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1) Introduction

The BBC World Service remains one of the leading international advocates for defending media freedom, building on our daily work providing international news in multiple languages to an audience of over 340m every week.

We work with other partner organisations to share safety information to protect journalists, and to advocate for journalists from other organisations who are being harassed simply for doing their job. Within the World Service itself, we see pressures on our staff globally increasing – most worryingly for BBC Persian staff whose families continue to suffer an unjust judicial campaign of collective punishment inside Iran - but also in countries like Burundi and Rwanda where BBC staff are either banned or operate under the threat of having their accreditation withdrawn and further official sanction. The killing of Jamal Khashoggi has focused minds on the vulnerability of many journalists and our evidence highlights some worrying examples the committee may be interested in.

We see a growing threat from state-backed disinformation – both from state-funded broadcasting networks which lack the editorial independence and accountability of BBC World Service – and from hidden operations which seek to manipulate national conversation through ‘bots’, the promulgation of disinformation (commonly known as ‘fake news’) and the malign use of technology to influence national debates and votes. The World Service’s editorial work on ‘Beyond Fake News’, set out in the BBC’s written evidence submitted to the DCMS Committee inquiry into Fake News, is summarised in the following sections. It indicates the BBC’s continuing commitment to being a leading global voice on thinking around practical solutions to tackle the growing problem of disinformation and to improve global media literacy.

The World Service’s editorial aim to bring audiences together rather than drive them apart continues. Following a pilot last year, the return of the ‘Crossing Divides’ season illustrates this commitment to positive, solutions-focused journalism and the BBC offering a unique safe space to contextualise disputed stories in markets where little open conversation is otherwise possible. Recent record audiences online in India and Pakistan\(^1\) confirm this - the BBC is now almost the only space where tensions over Kashmir can be covered in these national markets in a calm and explanatory manner.

The UK Government funding of additional services under the World 2020 scheme has allowed the World Service to build new audiences through the introduction of 12 new language services (many directed towards countries where media freedom is under threat) and enhancement of existing services, invest extensively in digital innovation to keep pace with changing audience behaviours and pioneer important investigative journalism like \textit{Africa Eye}. Discussions with the Government about the continuation of World 2020 funding are ongoing.

The BBC’s continued editorial independence means that it is the most trusted international news provider. Nevertheless the BBC supports the recent statements made by the UK

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\(^1\) World Service Language websites enjoyed a record performance in March 2019 during the India-Pakistan standoff - with BBC Hindi spiking for one week at double its average number of users and the Tamil, Marathi and Urdu websites also seeing big increases.
Government about the importance of protecting press freedoms around the world; the BBC has an important role to play in supporting the voices of journalists for press freedom globally and anticipates that the Government conference in July 2019 will be an important moment for international news providers around the world to make their own renewed pledges to support press freedom.
2) Context

At a time when global media freedoms and trust in the news media are under almost constant attack, the BBC remains the most trusted global news provider in the world\(^2\), with its news services reaching more people than ever (347m people\(^3\)).

The BBC is uniquely placed – with governance and funding arrangements set out in a Royal Charter – to provide trusted news and information that is free of interest and influence\(^4\) in this increasingly noisy and contested news context. However, as is the case for many news organisations, it faces significant challenges.

**Media Freedom** – the latest report from independent watchdog Freedom House\(^5\) shows that media freedom has been in a steady decline since 2002. Globally, the press is now less free than in 1993 and the Committee to Protect Journalists reports\(^6\) that the number of journalists imprisoned has been steadily increasing since 2000.

One of the main factors driving this decline in freedom is the activity of governments. While some countries – such as Eritrea, North Korea, Saudi Arabia – have remained ‘on censorship watch’ for years – media freedoms are also now being eroded in states which have, until recently, operated a democratic and free system.

