



media
development
investment
fund



2023

YEAR IN REVIEW

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO



Recently, on accepting the Gabo Foundation's Award for Excellence, Guatemala's acclaimed journalist José Rubén Zamora wrote from his prison cell,

The challenge of the independent press is to tell the truth, to express things as they are, from all possible points of view. As a rule, it is usually an exercise against the current, in a hostile, lonely and marginal context, and power often considers it subversive.

This reaction from those in power is happening more and more often, it turns out, according to Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index 2024, which documents "a worrying decline in support and respect for media autonomy and an increase in pressure from the state or other political actors".

The case of José Rubén and Guatemala illustrates this trend. MDIF first invested in José Rubén's daily paper *el Periódico* more than 20 years ago. After spending his entire three-decade career exposing corruption and holding authorities to account, in July 2022 José Rubén was arrested on trumped up charges in retaliation for publishing more than 120 investigations into the government then in power. With its founder in prison and the company under relentless pressure, *el Periódico* was finally forced to close in 2023. José Rubén remains imprisoned facing three meritless criminal cases, brought by a prosecutor who is under international sanctions for corruption and abuse of power.

In a number of democracies we work in, even well-established ones, we're seeing leaders push the limits on their power as they seek to control the media. In fragile democracies like Guatemala, the situation is even worse. With multiplying technological and business challenges adding to the pressure on independent media, our mission is more important than ever.

To support our goal of strengthening media independence, we are committed to innovating around the twin pillars of affordable financing and strategic support, notably:

- **Blended finance:** Crowding in financing from a variety of sources is vital if we are to address the shortage of media investment, particularly in the Global South. For nearly 30 years MDIF has been

expanding the typology of independent media funders and investors, which now range from civil society-supporting foundations to family offices and leading media companies.

- **Equipping media to adapt and evolve:** As technological challenges proliferate, particularly AI, technical assistance is a vital area of media support, a finding that was strongly borne out by our 2023 annual client survey.

Independent media are essential to free and thriving societies and though overall conditions are far from easy, we saw some powerful positive developments in 2023. In Poland where we have made a number of investments in recent years, with record voter turnout, the authoritarian Law and Justice Party was voted out of office after eight years in power. Even in Guatemala a new president committed to reform was elected, offering hope for the release of José Rubén. With half the world due to vote in 2024, independent media will be critical in ensuring that elections are free and fair.

A highlight of the MDIF year happened in November when leaders from 91 client and media partner organizations from 31 countries joined our staff and Board at the MDIF Media Forum. We held the event in Chiang Mai, Thailand to allow for the inclusion of many participants in our Myanmar Media Program now operating from exile to cover their country's ongoing civil conflict. With contributors including Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize winner and co-founder of MDIF client Rappler in the Philippines, participants discussed critical issues facing media worldwide in a stimulating spirit of solidarity. Being together with all our clients in person for the first time since the pandemic inspired us all for the year ahead.

Once again, thank you to our clients for their outstanding work and to our funders and investors who make our support possible.

HARLAN MANDEL, CEO

OUR APPROACH

MDIF is a unique mix of human rights organization and investment fund. [Founded](#) in 1996 by two journalists, their visionary concept of establishing a 'media bank' laid the groundwork for our pioneering approach to supporting independent media.

Who do we support? We work with independent media companies that provide the news, information and debate that people need to build free, thriving societies in countries where access to reliable news and information is under threat.

What is our goal? We want to help them build viable media businesses and protect their editorial independence.

Why do we do it? Because timely, accurate, relevant information is vital for free societies, accountable governments and realizing the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

HOW DO WE DO IT?

Catalyzing and providing capital to support independent media

Investing

We offer patient, no-strings-attached debt and equity financing for independent media.

\$162 million in assets under management invested in **62 media businesses** in **34 countries** in 2023.

Blended capital

We bring together diversified funding, leveraging development and philanthropic resources to mobilize private sector capital.

60 donors and investors brought together to support independent media in 2023.

Strategic support to media focused on strengthening their viability

Media Advisory Services (MAS)

We provide strategic advice and media business support to our clients and partners.

\$5 million in technical assistance provided in 2023, with **101 media companies** supported through MAS.

Amplify Programs

We run tailored programs to support media viability in challenging environments to broaden our impact.

8 tailored programs supported a total of **122 media companies** in 2023.

