

FMA REPORT 2021

FMATurkey.org

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INTRODUCTION

The **Foreign Media Association (FMA)** was created by a group of journalists to represent the interests of foreign media employees and freelancers in Turkey, who are facing increasingly difficult working conditions. FMA was inscribed in the official register of associations in Turkey with the Turkish name **Yabancı Medya Derneği** on 4 December 2018.

Our main mission, as stated in our founding documents, is to represent our members: professionals in the journalism sector who live in Turkey and work for media outlets headquartered abroad. As part of this mission, FMA works to:

- Advise, represent and advocate for members with all official institutions in Turkey.
- Protect the rights of our members and provide assistance in emergency situations.
- Clarify and challenge statements of misinformation targeting foreign media journalists and their reporting.
- Assist members with copyright issues.
- Cooperate with international and domestic organisations for journalists and media.

During 2021, the third year of FMA's existence, we aimed to consolidate the association and solidify its role as the main representative of journalists and media workers employed by foreign media in Turkey. Despite the ongoing obstacles presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe we have achieved that goal.

The main focus of our activities during 2021 was to increase our membership numbers (and thus our organisational strength) and to strengthen relations with both official bodies and civil society. We also completed two projects that the FMA Board had been working on since 2020: creating and issuing FMA Member press cards and holding a series of digital security webinars.

Most importantly, FMA continues to work with our main goal in mind: to ensure that members feel like they are not alone when dealing with the challenges encountered in their work.

MEMBERSHIP & BOARD ELECTIONS

FMA represents journalists, camera operators, photographers, fixers, producers and editors, with 102 members as of year-end 2021. As such, we represent close to a third (29%) of the approximately 350 foreign journalists accredited in Turkey, according to figures from the Directorate of Communications of the Turkish Government.

During 2021 FMA gained 37 new members and lost 14, with the majority of those leaving doing so because they moved outside Turkey. Our members represent 28 nationalities, the most common being Turkish, German, Spanish, American, French, British, Dutch and Italian. Almost two-thirds (63%) of our members are freelancers and the rest are employees. We have about 40% female and 60% male members, with one member identifying their gender as “Other”.

November 2021 Board elections

FMA held extraordinary elections to elect a new Board on 9 November 2021. The outgoing Board organised the elections following the rules stated by the Law on Associations of Turkey and the FMA by-laws, and worked to encourage members to stand as candidates for the elections in order to have a more inclusive and diverse new Board. In the end, 15 members ran for the five-member Board. The following representatives were elected to the new Board by a vote of FMA members:

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Chair: Christian Feiland
Vice Chair: Arzu Geybullu
General Secretary: Jennifer Hattam
Board Members: Barış Altıntaş, Naomi Cohen

Backup Board Members: Umar Farooq, Lara V. Montañon, Bulent Mumay, Bradley Secker, Murat Yıldız

Audit Members: Luis Miguel Hurtado Coronado, Halil Taşkın, Andres Mourenza Urbina

Backup Audit Members: Adria Rocha Cutiller, Albert Naya, Ilya U. Topper

This new Board will carry out the task of leading FMA for the three years following its election, if no extraordinary elections are held before then.

SUPPORT TO MEMBERS

Government-issued press cards

During 2021, almost all applications by foreign national members of FMA for a government-issued press card were approved. (The accreditation process is different for Turkish nationals.) One foreign-national member was initially denied the journalist visa to come to Turkey but was allowed to reapply after FMA mediation and the visa was subsequently granted.

Previously, FMA members often experienced delays in the delivery of press cards issued by the Directorate of Communications (*İletişim Başkanlığı*). This year saw some changes that resulted in the 2021 press card renewal process starting at the end of 2020, with most cards issued before that year's end. The same procedure was repeated for the 2022 cards, which helped ease the traditionally stressful process of renewing this accreditation. (For most foreign journalists, obtaining this card is necessary to apply for a residence permit.)

These changes to alleviate and speed up the accreditation renewal procedure are similar to an arrangement FMA had proposed back in 2019, during the first of a series of “unofficial” meetings with a representative of the Directorate of Communications. In 2020, we had several meetings and contacts with European Union representatives and diplomats from other countries in which we urged them to deal with this problem. They raised the issue in their meetings with Turkish authorities, even at the highest level. So we believe that FMA had a role in resolving this issue, even though the Directorate of Communications has repeatedly refused to recognize FMA as an official or valid interlocutor, and its president has yet to answer our request for a meeting.