On the one hand is the significant uplift in state-controlled broadcasting such as Russia’s RT and China’s CGTN and an increase in media repression, with the harassment suffered by BBC Persian staff at the hands of the Iranian authorities one such case. On the other, we can see governments across the Council of Europe area adopting tactics which were previously seen only in more repressive political environments: e.g. the closure or banning of media outlets by decree and enactment of legislation to block Internet sites citing national security. In Hungary for example the structure and production of state and public news media are now strongly centralised and pro-governmental. A Foundation exempted from external scrutiny, which includes the vast majority of the country’s pro-government media outlets, was created in November 2018 under the direction of a close ally of the Prime Minister.

CGTN has recently opened a large new office in London. The channel is recruiting more than 300 people in the UK. They will become part of an operation which aims to portray itself as a counterweight to the alleged bias of established broadcasters.

**Misinformation** – the increase in manufactured information that has no basis in fact for political or commercial gain (commonly known as ‘fake news’) has created an environment in which ‘journalism is facing widespread problems of ‘news avoidance’’. At the same time,

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\(^2\) Source BBC News Global Brand Tracker 2018  
\(^3\) Source: GAM 2018 (The Global Audience Measure is the BBC’s annual review of how many unique people come to the BBC each week across all its services and platforms. 347m is the figure for BBC’s global news services only. The total including BBC Studios is 376m)  
\(^4\) The BBC’s Public Purposes (set out in the Charter) requires the BBC to reflect the UK, its culture and values to the world through the ‘provision of high-quality news coverage to international audiences, firmly based on British values of accuracy, impartiality, and fairness’.  
\(^6\) [https://cpj.org/imprisoned/2016.php](https://cpj.org/imprisoned/2016.php)  
\(^7\) Source Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism report –More important, but less robust?
the ubiquity of disinformation can negatively impact on audience news behaviours: while trust in the news media increased in 2018, it had been in decline previously for several years. Moreover, this recent increase was largely limited to ‘the informed public’ – people who actively consume the news.

Strong public service broadcasting and publishing organisations, working alongside reputable commercial companies, could become part of the solution. But public service media themselves are increasingly under-funded. A decline in their budgets naturally leads to a decline in ambition and, therefore, relevance to the audience. As BBC Director General, Tony Hall, pointed out in a recent article in the FT ‘If fake news is the poison, those who stand up for integrity and impartiality in news must be the antidote.’

Fragmentation – in an age of globalisation, where nations are theoretically being brought closer together, nationalism has spawned a new wave of fragmentation and polarisation. As nation states disintegrate and subgroups and countries pursue political, ideological and economic independence these fractures are reflected in the increase in echo chambers and news bubbles.

At the heart of the World Service is its ambition to help audiences make sense of competing views - it provides opportunities for global conversations that promote greater understanding across divides and contribute to social cohesion.

3) BBC Response

Supporting media freedoms

The BBC is working to tackle the growing problem of disinformation and to improve global media literacy across the world as part of its mission to deliver impartial and accurate news and information.

Examples of BBC World Service content specifically aimed at supporting media freedom and democratic values include governorship debates delivered by the BBC’s West African services last year giving unprecedented voter access to politicians in local languages. These historical debates were broadcast by 100 partners across Nigeria and all were attended by over 300 guests with some debates attracting 1000 people. Another example aimed at young audiences is BBC Minute which explains big stories in concise and simple ways to audiences across the Middle East and Africa. It produced this explainer about the Nigerian elections - Why Nigeria’s election matters.

BBC Media Action, the BBC’s international development charity, works around the world to support media freedom. It does this by supporting policy, legislation and regulation that underpins media freedom and by supporting broadcasters and journalists working in the public interest. In Iraq for example, Media Action supported the development of a functional and effective independent media regulator and worked with local media to develop a code of self-regulation for broadcasters.

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8 See The Edelman Trust Barometer 2019
9 FT 11 February 2019
10 Another of the BBC’s Public Purposes requires the BBC ‘to raise awareness of different cultures and contribute to social cohesion’.
And in other parts of the world it is working to build the capacity of the media to provide trusted local news and information.