TRACK RECORD SINCE 1996



152

media companies invested in



\$49m

in technical assistance and grants



47

countries invested in



\$101m

collected in recovered principal invested



\$266m

in loans and equity investments

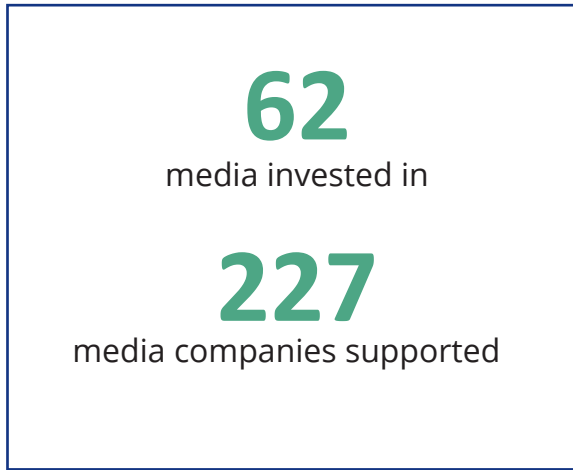


\$79m

returned to investors

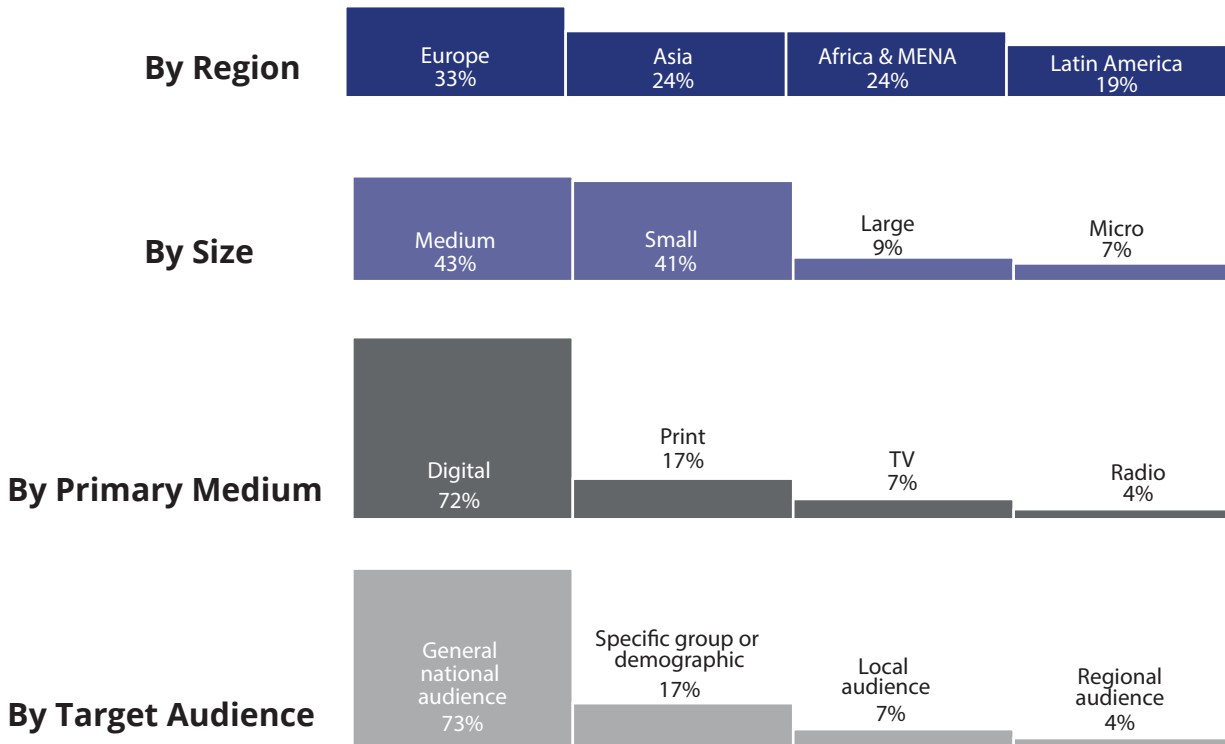


MEDIA WE SUPPORT



Our mission is to help media organizations across different mediums, sizes and stages of development grow viable businesses, strong enough to preserve their editorial autonomy and drive change in their communities. Since 1996, we have made investments in **152** media spanning **47 countries**. By the close of 2023, our portfolio comprised **62** media businesses operating in **34** countries. In addition to our investments, last year we provided vital business support to **101** media enterprises through our Media Advisory Services (MAS) and extended assistance to **122** others through our Amplify local programs. In total, we engaged with **227** media companies during the course of the year.

MDIF PORTFOLIO CLIENTS (BY NUMBER)



From digital startups to national multi-platform broadcasters, all our partners share a commitment to quality news, information and debate in the public interest. In fact, their dedication to high standards and innovation consistently earns them journalism and business recognition. According to our annual survey, an impressive **63%** of media we work with received awards in 2023, a testament to their exceptional work. In total, we counted **127** honours last year, and as many as **516** in the last 5 years.

In 2023, our investments and programs supported the work of more than **10,505** journalists, publishers, managers and other media workers, according to our annual questionnaire. Among staff, the average representation of females stood at **51%**, for males at **49%** and for non-binary or those who declined to answer at **0%**. In management roles, the corresponding figures were **42%** for females, **58%** for males and **0%** for non-binary individuals or those who chose not to disclose their gender.

AWARD HIGHLIGHT:

South Africa's Daily Maverick is a trailblazer in the digital media landscape, well known for its news innovation. In 2023 in recognition of its work, it achieved a remarkable feat at the WAN-IFRA Digital Media Awards Africa, winning three of eight categories: Best in Audience Engagement, Best Digital Subscription Initiative and Best Newsletter. Furthermore, the publication garnered three prestigious prizes at the Standard Bank Sikuvile Journalism Awards 2023 and seven awards at the Vodacom Journalist of the Year awards.



“An important pillar of sustainability is the ability to continue to innovate while producing high-impact journalism. Innovation doesn’t happen by chance; it needs to be planned for, supported and be part of the culture. It also comes with time and monetary investment that requires a long-term view over short-term demands that is even tougher to do in challenging times” .

Styli Charalambous.
CEO, Daily Maverick.



GLOBAL PRESENCE

With offices in New York, Prague and Belgrade, as well as regional representation spanning Colombia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Poland, and South Africa, MDIF is a truly global organization. Since 1996, we have made investments in more than **47 countries**. By the close of 2023 our active portfolio spanned **34 countries**, in addition to working in other countries through our [Media Advisory Services](#) and [regional programs](#).

