

# **„Freedom of the Press from an International Perspective“**

**Workshop-Manual by Hamed Alhamed**

# “Freedom of the Press from an International Perspective”

## Introduction

This workshop manual is intended for secondary- or vocational-school teachers of social studies, politics, English and/or German, etc. The workshop provides an introduction to press freedom from an international perspective, as well as possibilities for further work on the topic.

**In the workshop the students will discuss the importance of press freedom as a central element of democratic societies. Methods from global education and interactive visual materials are used to bring into focus the international differences in press freedom, as well as the consequences of the lack or limitation of such freedom. The digital workshop offers space for discussion and a critical engagement with the topic.**

## Thematic Introduction and Relevance:

In its 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations affirmed that freedom of opinion is a fundamental human right. Hence, every person should have the right to freely express and disseminate his or her opinion in speech, writing and images. Of course, this includes media outlets such as newspapers, television stations, online publishing and radio stations. But even today, 72 years after the Declaration, this right is still not guaranteed worldwide. Only 36% of the countries surveyed by Reporters Without Borders in 2019 are considered “free” in terms of freedom of the press.

According to research conducted by the Süddeutsche Zeitung, as of 27 April 2020 there were 359 journalists, citizen journalists and other media workers incarcerated around the world. It is clear that freedom of the press and of opinion are vitally important for democracy, and thereby for a free and peaceful society.

## Aim

The workshop aims to help students understand that the situation in Germany and Europe in terms of press freedom is comparatively good, though not perfect, and subject to persistent threats. It is the constant task of the state and of civil society to safeguard this freedom. The students should learn that what is often taken for granted in Germany—namely, the public expression of one’s opinion—is scarcely possible, and even punishable, in many other parts of the world, and that press freedom is restricted to some extent everywhere (including within Europe). They will be encouraged to engage with this issue on an ongoing basis, and with the situation in certain countries selected as examples. In addition, the workshop will develop students’ discussion and research skills. In sum, the method should increase the students’ awareness that press freedom is a privilege, and motivate them to take action to protect it.

videos, the journalists speak about the relevance of representation and how more diversity can be created. Students discuss.

## Technical Requirements:

The complete workshop can only be run in person, but the second exercise is also appropriate for an online event. The workshop runs for a total of approximately 90 minutes, and has been designed to include multimedia and interactive elements. The in-person version requires a projector, laptop, and speakers, as well as a large room with movable furniture. For the last exercise the students will need mobile devices with internet access, e.g. smart phones.

Duration	Module	Description
10 Minutes	<b>Introductions</b>	Introductions game, “I packed my bag” style: What is your name and where do you get your news?
30 Minutes	<b>Exercise 1: One Step Forward</b>	Introduction to the topic of press freedom from an international perspective: A free space should be cleared in the room. The students take on the roles of fictional personages from various countries, assigned via role cards. The students line up in order against one wall. The workshop leader reads out a series of statements and if the students (in their role) can answer the statement with a “Yes”, they step forward (without saying anything). If they cannot agree to the statement, they remain where they are. At the end they reflect as a group about the different positions they are standing in as representatives of their countries, and why.
25 Minutes	<b>Exercise 2: <u>Multimedia presentation</u></b>	The students remain in the groups to which they were assigned according to country in Exercise 1. They now learn which position “their” country occupies in the global press-freedom rankings, and are given the opportunity to express their thoughts on the subject. Then they watch a video presenting further information as well as expert opinions. From time to time the video is stopped for the quiz questions that are built into the video, to be answered in the small groups. At the end, the questions and information in the video are discussed in the large group.
20 Minutes	<b>Concluding discussion on press freedom in Germany</b>	In small-group discussions, the students connect what they have learned in the workshop to their own lives, and look for ways they might act to protect press freedom in Germany.
5 Minutes	<b>Feedback</b>	Flash round: Everyone gets the opportunity to say what they liked, what could be improved, and what they will take away from the workshop.
30 Minutes homework (optional)	<b>Concluding discussion on press freedom in Germany</b>	In order to consolidate and deepen their new knowledge, the students should now carry out further research on the country they were assigned. They should focus on trying to explain why the situation in the country is the way that it is (historical and political contexts). This research can be done on smart phones or other mobile devices. Their findings can be presented on posters or flip charts (or, if digitally, using PowerPoint or similar.)