**Tackling disinformation**

The **World Service** has been at the forefront of delivering practical solutions to tackle the spread of disinformation - it finds the stories, spots the patterns and then delivers the facts. Examples of content include:

- *Global Reality Check*, launched in 2018, brings the expertise of the BBC’s UK Reality Check teams to a global audience. The Global Reality Check team will be doing daily fact checks throughout the Indian election.
- BBC Africa launched a raft of TV content that gives audiences the tools to tackle disinformation. These include *What’s New?* for 13-15 year olds, *Factfinder* which analyses disinformation and *Africa Eye* which has raised the bar for investigative journalism in Africa, with the episode on killings in Cameroon winning the 2019 RTS Award for News Technology.
- World Service English’s coverage of US politics included documentaries on the US political system, one such example is *The Trumped Republicans*. News programme *Open Source* also ran the series *Trump's Towns* where they talked to voters on the ground.
- As part of the *Beyond Fake News* project set up to fight back against the spread of disinformation the World Service hosted a series of public events across India and in Nairobi in November, which looked for solutions to disinformation and included hackathons, and audience debates with tech platforms and local politicians. More details about the initiative are included in the Appendix.

**BBC Monitoring** – beyond granular reporting and analysis of stories carried by regional and international media, BBC Monitoring journalists produce a number of products that reflect changes in the global news media market. These include:

- detailed media guides that provide essential insight into regional media ecosystems and reflect changes in the media environment. Monitoring also produces weekly reviews covering media industry, social media and media freedom news.
- news reports about disinformation. It also verifies social media content on merit, alongside public debate, research and legislation being considered in various countries across the globe.
- a dedicated disinformation team, drawing on overall monitoring of global media, provides fact-checking and analysis of the latest trends and tactics adopted by disinformation actors.

**Overcoming fragmentation**

Some recent examples of World Service content which contributes to social cohesion include:

- *World Questions* which records debates in front of audiences in cities across the world. The programme provides a forum for open and in-depth debate where national broadcasters may not. Programme locations over the last year have included Harare, Sao Paolo, Yerevan and Prague.
- *Crossing Divides*[^11] – a 12-month season launched in March 2019 of programmes across BBC channels and platforms. It explores how people from conflicting sides can

[^11]: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/crossing-divides](https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/crossing-divides)
be brought together despite their differences - whether social, ethnic, political, religious, geographical or generational. It will feature a broad range of programming, special reports and innovative events across the year, designed to reach audiences of all ages and create opportunities for new conversations.

BBC World Service content includes:

· a BBC Indonesian Service story, which featured as part of the pilot last year, about a Christian and a Muslim who as children were sent out to mutilate and murder other islanders of a different faith. They now work together to keep the fragile peace on their island. Following the BBC broadcast in Indonesia the two friends became national heroes and a larger than life mural of them now looks down on the centre of Ambon City to inspire the community.

· the BBC Russian and Ukrainian Services are bringing a handful of students together from Russia and Ukraine to see the sites of London then sit down for a dialogue to see if they can find common ground discussing what freedom means to them.

4) BBC media freedom operational issues

The BBC constantly faces deliberate measures by governments, regulators and political groups to disrupt its services. And its journalists often operate in hostile or war-torn environments, working at great personal risk to bring truth to people and to hold authority to account.

The BBC takes the safety of its journalists very seriously and has committed to leadership in the protection of all journalists all over the world. It has an in-house High Risk team who ensure staff assigned to work in hostile environments complete appropriate training and works alongside other organisations to raise the profile of issues around the safety of journalists.

The harassment of BBC Persian journalists – and their families - by the Iranian authorities is an example of intimidation on a scale not experienced by the BBC anywhere else in the world – details included below. A regional round-up of other hotspots where the BBC is experiencing interference is included in the appendix to this evidence.

