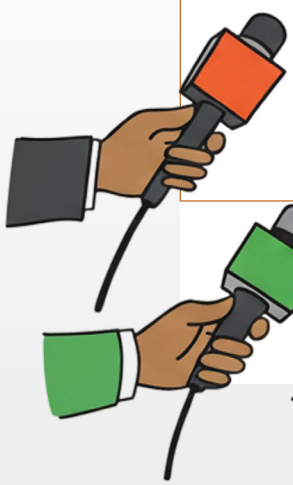
State of Media and Safety of Journalists in Ethiopia

Analysis Report March - May 2025

Prepared by: Editors' Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) in collaboration with Consortium for Safety of Journalists (CSOJ) and support from International Media Support (IMS)



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About the Report

This report, prepared by Editors' Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) in partnership with the Consortium for Safety of Journalists (CSOJ) and with support from International Media Support (IMS), presents an overview of threats to journalists in Ethiopia from March to May 2025. Drawing on verified data from sojethiopia.org, local media, and international watchdogs including CPJ, IPI, IFEX, HRW, and RSF, it documents cases of physical attacks, arrests, detentions, kidnappings, and related risks. The report also situates these incidents within Ethiopia's broader media environment, highlighting challenges to press freedom, professional security, and the urgent need for stronger protections for journalists.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by Editors' Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) in collaboration with the Consortium for Safety of Journalists (CSOJ) and support from International Media Support (IMS) to provide an overview of reported incidents affecting the safety of journalists in Ethiopia between March and May 2025. While every effort has been made to verify the information using credible local and international sources, including sojethiopia.org, CPJ, IPI, IFEX, HRW, and RSF, the report may not capture all incidents or reflect the full complexity of the situation. The analysis and findings represent the perspective of the authors at the time of publication and are intended for informational and advocacy purposes, not as legal or official determinations.

Background

Editors' Guild of Ethiopia (EGE) is a professional, membership-based association established on October 29, 2019, and officially registered by the FDRE Agency for Civil Society Organizations under registrar number 4527. Its formation was driven by a comprehensive assessment of Ethiopia's media landscape, which revealed significant structural and institutional gaps; particularly the absence of a dedicated organization representing news editors. As media gatekeepers, editors play a decisive role in shaping content, ensuring ethical standards, and safeguarding professional integrity. However, they often operate under precarious conditions, facing heightened risks of threats, intimidation, and interference.

The Guild was thus conceived as a platform to address these vulnerabilities while strengthening editorial leadership as a cornerstone of media freedom.

Since its inception, EGE has grown steadily, building a diverse membership base that now includes 108 news editors. These members represent a broad spectrum of Ethiopia's media environment, spanning print, broadcast, and digital outlets. Importantly, the Guild brings together editors from across ownership structures (private, government, and community-based) providing a rare platform for dialogue and solidarity that transcends political, commercial, and institutional divides. This inclusive membership ensures that the Guild reflects Ethiopia's complex media ecosystem, giving it both legitimacy and authority to articulate the collective interests of editors nationwide.

EGE's influence extends beyond Ethiopia's borders through its active participation in regional and international networks. It is a recognized member of the International Home of Journalists (IHJ) and a founding member of the Eastern Africa Editors Society (EAES). The latter is a regional coalition uniting editors' associations from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, with the shared goal of strengthening editorial independence and collaboration across East Africa. These affiliations position EGE as a key actor in regional media solidarity efforts and provide it with access to comparative insights, peer learning, and broader advocacy platforms.

A distinctive feature of the Guild's work is its focus on evidence-based advocacy. Through its monitoring and reporting functions, particularly via sojethiopia.org, a trilingual online portal, EGE documents and analyzes incidents affecting the safety of journalists. This platform serves as a repository of verified data on violations such as harassment, arrests, assaults, and censorship, providing the foundation for well-informed advocacy at both national and international levels. By producing timely and credible information, EGE helps ensure that the challenges facing Ethiopian journalists are not only recorded but also addressed through policy dialogue and practical interventions.

In addition to documenting threats, EGE actively promotes solutions to improve the safety and operational environment of media professionals. It facilitates dialogue between journalists, policymakers, and security actors; advocates for legal and institutional reforms that strengthen press freedom; and collaborates with local and international partners to provide training on safety, digital security, and professional resilience. These interventions are designed to create a more enabling environment for journalism, reduce vulnerabilities for editors and reporters alike, and reinforce media's role as a pillar of democratic society.

Executive Summary

Ethiopia's media landscape has experienced rapid but uneven change, marked by moments of cautious liberalization alongside persistent restrictions. While private and state outlets operate nationwide, journalists continue to face political, legal, and economic pressures that undermine independent reporting. Laws addressing terrorism, misinformation, hate speech, and cyber activities are frequently applied in ways that restrict press freedom, resulting in arrests, intimidation, and harassment of media professionals.