## Workshop Instructions

### Introductions

**Get-to-know-you game, “I packed my bag” style:**  
**What is your name and where do you get your news?**  
**Each news source can only be mentioned once.**  
**Anything that makes sense is allowed (including parents, friends, social media, etc.) Each person also repeats what the previous person said. For small groups (up to ten people) the whole round can also be repeated each time.**

Example:

**Person 1:** “My name is Hamed and I get my news by watching the evening news on TV.”

**Person 2:** “His name is Hamed and he watches the evening news on TV. My name is Svenja and I get my news from The Guardian.

**Person 3:** “Her name is Svenja and she reads The Guardian. My name is Sabrina and I scroll on Facebook.”  
Etc.

### Aim

The students learn each other’s names and get a sense of how many media and sources of news are at their disposal and that they consume.

## Exercise 1 - One Step Forward

### Preparation

The participants line up against one wall of the room. Each is given a role card and represents a person from a still unknown country. The role cards should be printed out and cut up in advance. It is important that the country of origin is not shown on the card. This will only be revealed at the end of the unit.  
The workshop leader tells the students that a list of

sentences is going to be read out. If, on the basis of the information printed on their role card, the students can affirm a sentence, they may take a step forward. The workshop leader should make sure to give the students enough time to think about each sentence and step forward where appropriate before moving on to the next sentence. There should be no discussion during this part of the activity. Students who are not sure whether to take a step forward or not should remain where they are.

Once all the sentences have been read out the students should remain in the positions that they have reached.

### Sentences to read out

1. If I tell my parents I want to become a journalist, this doesn’t make them worried.
2. In my country there are media (newspapers, TV, radio, etc.) in various languages.
3. Where I come from there are numerous media that report from different perspectives and voice diverse opinions.
4. Journalists in my country openly criticise the actions of politicians.
5. If journalists where I’m from receive threats, the police help them.
6. In our country, no journalists are serving time in prison for their work.
7. Where I come from, journalists are rarely or never attacked by unknown persons simply for doing their job.
8. Where I’m from, no journalist has been murdered for doing their job in the last ten years.
9. We have a democratically elected government.
10. In my country there is rule of law.

The students should take a moment to look at their relative position. Next, the group discusses which countries are likely to be further away from the wall and which closer to it. Then the international press-freedom rankings are shown, and a discussion is held about which positions come as a surprise and which could have been predicted. The workshop leader can now also directly talk to the students who hesitated.

A moderated discussion of the following reflective questions should now follow. Reflection has an important role to play, as the relative positions can once again be questioned.

- Does “your” country’s position surprise you? What about the others’?
- If there are two people standing in different positions although they were assigned the same country, why?
- Which sentences were you not sure about?
- How do you feel about your position?
- Did you notice that others did not make it as far forward?
- How did you decide whether you should step forward or not?
- Do you remember cases in which journalists were persecuted or attacked for their work?

- How is freedom of the press constrained? Are there differences between countries or between certain groups of countries?

The individual questions should serve as conversation starters that lead into certain facets of the topic with the students. The aim is to create a stronger connection to the world in which the students live, and to reflect on whether and how the situation in other countries can be compared with the situation in Germany/ Europe. Problems and problematic trends should also be addressed. For this purpose, individual role cards can also be read out again and analysed and discussed in more detail.



## Teachers' overview of the contents of the role cards (this should be updated every year!):

### 1 - Norway: (William)

In my country, everyone can publicly say and write whatever they want. Journalists are able to work free from censorship or political pressure. The freedom of the press is protected by many laws, and the media report from various perspectives and in different languages. Violence against media workers is very rare, although recently there has been more online directed at journalists. The government has commissioned a comprehensive review of the situation regarding freedom of expression in the country.

