlatı üzerindeki tekelleşmeyi kırmış; böylece, bağımsız, sorgulayıcı, tüm otoriteleri hesaba çeken ve bilgi sunumunda tarafsızlık ve doğruyu hedefleyen bir medya haline gelmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Suriye Medyası, Alternatif Medya, Suriyeli Mülteciler, Finansman Modelleri, Hukuki Zorluklar, Resmi Anlatıların Tekelleşmesi, Sorgulayan Bağımsız Medya*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the radical transformation in the Syrian media landscape following the Arab Spring and the outbreak of the Syrian revolution in 2011, which gave rise to the phenomenon of alternative media. Numerous challenges pushed journalists and media institutions to work "across borders," focusing their coverage on Syria while establishing Turkey—an environment that supported a degree of freedom and infrastructure—as their base. This situation enabled these institutions to initiate volunteer activities that evolved into professional organizations despite organizational, financial, and legal challenges.

The study discusses the fragility of funding based on external grants, as well as legal difficulties in Turkey such as employment conditions and limited licenses, and how these factors impact operational structures. Despite these obstacles, alternative media played a pivotal role in documenting crimes and conveying facts, contributing to the preservation of refugees' identities and strengthening their connection to their homeland.

The research recommends developing sustainable funding models, diversifying media content to reflect cultural and linguistic pluralism, and enhancing cooperation with local and international entities to ensure the continuity of Syrian alternative media. This is crucial for breaking the monopoly of official narratives held by the Al-Assad family from Hafez to Bashar, transforming it into an independent, alternative media that questions and holds all authorities accountable while delivering information without bias or distortion.

Keywords: *Syrian Media, Alternative Media, Syrian refugees, Funding Models, Legal Challenges, Monopolization of Official Narratives, Independent Inquisitive Media*