**BBC Persian harassment by the Iranian authorities** – As outlined in the BBC’s written evidence to the Committee for its 2018 inquiry into the FCO’s human rights work, the Iranian authorities have been systematically targeting BBC Persian journalists (who are mainly based in London), and their families in Iran, since the service launched satellite television in 2009. This persecution escalated in 2017 when the Iranian authorities commenced a criminal investigation into journalists working for the BBC’s Persian Service in London, alleging their work is a crime against Iran’s national security. This was accompanied by an asset-freezing injunction preventing 152 named individuals, comprising mainly current and former BBC Persian staff, from buying or selling property inside Iran.

The names of a number of people who have left the BBC have since been removed from this list and the Iranian judiciary are now openly stating that staff should leave the BBC if they want the injunction lifted, which is a disturbing development and a clear attempt at intimidation.
Other measures against the journalists and their families have included arbitrary arrest and detention of family members in Iran, the confiscation of passports and travel bans on family members leaving Iran, ongoing surveillance and harassment and the spread of fake and defamatory news stories designed to undermine the reputation of BBC Persian staff and their families (much of which is directed at female journalists).

Rana Rahimpour, a BBC Persian presenter, spoke movingly at a BBC/IPU co-sponsored event in Parliament earlier this year about her personal experience of the persecution, explaining how her father was subjected to a travel ban to prevent him from visiting her after her first child was born. She also spoke about the effect of the measures on her colleagues: “every time a parent dies, we get together in London and hold a service in the memory of our colleagues’ loved one in Iran. We do this, to offer support for a friend facing their painful loss simply because it is too dangerous to go home and mourn with those gathered around the grave.”

The BBC, alongside the NUJ and Doughty Street Chambers, is working hard to raise the profile of the issue. Concerns have been raised on the international stage including at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva by the BBC and the UK Government and at the European Parliament.

However, the injunction remains in place, the criminal investigation remains ongoing and BBC Persian staff and their families continue to have their rights infringed. A recent development has seen the Iranian authorities warn of reprisals against BBC Persian journalists and their families for engaging with the UN.

5) Working with international partners on media freedom issues

The BBC works with international broadcasting partners on a range of media freedom issues often resulting in joint public statements and representations to international organisations such as the UN. Much of this work is carried out via a grouping which the BBC was instrumental in setting up known collectively as the DG7.

It includes the leading public service international media organisations, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the United States Agency for Global Media (which includes VOA, Al hurra, Radio Sawa, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia and Radio and TV Marti), Deutsche Welle, France Médias Monde, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and Radio Canada International (CBC) which has observer status, represented by their respective Directors General or Chief Executive Officers.

The group meet annually to discuss areas of collaboration and of mutual interest, as well as challenges facing international public service broadcasters including trust in journalism, media freedom, interference with broadcasts and current diversity initiatives in the media industry. The 2018 annual meeting took place in December in London, hosted by the BBC. In a joint communique12 at the end of the meeting, the broadcasters said public service broadcasting faces ‘increasing threats’, expressed concern about ‘troubling attacks’ on journalists around the world and confirmed that they were committed to working together to help protect them.

12 https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/statements/ipsb-threats-to-journalism
The BBC also works with its international partners, Ofcom, the FCO, DCMS and the UK Space Agency on technical and regulatory issues at UN agency, the ITU (International Telecommunications Union).

6) Working with the FCO to resolve issues

As part of the October 2010 licence fee settlement, the BBC agreed that from 1 April 2014 the World Service would be funded from the licence fee. This settlement ended the grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and changed the relationship accordingly. The BBC provides World Service and is responsible for setting its overall strategic direction, the budget and guarding its editorial independence. Its Licence published online13 defines its remit, scope, annual budget and main commitments, as well as objectives, targets and priorities which, along with the closure and opening of any new World Service languages, are agreed with the Foreign Secretary.

In 2016, the Government agreed to additional funding via a £291 million grant over four years (up until 2020) for a programme to expand and enhance the World Service. The grant is administered by the FCO. This enabled the World Service to open 12 new language services and enhance existing services.