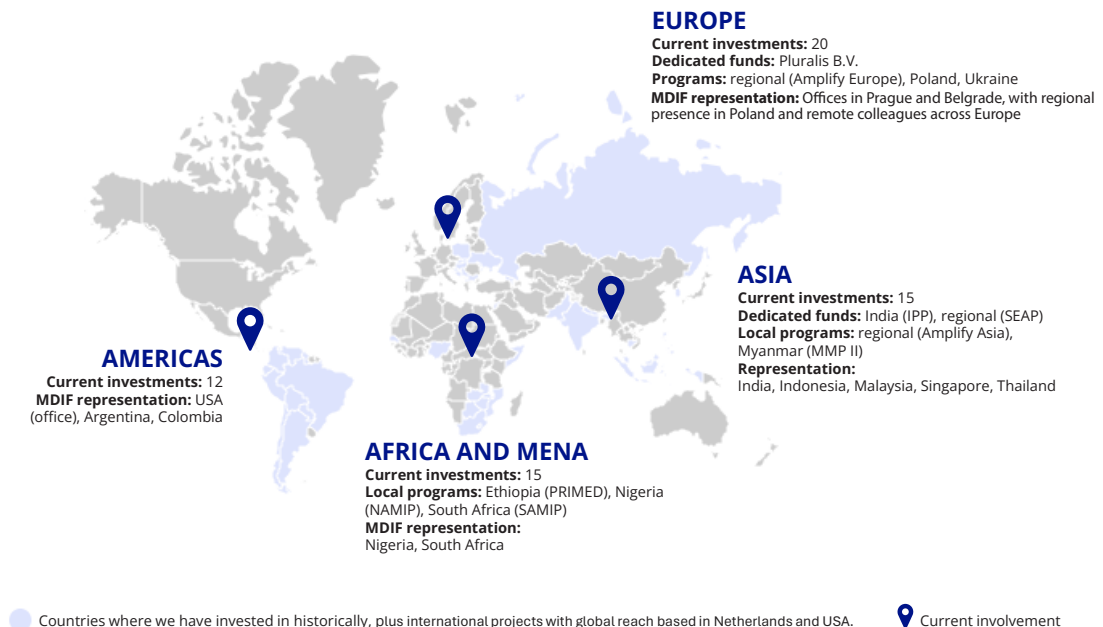
Whether it is investing or regional support programs, all our efforts are directed towards media operating in countries where access to reliable news and information is under threat. Unfortunately, the prevalence of such environments is widespread. In fact, the state of press freedom is deemed unfavourable in three-quarters of the world's nations, as per the latest Reporters Without Borders' [World Press Freedom Index](#).

34
countries invested in

100%
in countries where press freedom is not good

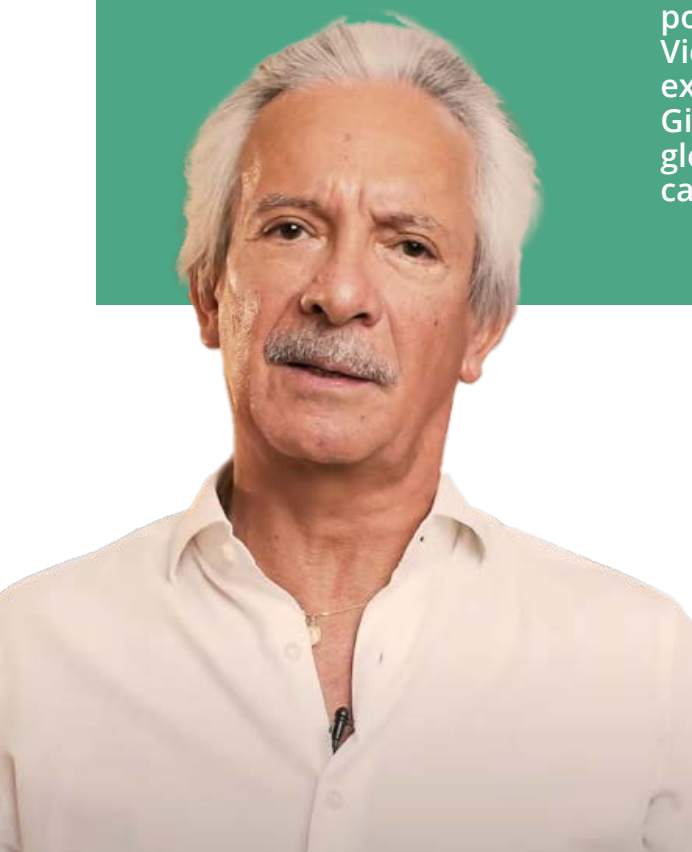
At the end of the year, **100%** of MDIF clients operated in countries where the media environment is not good, according to the Index. The average press freedom score stood at **56**, at the lower end of the 'problematic' range, nearing the threshold of the 'difficult' category. Additionally, within the past year, **40%** of media supported by MDIF reported direct attacks, arrests or harassment, as revealed by our annual questionnaire.

WHERE WE WORK



PRESS FREEDOM HIGHLIGHT:

elPeriódico was a Guatemalan daily known for its fierce investigative reporting and a long-term MDIF client until it was forced to close in 2023. Its founder José Rubén Zamora has remained in jail since his arrest in July 2022 on trumped-up charges of money laundering. His sentence of six years in prison in June 2023 was overturned on appeal, but he remains in detention until a new trial is held. With its founder in jail and facing ongoing financial and political intimidation, elPeriódico was forced to close. Viewed as clear retaliation against his newspaper's exposure of corruption within President Alejandro Giammattei's administration, Zamora's arrest ignited global condemnation and spurred the #ZamoraLibre campaign.



“Despite the fatigue, the severe adverse conditions, the humiliation and the derision, I will not cease in my fight for freedom and democracy in Guatemala. Without press freedom, there is no democracy,”

José Rubén Zamora, in a final editorial written in jail.