### 10 - Portugal: (Raul)

In my country, everyone can publicly say and write whatever they want. Journalists are very badly paid and many are precariously employed. The freedom of the press is protected by numerous laws. The problem is the generally high level of criminality. Many journalists are threatened and/or attacked for their work, by unknown persons. Fortunately, nobody has been imprisoned for their opinions or for their reporting.

### 11 - Germany: (Sara)

In my country, everyone can publicly say and write nearly whatever they want to. There are many laws protecting freedom of the press. Overall, the working environment for journalists is good. There are many different media that report from various perspectives and in different languages, although less and less newspapers have their own complete editorial team. Journalists who report from extreme perspectives (e.g., the far right) are monitored by the state. Recently there have been occasional attacks on journalists; fortunately though, nobody has died in such an attack for a long time, and the police pursue the attackers.

### 23 - Namibia: (Jamaal)

The media here are pluralistic and also convey the views of the political opposition and critics of the government. However, there are political attempts to bring the national broadcaster, which dominates the radio sector, more strongly into line with government policy. Internet access is limited. Unfortunately there are not that many newspapers or broadcasters, and the media are partly under government control. There is no violence against journalists and threats and abuse directed at politicians have become rarer.

### 45- USA: (Stephanie)

In my country, everyone can publicly say and write almost whatever they want to. Theoretically I could found my own newspaper, which would report in whichever language or from whatever perspective I chose. However, a large part of the population believes that the media disseminate “fake news”. Journalists constantly face verbal attacks. There is an extremely hostile atmosphere between the current President and the media. Arrests, violent attacks, public vilification and harassment of journalists occur.

### 89 - Hungary: (Anna)

Since our current President and his party came to power, they have step-by-step brought the entire media landscape under their control. The public broadcasting services were merged into a state media company. The regional press was completely transferred into the possession of one businessman, who is a close friend of the President. Investigative reporting and articles critical of the government have only very limited distribution via online outlets. Media close to the government have repeatedly published “black lists” of the names of undesirable journalists.

#### **147 - Venezuela: (Mario)**

In my country there is no freedom of expression. People have to be careful about what they write or say in public. The President often refers to an alleged “media war” against his government, in order to discredit critical reporting nationally and internationally. His government constantly blocks the broadcasting frequencies of critical radio and television stations, and orders temporary shutdowns of the internet or social media. There have been arrests and violent attacks by the police and the secret service against reporters. Foreign journalists are frequently arrested.

#### **149 - Russia: (Daniel)**

In my country there is no freedom of expression. There are no laws that protect press freedom. Journalists are threatened and suffer political persecution. Television remains the most important source of news and is firmly in the hands of the state. Internet censorship has massively increased in recent years. Websites can be blocked with no court order and critical commentary can be punished with years of imprisonment on the basis of vaguely-worded anti-extremism laws. “According to official figures”, there are five journalists serving prison sentences for their work. In recent times numerous citizen journalists and online activists have been physically attacked by unknown persons. The police threaten journalists and are firmly on the side of the government.

#### **154 - Turkey: (Alena)**

In my country there are several laws that are supposed to protect freedom of the press, but no one can be sure that they will not be arrested. Dozens of journalists have been sent to prison, some for many years; many have been waiting for years to be sentenced, or are defending themselves against prison terms in courts of appeal. Others have fled the country. Foreign correspondents sometimes wait months for their accre-

ditations to be renewed. The once pluralistic media landscape has meanwhile completely fallen under the control of the government or of businesspeople close to the government. The government blocks thousands of news items on the internet.

#### **174 - Syria: (Leyla)**

In my country, you can pay with your life just for expressing your opinion. There are no laws that protect freedom of the press and journalists. The President and his family dominate the media and all newspapers. They disseminate their propaganda in numerous languages. “Officially”, there are 14 incarcerated journalists. In just one year ten journalists died, six of them were murdered under unclear circumstances. The secret service and the police are constantly attacking online activists and citizen journalists. Many have disappeared until now and we still do not know where they are.