While the FCO is not required – beyond the duty of care it extends to all British subjects – to protect individuals who work for the World Service, it has an interest in ensuring the continuity of the language services. With this in mind, the FCO (at the BBC’s request and with due consideration to the BBC’s editorial and operational independence of government), has consistently provided practical diplomatic support to BBC staff who have been the subject of political intimidation or similar threat to their personal security as well as offering support on technical issues as mentioned above.

Of particular note has been the case of BBC Persian, where both former Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and the current Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt have demanded that the Iranian authorities cease the systematic harassment of British subjects and dual nationals working for the Service.

13http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/managementstructure/structureandgovernance/world_service_licence.pdf
7) Appendix I - Regional round-up of incidences of interference

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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Issues</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>China – all BBC websites have been blocked since July 2018 after the World Service moved their sites to a secure internet protocol. Before that, China blocked only BBC Chinese. Online BBC content is now accessible using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) only. BBC Learning English for China content remains popular and is still being delivered through a network of local partners. World Service English shortwave radio is jammed which as well as affecting audiences in China affects those in surrounding areas like Nepal, northern India, parts of Bhutan and further afield in south-east Asia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>BBC News Korea broadcasts on shortwave aimed primarily at North Korea, which is one of the most closed countries in the world. Audiences in North Korea can also access BBC news and information (at significant risk to personal safety) via DVDs and USBs and typically brought in covertly via personal networks. The service also has a website and presence on social media which serves audiences in South Korea, although there is evidence that its digital content has also been accessed by small number of unique users in the North.</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
<td>primarily legal threats under the powers of the Computer Crimes Act and more broadly overt censorship from the Lese Majeste laws. BBC Thai has been producing high impact stories about the military and the monarchy since its launch and that led to friction with the government on a couple of occasions. Because of the Lese Majeste law (that is applied to individuals and not to institutions) the Head of the Thai service - who would be a natural target - hasn’t been back to Thailand out of precaution and there are no plans to do so in the near future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>BBC News Vietnamese is based in Bangkok and London because it is not able to operate reasonably in Vietnam and access to the website is problematic.</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>two Reuters journalists were detained in December 2017 and later jailed for 7 years on colonial-era espionage charges for their reporting of a Rohingya massacre. The BBC ended a partnership deal with Myanmar TV (MNTV) in September 2017 over interference following the BBC’s reporting in Burmese on the ethnic strife. In March 2018 the BBC started a new partnership with TV channel, Mizzima, who broadcast the BBC Burmese news bulletin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Nigeria – there is a severe issue re physical security of journalists as a result of the BBC Africa Eye investigation into the criminality surrounding codeine cough syrup.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ghana – a local journalist who worked with renowned Ghanaian investigative journalist Anas Anas and also with BBC’s Africa Eye on football corruption in Ghana and West Africa was murdered in January 2019.</td>
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</table>
**Tanzania** – press freedom is narrowing due to hostility from the government which has introduced stringent laws that restrict journalists to quoting only government statistics. There is also a social media law that requires bloggers to be licenced as a media company. (There are other countries where such laws have been introduced eg Zambia).

**Liberia** – there is concern around the security of a BBC freelance reporter following a press conference with the President at which the reporter asked probing questions.

**Rwanda** - the Kinyarwanda-language service BBC Gahuza was taken off air from BBC FM relays in 2014 following the broadcast of a BBC Two documentary on the Rwandan genocide. Controversial stories are covered from London as the BBC team in the country fear reprisals not only from the government but also from its staunch supporters. In addition, the government of Rwanda has been reluctant to give accreditation to non-Rwandan journalists going to cover major events in the country.

**Burundi** - two BBC FM relays were taken off air in the run-up to the constitutional referendum in May in 2018. None of BBC’s English, French, Swahili or Kinyarwanda/Kirundi programmes are heard on FM in the country, although they are still available on short-wave. The National Communications Council has also declined to receive payment from the BBC team in the country for the newly introduced National Press Cards which are likely to be enforced from September 2019. Without them, BBC journalists won’t be allowed to work in the country as BBC journalists. Some government officials are reluctant to be interviewed by BBC journalists in the country. A BBC freelance reporter was forced to flee the country after the President adversely mentioned her in a meeting and she subsequently resigned from the BBC.