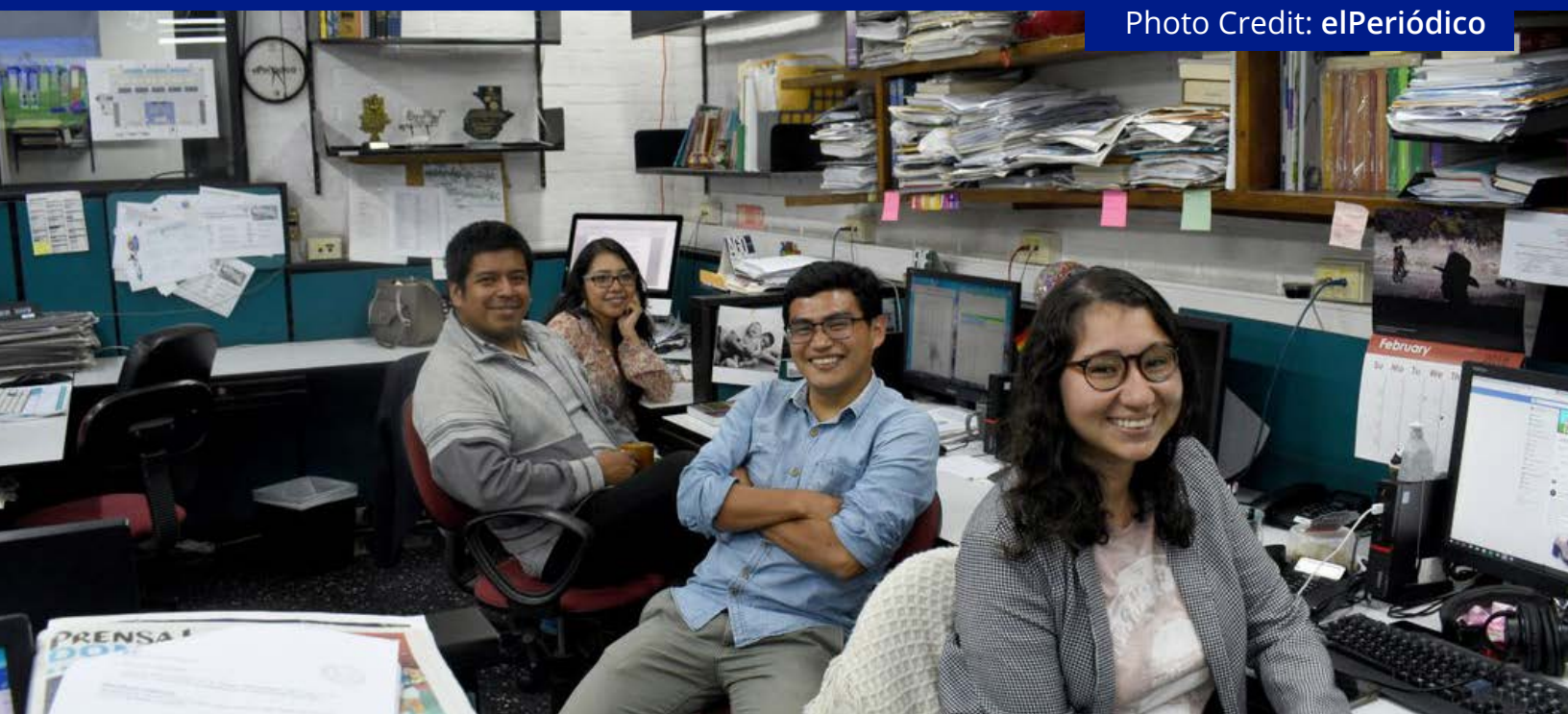


Photo Credit: elPeriódico

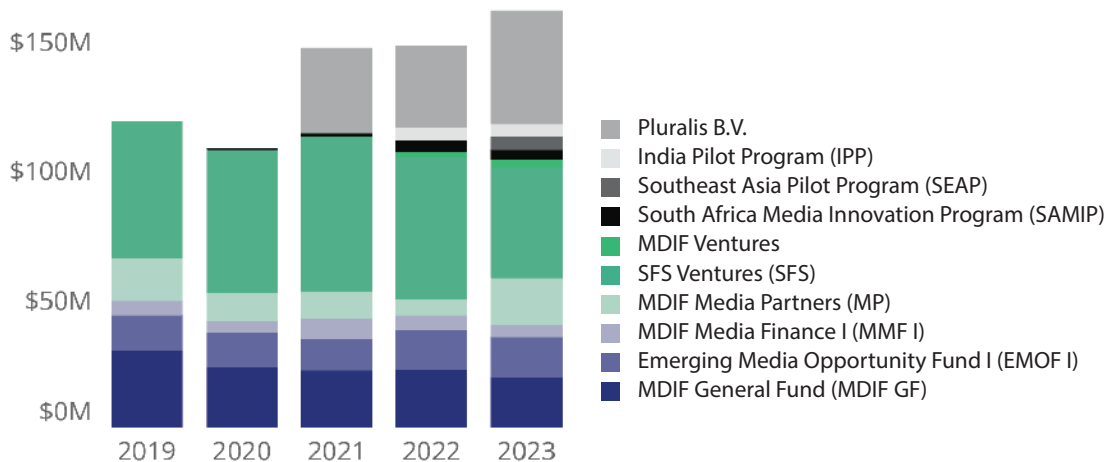
INVESTING

MDIF provides debt and equity financing to help independent media build robust businesses, safeguard their editorial independence and respond to challenges facing the media industry. We believe in long-term investment over grants as the most effective means to support media in the public interest, providing patient, no-strings-attached financing without editorial interference.

Since 1996, MDIF has provided **\$266 million** in loans and equity investments. In 2023 alone, we invested **\$14.3 million** in **19** media across **14** countries, welcoming **six** new clients. We ended the year with approximately \$162 million in assets under management allocated to 62 media businesses in 34 countries. We handled our investments through a fund structure, which includes private equity, debt and hybrid funds, and other investment vehicles.

- **Pluralis B.V.** is an impact investment vehicle for news companies that provide independent, quality reporting in countries in Europe where a plural media is at risk, bringing together a coalition of prestigious European media companies, foundations and impact investors. By year’s close, it had invested a total of €29.8 million in three companies in three countries.
- **MDIF Media Finance I (MMF I)** is a blended-value loan fund for independent news media companies in select emerging and frontier markets with a guarantee from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). At the conclusion of the year, it had invested a total of \$9.6 million in 25 companies in 20 countries.
- **The Southeast Asia Pilot Program (SEAP)** was launched in 2023. It invests in young and growing media, impactful content and media-tech companies across the region. By the end of the year, it had invested \$1.5 million in one company in Indonesia.
- **The India Pilot Program (IPP)** invests in young and growing media, impactful content and media-tech companies in India. As of the end of the year, it had invested a total of \$3.25 million in three companies.
- **MDIF Ventures** invests in young and growing media companies with a positive social impact and the potential to scale in countries where access to free and independent news and information is under threat. At year’s end, it had invested a total of \$1.8 million in 10 companies in eight countries.
- **Emerging Media Opportunity Fund I (EMOF I)** is an equity fund for independent media in emerging markets that is fully invested in 10 digital media companies in 6 countries.
- **MDIF General Fund (MDIF GF)** is our original evergreen fund providing Program Related Investments (PRIs). In 2023, it invested approximately \$200k in three clients.
- **SFS Ventures (SFS)** invested in Eurozet.
- **MDIF Media Partners (MP)** is a fund managed by MDIF that invests in Polish media company Agora SA.