**Role cards for the students, to be printed and handed out (see file – Role Cards):**

**The cards should be printed on A4 and cut up. If there are more students than cards, some roles will be given away twice.**

**The students should only find out which country their person comes from at the end of the exercise. The summary above is for the teacher’s use. Then the Reporters Without Borders list of countries relevant to this exercise should be presented and/or partially shown. Using the number on their role card, the participants should check where they come from, and write this down (see file: List).**



## Exercise 2 - One Step Forward

### Preparation

The students write down which country they were representing on their role cards, and form groups with the other students who were assigned the same country.

### Task

The students remain in their country group. The workshop leader explains to them that they will now watch a video, which will include quiz questions to be answered within their small groups. The video will give 10 seconds to answer each question, and if necessary the video can be paused for the purposes of discussion. In conclusion, the results will be further discussed with the entire class.

### Aim

Overall, the multimedia presentation provides the students with facts and various perspectives on press freedom and journalism. The quiz questions are intended to raise the students' attention level and give the activity an interactive character.

### Short Film: Freedom of the Press from an International Perspective

A video of approx. 10-15 minutes containing facts, graphic descriptions and statements by journalists and experts on the topic of freedom of the press. The video is provided as a normal video file and can be shown over a projector.

### Content of the Short Film

1. Definition of freedom of the press
2. Statistics and numbers regarding the situation of freedom of the press in the last ten years
3. How the Reporters Without Borders rankings are generated and how countries' level of press freedom is evaluated
4. Small scenarios display negative and positive examples of freedom of the press and instances of improvement in recent years
5. Statements by experts/journalists
6. Quiz questions (factual questions), with 10 seconds pause for thought, as a small task for the students

Video link: <https://youtu.be/wzHvCIsMFbQ>

### Concluding Discussion

#### Task

In this phase the knowledge gained in the first two phases should be placed into relation with the students' lived experience. For this purpose they should discuss the following questions in small groups. The questions are to be printed out on cards and distributed to each group.

- Question 1 (blue): What is Germany's relative international position like?
- Question 2 (green): What problems and debates in regards to press freedom in Germany do you know about? How did you find out about them?



- Question 3 (red): What has to be done (e.g., politically) in order to better protect press freedom in Germany?
- Question 4 (yellow): What could you yourselves do to protect the freedom of the press?

The workshop leader should support or simply monitor the discussions as appropriate. The students are given moderation cards in four colours (corresponding to the colours of the questions), which they should use to record the results (write down answers to the questions in point form). At the end of the discussion phase the results recorded on the moderation cards are matched up with the questions on the board and saved.

### Aim

The students should gain the awareness that freedom of the press in Germany is not invulnerable and needs to be defended. They should discuss the threats to press freedom that they have become aware of in their everyday lives, and reflect on how they themselves and society as a whole could work to defend the freedom of the press. The knowledge that they have gained about other countries is useful here in order to appreciate how important the freedom of the press is. Through these discussions and the jointly collected possibilities for action, they are able to experience their self-efficacy.

## Optional Homework Task

### Task

In order to consolidate and deepen their new knowledge, the students should now carry out further research on the country they were assigned. They should focus on trying to explain why the situation in the country is the way that it is (historical and political contexts). This research can be done on smart phones or other mobile devices. Their findings can be presented on posters or flip charts (or, if digitally, using PowerPoint or similar.)

- What is the political system in your country like? How did it get that way?
- What are the major media in your country? Who do they belong to? Do they report critically about the government?
- Are there prominent people in your country who campaign publicly for (greater) freedom of the press?

### Aim

The students practice independently research and critical questioning of information. They should pick out core statements from larger contexts and present them to their classmates. This will also contribute to the whole class's factual knowledge about the countries researched.



## Publication information

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The media pedagogical fellowship enables and supports the development of diversity-oriented, low-threshold and application-oriented educational materials by young educators. The materials developed in the process focus on the media habits of young people and are intended to strengthen the media skills of adolescents and young adults.

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