

Media Engagement Lunches Report

On 29 January and 11 February 2026, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa (SDI) convened two media lunches at the Residence of the Director. The meetings brought together a cross-section of Jordan-based journalists, editors, community media actors, and regionally active correspondents. The purpose was twofold: to introduce the Institute's mandate and programming priorities, and to listen to practitioners' reflections on the evolving media landscape in Jordan and the wider region.

Across both lunches, participants described a media environment shaped by constraint, adaptation, and structural transition. Self-censorship emerged as a defining operational reality. Rather than explicit written prohibitions, "red lines" were characterised as learnt boundaries reinforced over time through editorial caution, shifting sensitivities, and digital regulatory frameworks. Participants noted that unpredictability complicates editorial planning; as one participant remarked: "Sometimes an issue is sensitive one day and not the next. That unpredictability is part of the pressure."

Discussions in the first lunch also focused more heavily on operational constraints within the Jordanian media environment, including editorial caution, institutional pressures, and structural fragmentation across smaller outlets. By contrast, the second event reflected more broadly on regional dynamics and emerging geopolitical trends. In response to a question on what is currently missing from media coverage, one participant for instance highlighted the lack of deeper reporting on how a potential "post-US era" could reshape regional dynamics and power balances. Another observation concerned the absence of visible political leadership among Palestinians, raising questions about representation and political direction in the absence of effective leadership structures.

In the second lunch, emphasis was further placed on layered pressures inside Jordan: not only publication risks but also the vulnerability of sources, who may decline interviews out of fear of repercussions. Reduced access to official comment was cited as a contributing factor to speculation and diminished public clarity. One journalist noted: "If we cannot report something properly, sometimes the only honest choice is not to publish."

Furthermore, artificial intelligence featured prominently in both discussions. Participants acknowledged practical benefits, especially in transcription, translation, summarisation, and audio narration, particularly for teams operating under financial constraints. At the same time, concerns were raised regarding verification challenges, erosion of editorial discipline, and the risk of undermining journalism's core asset: public trust. As one participant noted, "Journalism's core asset is trust, and trust is the first thing we lose if AI replaces voice and accountability." The prevailing view was that AI may serve as an assistive tool, but not a substitute for authorship, judgement, or accountability. The rapid



improvement of AI-generated visual content was also noted as a growing verification challenge.

Audience behaviour was described as undergoing generational transformation. Younger consumers increasingly rely on social platforms and short-form content, while traditional outlets face declining attention spans and intensified competition. Several participants stressed that the added value of journalism must lie in original reporting, contextualisation, and credibility rather than speed. Concerns were also raised about language proficiency, newsroom readiness, and training gaps, particularly in editing standards and bilingual competency.

Overall, the engagements with the media were candid and substantive. The discussions offered the SDI valuable insight into the intersection of regulation, technology, credibility, generational shifts, and geopolitical change, and highlighted potential areas for future dialogue and engagement with media actors in Jordan and across the region.