**Uganda** – in February a BBC team (including local freelancers) investigating the illegal sale of government medicines was arrested and later released on bond. Later the BBC’s Kampala based reporter had to go into hiding after hearing of an active plan by the country’s intelligence unit to arrest her in connection with the investigation. Following intervention from BBC management, the threat to arrest her has since reduced. Uganda introduced a social media tax last July. There are now reports that there is a nearly 15% decline in the number of people who connect to the internet in Uganda.

**Eritrea** – the BBC has not been allowed into the country to recruit a local reporter and/or producers to work with BBC News Tigrinya which is based in Nairobi. Despite various meetings with Eritrean ambassadors in London and Nairobi as well as other government officials, there has not been any progress.

The physical security of journalists is an issue in most areas of Africa – not all examples are included here due to ongoing sensitivities.

| Arab world | Egypt | recent security laws mean that the BBC has to report much of the Islamist driven violence from London, including any interviews with Muslim Brotherhood members. The government led an angry campaign against the |
**BBC over reporting of severe human rights abuses and filming permits for accredited journalists were withdrawn in the lead-up to the election campaign. Most of the BBC journalists’ accreditation has since been restored but a repeat is a serious possibility at any time the authorities disapprove of something in BBC coverage.**

**Gulf region** – the World Service is refused anything but highly controlled access.

**Libya** - the FM relay in Benghazi was taken off the air in 2014 after an armed group raided and occupied the hotel tower where the BBC Arabic FM relay was hosted. Negotiations to resume BBC broadcasts from a different location were halted in March 2018 when a local Libyan commander issued a decree to shut down foreign FM radios.

**Near East and Central Asia**

**Afghanistan** - BBC journalists along with most other journalists and civil servants have been coming under increasing threat from militant and criminal groups. The Afghan security services have always offered support but the unstable situation in the country means that BBC journalists in Kabul are often required to change their routines and those in remote provinces have on occasion had to relocate with their families to another area for periods of time.

On 30 April 2018, a day during which journalists seemed to be a particular target, the BBC received the tragic news that BBC Afghan reporter, Ahmad Shah, had been shot and killed in Khost, a normally safe area. He was the fourth BBC member of staff to be killed in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban.

**Iran** - as described in earlier paragraphs, the Iranian authorities criminalised working for BBC Persian in 2017 and have run a sophisticated campaign of harassment and intimidation against 152 staff and their families. BBC Persian has no access to Iran and the Iranian authorities prevent news agencies who operate in Iran from supplying video and content to the Persian Service.

In addition, signals of BBC Persian TV are targeted in the form of downlink jamming. Persian TV, along with other privately-owned or foreign Persian-language stations, is routinely jammed during big stories in the country, such as elections or protests. The jamming appears to be focused on specific geographic areas within Iran. BBC Persian’s website has been blocked since 2006. Despite these obstacles the Persian service manages to reach an audience of 13m in Iran each week.

**Turkey** – greater authoritarianism is affecting mostly Turkish journalists working for the Turkish press. As of 31 December 2018, 110 journalists are in prison according to the Council of Europe annual report. The BBC is largely left to operate freely, although it is often the subject of political campaigns by senior government officials and the pro-government media. The BBC’s TV partnership with NTV ended in 2013 when NTV tried to interfere editorially on coverage of the protests. Since then, independent media in Turkey to a large extent collapsed and there has been no possibility to form a TV
partnership with anybody else.

**Uzbekistan** - the BBC Uzbek service website is largely blocked. Despite some improvements there is no media freedom and repression of independent journalists and bloggers is prevalent. The BBC has been waiting for more than a year to get accreditation for its new reporter in Uzbekistan and is unable to operate in the country.