We have always maintained open channels of communication with some representatives of the Directorate and we plan to continue doing so in order to facilitate better working conditions for our members and the foreign press in general, and to promote our own proposals.

Sharing information

CONTACTS FMA maintains WhatsApp and Telegram groups that serve as forums to share information, advice, contacts, trip opportunities and job offers in a safer atmosphere than other online groups, as all new FMA members are vetted before being accepted.

PRESS RELEASES We have set up an email list where every member can send press statements and/or information that can help our colleagues in their journalistic work.

ADVICE We provide members with help and advice in dealing with the bureaucratic aspects of renewing press cards and residence permits as well as other issues related to their work in Turkey.

BIP group

Starting in 2021, press-information groups operated by the Turkish Government and its ministries migrated to BIP, a local app developed by Turkcell. FMA investigated the app and had a security expert review a reverse-engineering analysis written about BIP. We concluded that downloading the BIP app entails security risks for users and thus recommended our members not to join. We also protested to the Directorate of Communications about the transfer of all press groups to that app, a migration that has been used by the Government to further reduce its contact with foreign media.

Detention and expulsion of journalists

Two foreign journalists were expelled from Turkey last year. One of them, an FMA member, was investigated as she was flying back to her home country and was informed she would not be allowed to return to Turkey. FMA and our partner the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) have been in contact with both journalists and are following their cases to provide support and legal counselling in order to revert the ban on return.

Complaint form and delayed payments

Protecting our members, especially the freelancers, from unethical behaviour by media outlets and employers has been a priority for FMA since day one. To address such issues, we created an easy-to-fill-in and identity-protective [form](#) to register complaints such as delays in payments, copyright issues, unethical treatment or reputation damage. The form is open to submissions from both members and non-members. Once FMA receives a complaint, our Board members check the facts and try to mediate with the involved actors. In 2021, the complaint form was used once to report unethical behaviour by an FMA member and the Board successfully mediated the issue.

In cases of delayed payments by companies employing FMA members, each time we have intervened, the media companies have agreed to pay the amount owed, with one exception.

PROJECTS

FMA Member press cards

Given the previous delays in the delivery of government-issued press cards and the rejection of the applications made by some of our members, the membership voted in 2020 to issue FMA Member press cards and the Board began to look at different options and potential providers. We focused on presentable, solid and secure design as well as quality to prevent possible forgeries. We contacted several printing houses, prepared a budget and commissioned a designer to create some draft designs that were presented to the members. One design was chosen in January 2021 in a vote open to all members. Separately, we ordered a printing house to print holograms with the FMA logo that were affixed to the cards to prevent forgeries. (The cards also have a QR code for added security.) The first batch of cards was printed in Spring 2021.

Cards are printed only upon member request and thus far 65 cards have been printed. They have proven useful as identification for members who do not have the official government-issued press card and were even recognized during the Covid-19 vaccination process, under which journalists of Turkey were designated a priority sector for vaccination.

Digital security webinars

An in-person workshop on digital security was supposed to take place during 2020 but the project had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the pandemic continued in 2021, we decided to transform the event into an online format. We signed a contract with the Italian organisation Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights and agreed with them on a series of four webinars to address general and specific issues of online and digital security. These webinars were offered for free to FMA members and served as a tool to recruit new members.

The first three webinars were recorded and these recordings, as well as some links related to the topics discussed, were shared with all FMA members.

Freelancers database

At the end of 2021, we published an online database of freelance journalists who are FMA members and wished to be included, so that producers or other media workers seeking to commission a job can easily find and hire someone within our membership who meets their criteria.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

FMA and its Board members maintain good working relationships with official institutions and civil society as part of our work advocating for our members.

These relationships include several Turkish and international institutions, such as the Istanbul

Metropolitan Municipality, foreign embassies and consulates, and the European Union.

With the Directorate of Communications and the Foreign Ministry of Turkey, we maintain open but informal channels of communication.

We work closely with major press and press freedom organisations, including the International Press Institute (IPI), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as well as national groups such as the Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS) and the Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC), which regularly contact us to inquire about the situation of foreign journalists in Turkey.