ASSETS UNDER MANAGEMENT 2019-2023



CLIENT HIGHLIGHT:

[eDiarioAR](#) is an Argentinian independent digital news and information outlet launched in 2020 through a partnership with the Spanish [eDiario](#). In 2023, MDIF [invested](#) in the company through MDIF Ventures to help it expand its audience and develop its membership strategy, as well as explore and diversify revenue streams.



“MDIF’s support gives us certainty to focus on our journalistic work amid a difficult economic context, which challenges the sustainability of Argentine companies. The contribution, which in no way compromises our editorial approach, helps the newspaper to remain faithful to its mandate of independence and to give priority in our decisions to journalistic criteria over any other factor,”

Delfina Torres Cabreros,
eDiarioAR’s Editorial Director.

Photo Credit: Seen



MEDIA ADVISORY SERVICES

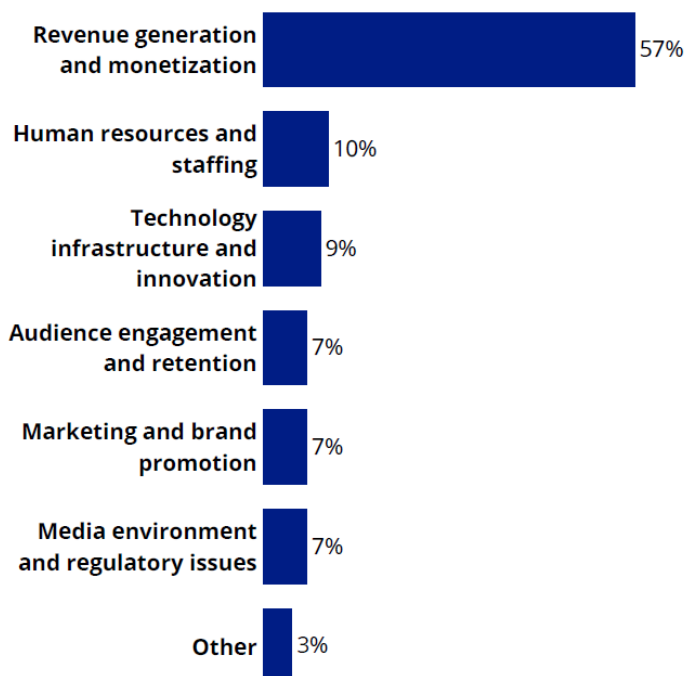
Our expertise is media viability. In addition to financing, we also bring non-financial value centered around media management and strategy, deploying **\$49 million** in business advisory, venture support and grants since 1996 through Media Advisory Services (MAS), our capacity-building unit, and through our regional initiatives (see next page for more information). In 2023 alone, we delivered **\$5.3 million** in tailored technical assistance.

Our media advisory services take various forms, including tailored consultancies from internal and external experts, long-term mentorships, workshops, conferences and peer-to-peer learning. We address a wide range of issues, from optimizing paywalls and driving reader engagement to designing and launching new products and supporting media startups in governance and business plan development.

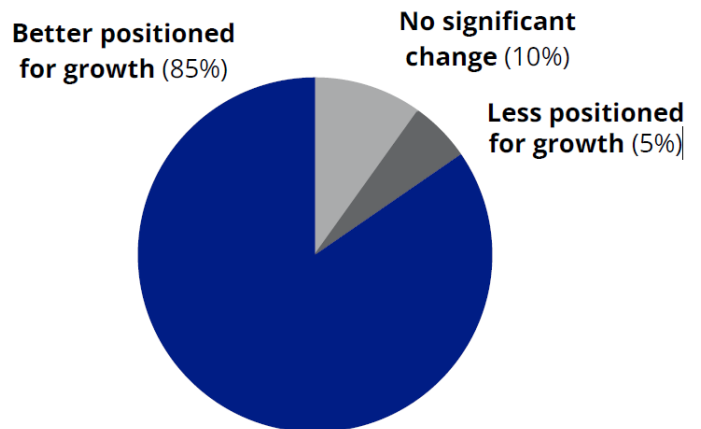
In 2023, MAS engaged with **101** media companies, including **47** MDIF clients, in addition to other media participating in our special programmes, candidates for financing and others. It hosted **24** group events, including multi-day workshops, trainings and regular community calls, with **44%** of female panellists and presenters and a total of **83** media companies taking part.

While risks to public interest media come from various sources, revenue generation and monetization were by far the biggest challenges in a survey of the companies we support, as shown in the graph below. MAS aims to help media companies build resilient and resourceful information businesses that can not only remain financially stable in a fast-evolving media landscape, but also adapt, innovate and scale to meet the rapidly changing needs of their communities. **85%** of partners report being better positioned for growth compared to before receiving funding and support from MDIF.

KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY SUPPORTED COMPANIES



GROWTH READINESS AFTER MDIF SUPPORT



SUPPORT HIGHLIGHT:

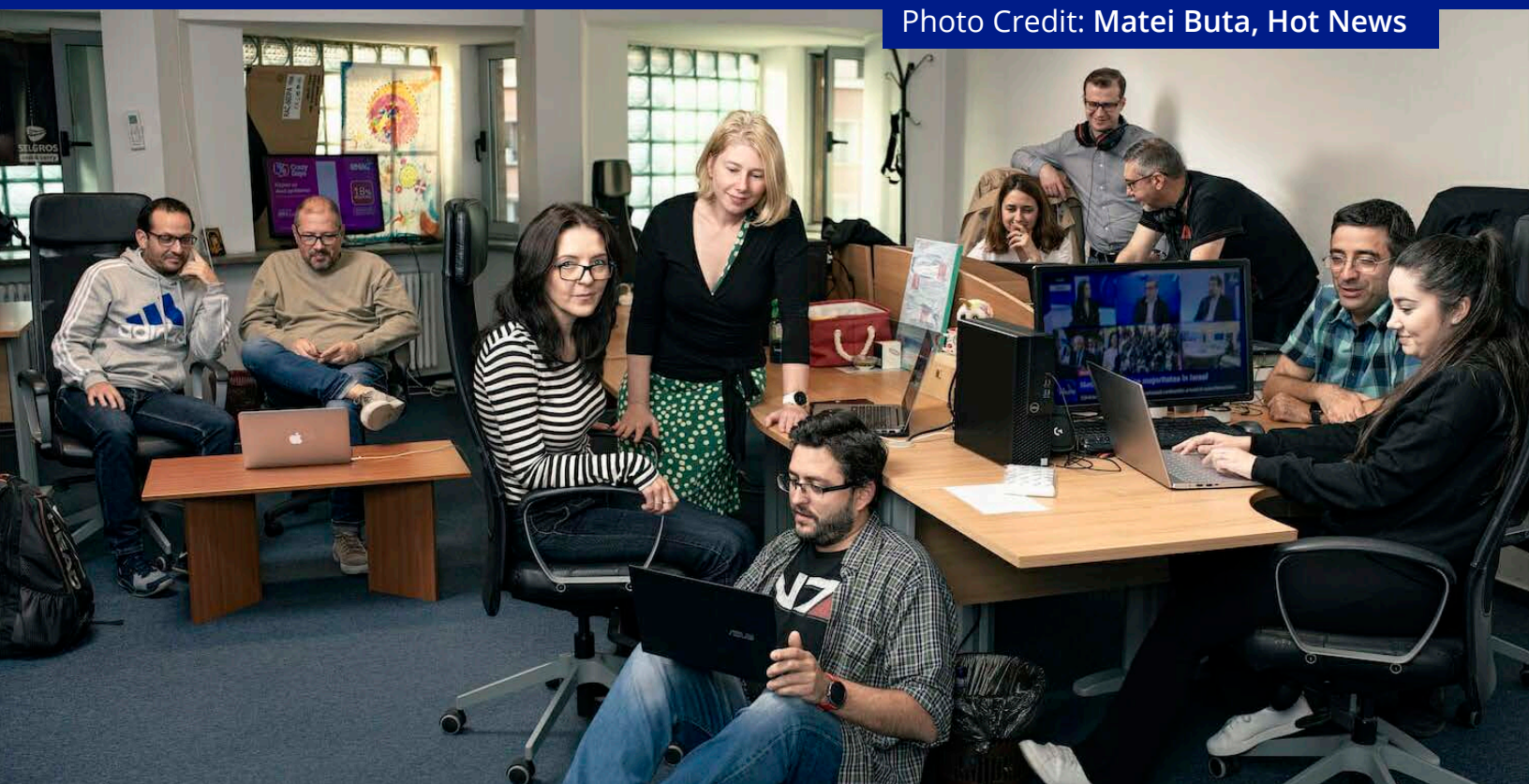
Telegram Media Grupa is a digital native company in Croatia that runs the news portal Telegram.hr. It joined our portfolio in 2023, after Pluralis, which is managed by MDIF, acquired a minority stake as the company sought a reputable media-oriented investor that would not compromise its editorial independence. MAS supported the media group to enhance its subscription model and user engagement, helping Telegram experience strong growth. From April 2023 to April 2024, Telegram saw a 66% year-over-year increase in subscribers, a 6% growth in real users, a 79% uptick in pageviews and a remarkable 146% surge in ad impressions.



“Media Advisory Services have been of pivotal value as Telegram grows into its next development phase, becoming the leading publisher for premium news and services in Croatia,”

Miran Pavić, Telegram Media Grupa’s CEO.

Photo Credit: Matei Buta, Hot News



PROGRAMS

We broaden our impact by launching or partnering in a wide range of targeted initiatives. In 2023, we ran **eight** such tailored local programs, supporting a total of 122 media companies through long-term coaching, training and strategic assistance. Programs are centred on specific issues or geography, with many designed around our “Amplify” model of localized capacity support for young independent media in challenging environments.

amplifyeurope

Amplify Europe is our business capacity support program for independent media from selected countries in Europe. Funded by the Dutch Postcode Lottery and the German Postcode Lottery, in 2023 it completed its inaugural year and at year’s end supported eight media companies in three countries – Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia.

Polish Regional Support Program was launched in 2023 to support local media to build revenues and audiences. In the first round, four media companies were selected for support in how to build a more solid foundation for their business.

nigeria media innovation program

Nigeria Media Innovation Program (NAMIP) is a support program working to increase capacity, generate sustainable and diverse revenue streams, and build audiences of independent media in Nigeria, funded by the MacArthur Foundation. In 2023, 12 new media organizations joined the existing cohort of 14.

ukraine emergency support

Ukraine emergency support, backed by organizations including King Baudouin Foundation, Mediahuis, Wyncote Foundation, Tinius Trust, and the German Postcode Lottery, provided assistance to 10 companies across Ukraine including current and former MDIF clients and other independent regional media, and enabled the delivery of more than 150 tonnes of vital newsprint.

south africa media innovation program

South Africa Media Innovation Program (SAMIP), backed by Luminate and OSISA, wrapped up its work in South Africa last year after nurturing more than 20 young media organizations since 2017. In addition, MDIF finalized six investments in SAMIP participants. By year’s end, SAMIP’s regional program, supported by the Wyncote Foundation, continued to work with five organizations spanning Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Lesotho.

myanmar media program

Myanmar Media Program II (MMP II) is our support program for Myanmar’s independent media funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Despite the February 2021 coup, MDIF’s work continued. In 2023, we worked with 31 media operating under very dangerous circumstances, many of them in exile.

amplifyasia

Amplify Asia is our business capacity support program for independent media in selected countries in the region funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Luminate. In 2023, it provided business coaching to 14 media from seven countries across Southeast and South Asia.



Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) wrapped up implementation of a four-year capacity strengthening project in Ethiopia, undertaken with a consortium of media development organizations led by BBC Media Action and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In 2023, we provided direct long-term coaching to four public interest media organizations.

SUPPORT HIGHLIGHT:

Prime Progress is a NAMIP partner and a solutions-focused online media that has found a niche covering social impact and cultural issues typically neglected in Nigeria and across Africa. Before joining the program cohort, it was largely funded by small grants to deliver editorial outputs such as story production. NAMIP helped Prime Progress diversify and expand revenue streams and audiences. Its reliance on grants came down to 45% from nearly 100% and the company recorded a 70% jump in page views and an uptick of 70-150% in its social media following.

"When we started Prime Progress in 2021, we just wanted to break away from the conventional problems-focused reporting and do journalism that heals and inspires hope while holding people to account. But we struggled to figure out the business/revenue side for our sustainability until we became MDIF's NAMIP cohort member. With the mentorship, community calls, workshops, conferences, and grants we access as a cohort member, we have started monetizing some of our media products and services, cutting our grant dependence as we continue to experiment with new models and innovate around existing ones,"

Innocent Eteng, Managing Director and Business Development Lead, Prime Progress.

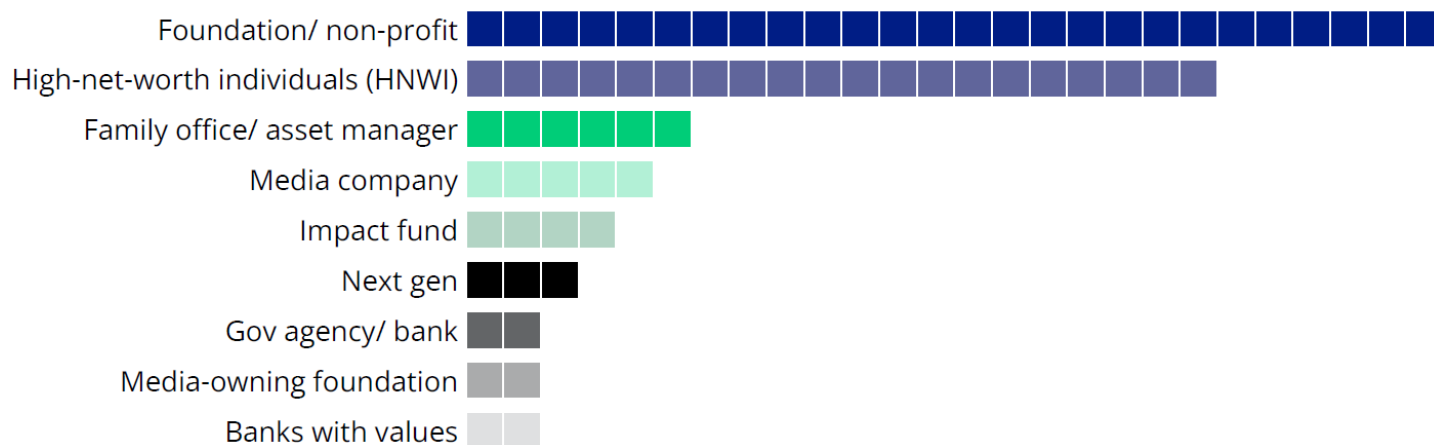


BLENDING CAPITAL

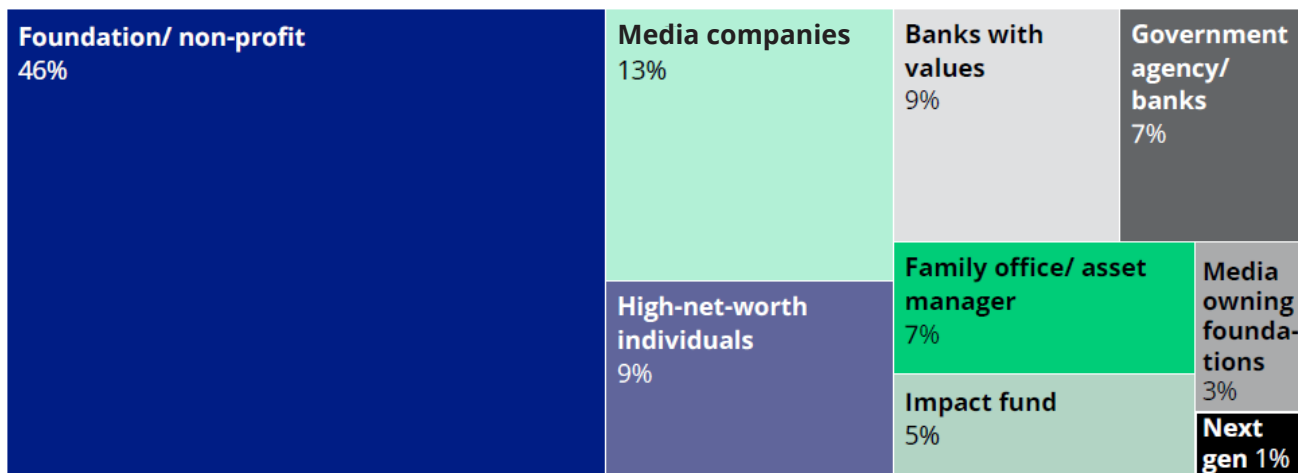
MDIF champions blended finance, leveraging philanthropic and commercial capital for independent media. By the end of 2023, we were bringing together more than **60** different donors and investors, spanning development agencies, foundations, impact investors, media organizations and individuals who share our commitment to free media. Investors seeking both financial and social returns support our work through various funds and investment vehicles offering fixed or variable returns and durations (see page 4). While we cover part of our deployment costs by earned income, donors contribute to our general operations, Media Advisory Services and our targeted programs and initiatives (see page 11 and 13).