Since early 2025, conditions have deteriorated further, with increased legal uncertainties and limited access to information contributing to an environment of fear and self-censorship. These developments not only weaken press freedom but also heighten risks to the physical safety of journalists.

This report briefly reviews incidents affecting Ethiopian media between March and May 2025, highlighting how legal amendments, enforcement practices, and broader political dynamics are shaping the operating environment and challenging the ability of journalists to work freely, safely, and responsibly.

Physical Safety Risks (March–May 2025)

Between March and May 2025, Ethiopian journalists encountered escalating safety threats, including arrests, physical attacks, and in some cases, kidnappings, directly linked to their professional work.

Detentions, Intimidations and Arrests

The period saw a notable rise in detentions and intimidation of journalists. Allegations commonly invoked against them (such as disinformation, defamation, incitement, or terrorism) were often framed in broad terms, raising concerns that these charges served more to silence critical voices than to uphold the law.

Beyond legal actions, significant number of journalists faced heightened physical risks, including harassment, surveillance, newsroom raids, and temporary detentions. Both private and state-affiliated media professionals reported such incidents, creating an atmosphere of fear that undermines editorial independence.

Imprisonment and Kidnapping

Several journalists remained in prolonged detention without clear charges or due process. Reports also indicated instances of enforced disappearances and kidnappings in different regions, underscoring the severe threats confronting the profession.

The table below summarizes major arrests, detentions and intimidations reported during this period. Allegations centered on disinformation, defamation, and terrorism-related offenses. Cases affected both private and public media staff, with some detainees released after short detentions, while others remained imprisoned despite court orders.

Date	Location	Journalist(s)	Media Affiliation	Incident Type	Allegation / Context
Mar 26, 2025	Addis Ababa (assumed, not specified)	Nebiyu Tiumelissan, Tariku Haile, Hilina Tarekegn, Niter Dereje	EBS (private)	Arrest	Accused of fabricating a documentary; terrorism-related allegations
Apr 5, 2025	Harari Region	Muhyidin Abdullahi Omar	Harari Mass Media Agency / Biyyoo Production	Arrest	Defamation and disinformation charges
Apr 17, 2025	Addis Ababa	Addis Standard office in Addis Ababa	Addis Standard	Newsroom Raid	Newsroom raid; no formal charges reported
Apr 23, 2025	Jigjiga, Somali Region	Ahmed Awga	Jigjiga Television Network	Arrest & Sentencing	Charged with incitement; sentenced to two years
May 9, 2025	Addis Ababa	Abebe Fikir	The Amharic Reporter	Arrest	Reason for arrest not publicly stated

Table 1, Shows the number of journalists detained between March and May 2025

Key Challenges Identified

Since April 2025, Ethiopia's media sector has faced a range of inter-related challenges that continue to restrict the ability of journalists to operate freely and safely. The overlap of media, anti-terror, and cyber laws has created significant legal uncertainties, often leaving journalists vulnerable to arbitrary interpretation and prosecution. Media outlets also face stringent regulatory requirements, including licensing and reporting obligations, which can be applied in restrictive ways.

Journalists encounter both physical and digital threats, ranging from online harassment and exposure of personal information to direct intimidation and violence. Economic pressures further strain newsroom operations, limiting resources available for safety measures, professional development, and sustainable staffing. Restrictions on access to certain regions, events, and public records also hinder reporting. A notable example was the decision to ban The Reporter newspaper from attending parliamentary sessions, an action widely criticized as a direct infringement on press freedom and accountability.

Equally concerning is the absence of accessible and reliable official communication channels for advocacy or rapid emergency response when journalists are arrested, harassed, or intimidated. This lack of institutional engagement mechanisms weakens protections for media professionals and undermines trust between the press and authorities.

Together, these challenges highlight the precarious and restrictive environment in which Ethiopian media professionals continue to work.

Conclusion

The March - May 2025 reporting period highlights how Ethiopia's evolving legal and regulatory frameworks, coupled with law enforcement actions, continue to undermine the safety and independence of journalists. During this period, at least nine journalists were arrested, with detentions often linked to broad or politically sensitive allegations. These incidents disrupted newsroom operations and fueled self-censorship, particularly on issues of governance, security, and political accountability.

Ethiopia's ranking of 145 out of 180 in the 2025 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Index underscores the difficult environment in which media professionals operate. Sustained risks to press freedom call for comprehensive responses: stronger legal safeguards to prevent abuse of laws, effective professional regulation to uphold journalistic standards, and practical safety measures that protect both individual journalists and media institutions. Addressing these challenges is critical not only for safeguarding media freedom but also for strengthening democratic governance and the public's right to information.

References

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