In 2021, IPI and CPJ contacted us again to provide information for their fact-finding mission on Turkey, which demonstrates we have become a reliable interlocutor for press freedom organisations.

During 2021 we also strengthened our relationship with the following associations:

Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)

We continued our collaboration with our partners at the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA), who helped us with their invaluable expertise on legal matters. This cooperation constitutes one of the main pillars of support to our members on legal issues.

Global Journalism Council (GJC)

At the beginning of 2020 we were contacted by Kahraman Halisçelik, former press representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who now leads a journalists association, the Global Journalism Council (GJC). After our initial contacts we decided to reinforce the cooperation as they have good connections with the ministry and to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, while also understanding the issues international journalists face. We have sent FMA representatives to participate in some of their public events and the GJC has been helpful in providing us with assistance and mediation to solve some problems of our members. They also provided the opportunity for some of our members to participate in two free trips to Azerbaijan. The GJC has additionally offered to organise background meetings for FMA with ministry officials and the Foreign Minister himself, though this had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

Diplomacy Correspondents Association (DMD)

In January 2021 we were asked by the Diplomacy Correspondents Association (DMD), a Turkish association whose members are journalists covering diplomacy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mainly in Ankara, to have a meeting to discuss the problems related to the Government-enforced migration to BIP chat and our shared opposition to this move. Our president and a representative of their Board had a meeting and explored ways to cooperate in the future.

ATTACKS ON THE PRESS

An attack against one of us is an attack against all of FMA, and we are committed to defend our members against all kinds of threats, attacks and obstacles they may face in Turkey due to their journalistic work. Through our social media and participation in demonstrations, we have also shown solidarity to non-members who have suffered attacks or judicial processes due to their journalistic activity, such as the brutal police aggression experienced by photographer Bülent Kılıç while he was covering Istanbul Pride in June.

In 2021, FMA followed and documented other cases of attacks on journalists:

- In July, several photographers covering the commemoration of the 6th anniversary of the Suruç terrorist attack were themselves attacked by police. One of these photographers was an FMA member, who explained: “They pushed me to the ground and started kicking me. A little bit later another group of police attacked me again when I was taking photos of detainees and broke my camera.”
- Also in July, an FMA member covering the fires in Antalya province was detained by the gendarmerie, who erased his photographs from his camera and left him in the middle of nowhere after subjecting him to homophobic comments and other mistreatment.
- In August, another member of the FMA was threatened by the local authorities in Van and asked to leave the city.

In addition to these individual incidents, we are concerned that the new law on associations that was approved in 2020 could affect FMA if we become a target of the Turkish authorities. We continue to follow this matter closely. We also stated our concern over the law approved in May 2021 to ban the filming of police officers. Fortunately this was overturned in November by the Council of State.

FINANCES & FUNDING

Funding opportunities

We are engaged in an ongoing search for grants and other funding opportunities in order to hire someone who can help with the day-to-day administration of FMA in order to streamline and enhance the services we provide to our members.

Financial summary

As of 31 December 2021, FMA closed the year with 6.482,30€ and 4.368,89 Turkish lira in its accounts. An amount of 1.100€ was paid in the first week of January 2022 for the digital security webinars held in 2021, leaving 5.382,30€ in FMA's euro account.

FMA's main income sources during 2021 were:

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|--|--------------|
| ➤ Member fees | 39.320,00 TL |
| ➤ Get-togethers (September & December) | 700,00 TL |
| ➤ Donations | 0,00 TL |

FMA's main expenses during 2021 were:

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|---|-------------------------|
| ➤ Digital Security Webinars provided to members | 1.100,00 € |
| ➤ Office rent (total for the year) | 7.400,00 TL |
| ➤ Translating FMA <i>tüzük</i> (charter) into English | 1.650,00 TL + VAT |
| ➤ Printing FMA member cards (total for two batches) | 780,00 TL |
| ➤ Aidat for the office (total for the year) | 780,00 TL |
| ➤ Assistance with filling out the Kara Defteri | 300,00 TL |
| ➤ Web hosting, domain and SSL for the website | 411,33 TL |
| ➤ Bookkeeper | 3.480,00 TL |
| ➤ Taxes (estimated) | 2.000,00 to 3.000,00 TL |
| ➤ Other cash payments | 0,00 TL |

THANK YOU FOR READING!

We welcome your comments and questions at
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