WFSJ Guiding Principles Workshop in the Arab Region

Workshop Date: 25 November 2025
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Subject: Outcomes and Recommendations from the Regional Arabic Workshop (WFSJ/Kavli)
Objective: Integrate regional challenges and priorities into the updated Guiding Principles document.

1. Executive Summary

The Arabic Workshop, the eighth in the series of global consultations for the joint WFSJ / Kavli Foundation project, successfully gathered critical input on the Scope of Ethics in Science Journalism.

1. **Key Priorities:** The most urgent demand was the creation of a separate, detailed section on Artificial Intelligence (AI), with strong limitations or prohibition on its use in sensitive health and medical coverage.

2. **Regional Challenges:** Participants highlighted significant regional obstacles, including the lack of institutional support, threats to journalistic independence, and the scarcity of reliable Arabic research centers.

3. **Document Structure:** There was a consensus to reorganize the document into three distinct sections to enhance practical utility: Guiding Principles, Best Practices, and Recommendations for Stakeholders.

4. **Document Status:** Participants acknowledged the document as a non-binding ethical framework, though many expressed a strong desire for it to eventually become legally binding to increase its enforcement power.

2. Background and Methodology

A. Project Context

- **Goal:** The joint WFSJ/Kavli project aims to assess the scope of ethics in science journalism and develop universally applicable guiding principles.
- **Workshop Structure:** The Arabic session followed the same methodology used for the 2024 workshops: a 3-hour duration, with participants divided into three separate breakout rooms for in-depth discussion, followed by a recorded final plenary session.
- **Facilitation:** The session was moderated by Abdulrahman Abotaleb, with logistical support provided by Vera Novais.

B. Participation Statistics

Application Window: 3 days only
Total Applicants: 143 candidates
Selected Participants: 47 applicants
Actual Attendance: 18 participants
Gender Distribution: 9 Male and 9 Female
Geographical Representation: 9 different Arab countries
Selection Rationale: Participants were selected based on their level of specialization and close connection to scientific journalism, representing various media formats (visual, audio, and print), plus academics.

3. Analysis of Thematic Outputs and Recommendations

The discussions were structured around assessing the principles' relevance, clarity, and applicability within the Arab science media landscape.

A. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI emerged as the most critical point for revision:

- **Need for Expansion:** Must be given a separate, developed section in the Guiding Principles.
- **Health and Medical Content:** Strong consensus to prohibit or strictly limit the use of AI tools in covering medical, health, and sensitive scientific topics.
- **Usage and Ownership:** Clarify that AI is a tool, not a source, and information accessed via AI tools belongs to the original research/sources.
- **Disclosure Debate:** While transparency is key, participants were split on mandatory public disclosure, arguing AI is a common utility tool (like MS Office or multimedia editing tools), and disclosure might undermine the message's impact.
- **Algorithmic Bias:** Emphasize the need for journalists to be acutely aware of and mitigate algorithmic and data biases.

B. Regional Challenges and Gaps (The Application of Principles)

Participants identified several significant regional obstacles to applying the principles, confirming a gap between the document's ideals and the local environment:

- **Lack of Institutional Support:** Absence of supportive institutions for media training, capacity building, and specialized funding for science journalism.
- **Independence Crisis:** Journalists often struggle with institutional constraints, forced to follow the media organization's agenda. **Freelancers** face particular vulnerability ("arbitrary treatment") from editors.

- **Arab Research Deficit:** The lack of reliable, high-quality Arab research centers necessitates reliance on international research institutions for regionally relevant stories.
- **Media Agenda vs. Science:** Editorial decisions are frequently driven by **social media trends** (Trends), causing the audience's demand to override the subject's scientific importance.

C. Document Structure and Status

- **Reorganization:** There was widespread support to reorganize the document to improve usability.
  - **Proposed Structure:** 1. Guiding Principles, 2. Best Practices, 3. Recommendations for Stakeholders (which includes media owners, research centers, etc.).
- **Clarity:** Need to add procedural definitions and practical examples to clarify terms like "accuracy".
- **Status:** Acknowledged as a "living document" and a professional ethical framework, but participants requested WFSJ assistance in lobbying for its adoption by local/regional media syndicates.

D. Training and Societal Engagement

- **Continuous Training:** Essential for both new and current science journalists, especially training focusing on the practical application of the principles and preparation for major events (e.g., climate conferences).
- **Public Responsibility:** Journalists have a shared responsibility to educate the public about these ethical standards, thereby enabling the audience to perform "Societal Monitoring" of media compliance with scientific ethics.

4. Proposed Next Steps and Action Items

Summary of Participants' Recommendations: The participants presented several actionable proposals to enhance the document's utility and regional impact. Structurally, the core recommendation was to divide the document into the three-part format (Principles, Practices, and Stakeholder Recommendations). On content, they called for developing a dedicated and restricted AI section, particularly for sensitive health reports. To drive adoption, they requested WFSJ's support in assisting local entities to adopt the principles, and they volunteered to act as "ambassadors" for the document within their organizations. Finally, they stressed the need for continuous, localized training on the practical application of the document, and the necessity of including a component for public awareness to enhance societal ethical monitoring.