We are rigorous in managing risk and since making our first loan in 1996 have never missed or been late with a repayment. In total, MDIF has received back **\$101 million** in recovered principal invested and earned more than **\$74 million** in interest, dividends and capital gains, while returning **\$72 million** to investors. Since 1996, we have written off only 9.5% of the total loaned and invested. In 2023 alone, MDIF received back **\$20.6 million** in principal recovered and earned **\$11.6 million** in interest, dividends and capital gains, while returning more than **\$4.3 million** to investors.

FUNDERS PER TYPE



AMOUNT INVESTED PER TYPE



PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

In 2023, MDIF partnered with leading German ethical bank GLS Bank and GLS Crowd to issue Europe's first impact bond for media plurality. Pluralis Media Anleihe enables people in Germany to invest in news companies that provide independent, quality reporting in countries in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe where media pluralism is at risk, through Pluralis, an entity managed by MDIF (see page 9). 10-year bonds at €1,000 each provide a guaranteed annual return of 5% interest. As of 31 December, 2024 €3.1 million was raised through the crowd-bond program.



"Freedom of speech and free media are the lifeblood of civil society in liberal democracies. Hence GLS felt honoured to be able to support MDIF's fight for independent media,"

Lukas Adams, Head of Institutional Clients at GLS Bank.

Photo Credit: Addis Zeybe

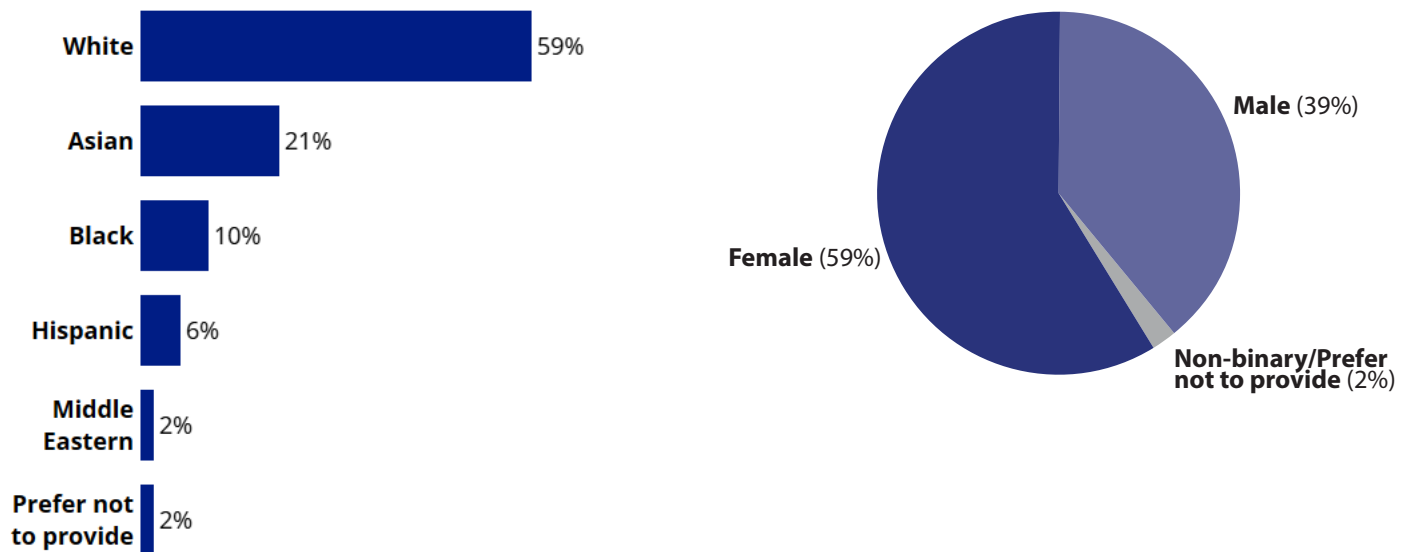


ABOUT MDIF

MDIF is a New York-registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation. As of the year’s end, our organization comprised **49** individuals across **19** locations and **16** nationalities. Among us, **59%** identify as female, **39%** as male, and **2%** as non-binary or preferring not to disclose. Additionally, **59%** of our workforce identifies as White, **20%** as Asian, **10%** as Black, **6%** as Hispanic, **2%** as Middle Eastern, and **2%** preferred not to provide the information. Guiding our efforts is a dedicated Board of Directors, consisting of **8** members representing **6** nationalities, with gender parity at **50%** women and **50%** men.

We are a [values-driven organization](#), rooted in diversity, equal opportunity and non-discrimination. Guided by our commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles, we have developed a comprehensive set of policies to ensure ethical conduct, promote diversity and inclusion, protect the environment, uphold human rights and foster transparency in our operations. Recognizing the spiraling climate crisis, we have offset our greenhouse gas emissions since 2008 through a variety of renewable energy projects. With diverse backgrounds and expertise, we collaborate with our clients, partners and funders to cultivate a community committed to championing independent media and preserving press freedom.

MDIF WORKFORCE REPRESENTATION DATA



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT:

In a vibrant gathering that underscored the power of community, the Media Forum 2023 brought together over 170 MDIF media partners, donors, investors, staff and Board members from more than 40 countries in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This dynamic event knitted together a global network dedicated to building resilient and sustainable media enterprises. Attendees from Colombia to India, Romania to Nigeria, participated in two days of panels, presentations and discussions around the pressing challenges of independent media, from AI to press freedom issues.

"The energy and the entrepreneurial spirit evident both in the panels and in the hallways were inspiring and contagious. I came away more optimistic about the future of independent media despite the challenges, and the solidarity shown by our clients bolstered my optimism,"

Sheila Coronel, Chair of MDIF Board and Professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



PERFORMANCE SNAPSHOT