**Europe**

**Russia** - accreditation is very restrictive. Current relations between the UK and Russia and the possibility of Ofcom action against RT mean the BBC is highly scrutinised and will suffer reciprocal measures should Ofcom act. The BBC made a formal complaint to the Russian authorities in December 2018 after a list of BBC staff working in Russia, including their personal data, was leaked online. BBC journalists suffer occasional physical intimidation but the main means of restricting the BBC’s activities are regulatory and administrative.

**Azerbaijan** – BBC Azeri is the only international broadcaster operating from within the country. In February two BBC Azeri correspondents who were gathering material about local social problems were detained in the Barga region. They have since been released but it was a worrying development particularly as communication with the correspondents was cut off at one point and information from the police about their whereabouts was very vague.

**Latin America**

**Mexico** – after Iraq and Philippines, Mexico is the country where most journalists are killed, many of them caught up in the war on drugs. Freedom of the press has suffered hugely as a result, often through self-censorship. There are large areas of the country known as ‘silent zones’ because no-one dares to report from there.

**Brazil** - the second most dangerous country in Latin America for journalists, the danger comes notably from the unchecked spread of fake news and disinformation through social media channels and chat apps. Under the new government press freedom is under a new threat from financial constraints that make traditional outlets vulnerable to political pressure.

**Venezuela** - the worsening of the political and economic situation in Venezuela is having serious effects on the country’s press freedom. The shortage of paper – which used to be supplied by the State - has caused the closure of most print media, the only source of information for the many Venezuelans that don’t have access to internet or money for Smartphones and data consuming. This has resulted in a vicious circle in which Twitter and Whatsapp chains have replaced traditional media consequently increasing the spread of fake news. Media polarization is so high that impartiality is almost impossible to find. Websites have been blocked, licenses not renewed and investigative journalists temporarily detained or forced to abandon the country due to what they describe as dubious judiciary processes.
8) Appendix II – Beyond Fake News project

Launched by Jamie Angus, Director BBC World Service Group, in November 2018, the Beyond Fake News project set out to move beyond just talking about the global ‘fake news’ threat, and take concrete steps to address it. It saw the BBC carve a path as a leading global voice for spotting the problems and setting out ambitious solutions. It has tackled disinformation in targeted and practical ways including:

- A series of public events held across India and in Nairobi in November which looked for solutions to the challenges posed by disinformation incorporating:
  - Hackathons focused on technical solutions
  - Audience debates to hold tech platforms and local politicians to account
  - Extensive audience research into why people share disinformation on social media.
  - The study examined networks within Twitter and analysed how people are sharing information on encrypted messaging apps after users in India and Africa gave the BBC unprecedented access to their phones.
- BBC World News broadcast special content from India over four days and BBC Africa covered the issues raised across its new TV programmes, as well as on Focus on Africa radio. It created a huge amount of impact and media interest across both African and India markets.
- A wide range of content across the BBC investigating the business and politics around fake news, bots and disinformation. The BBC continues to curate much of this content which is available on its website at BBC.com/fakenews.
- A rollout of media literacy videos and workshops, developed by the UK’s Young Reporters team and made relevant to Indian and African audiences.
- BBC World Service also held a major conference in Nigeria in February 2019 which brought together politicians, senior media figures and influencers to try and prevent information being weaponised during the Nigerian election. Speakers included the Vice President of Nigeria, Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka and Director of BBC World Service Group. It was attended by other notable Nigerians, civil societies, security agencies, Nigerian political parties and over 60 media houses and made the front pages of almost all Nigerian newspapers, online platforms, TV and radio stations.
- Events in March 2019 include - a Horn of Africa roadshow with new services in Amharic, Tigrinya and Afaan Oromo travelling around different regions of Ethiopia to meet and engage directly with their audiences in their hometowns. It will culminate in a joint debate on the issue of fake news at Addis Ababa University; a Beyond Fake News conference in Sao Paulo hosted by BBC Brasil incorporating media literacy workshops; and a Media Freedom Conference in Belgrade hosted by BBC Serbian incorporating a panel discussion on disinformation, BBC digital literacy workshops and a demonstration of the challenges of AI, machine learning and deep fakes.

March 2019

14 https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/beyond-fake-news