

# **A Feasibility Study on Establishing a Guild for Filipino Freelance Journalists**

A study conducted by the National  
Union of Journalists of the Philippines  
2021

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# **PART 1: Introduction, Definition of Terms, and Abstract of the Study**

## **I. Introduction**

A labor shift is happening in the Philippines right now.

Freelancing, or the “gig economy”, as it is also commonly called, has been on the steady rise in the country, with more individuals opting out of the unforgiving 9-5 work schedule that Filipinos have grown accustomed to, and, instead, choosing to work at their own pace and environment.

In a [2018 report](#), global payment app PayPal said that the Philippines has around 1.5 million freelancers. The company also stated that [one in five](#) Filipino workers would be freelancing in 2020.

With the Covid-19 outbreak, independent work seems to have become a more viable mode of employment for many, with freelance workers emerging in various industries [such as](#) administrative work, content creation, and web and graphic design.

The rise in number of freelancers has led to the creation of various support groups and organizations that cater to freelance needs.

Meanwhile, journalism also has its fair share of independent workers.

But what sets them apart from their counterparts in other occupations is the level of aid and support available to freelancers within the media.

To be clear, media agencies and groups are already in existence in the country; none of these, however, were established solely to attend to the emerging needs of freelancers.

It cannot be denied that the unconventional nature of this new economy has given Filipinos more options and opportunities in making a living. But it also comes with its own set of problems—delayed or nonpayment of fees, zero social protections, and exploitation due to contract-less transactions—which only lead to an overall culture of exploitation.

And that a collective body focused only on freelance journalists and media workers’ rights does not exist in the Philippines makes working conditions more perilous for these individuals.

To address this organizational lack, the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), with support from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), has launched this study—a first in-depth look into the state of freelance journalism in the Philippines—to assess the possibility of establishing a guild that will cater exclusively to freelancers in the field of journalism.

## II. Definition of Terms

In order to understand the situation of freelancers in Philippine journalism, clear definitions must first be provided for who or what a freelancer is, as well as other related terms that will be mentioned or used in this report.

Who or what is a freelance journalist?

A **freelance journalist** is any individual who produces news—whether in audio, photo, research, text, or video form—for any local or international outlet, without any exclusivity or restrictions from these outlets.

In addition, a freelance journalist can pursue multiple stories for multiple outlets at any given time, and is not required, or expected, to log work hours, and report for work in person. Oftentimes, freelance journalists work without contracts as well.

For the purpose of this report, 'freelance journalist/s' and 'freelancer/s' would be used interchangeably.

Who is an employer?

An **employer** is an individual or a company that pays for the service or work rendered by an employee. However, this definition cannot be applied in the case of freelancers, who, technically, are not employees.

According to some of the freelancers interviewed for this project, the more accurate description would be any individual or company who commissioned them for an assignment.

But for the purpose of this report, the term 'employer' would be used to mean the explanation right above.

What is an assignment?

An **assignment** is any approved job that a freelancer works on: The freelancer could have pitched this, or they could have been chosen by a news outlet/ publication to work on it. It could also be a short- or long-time engagement.

'Assignment' can mean the following outputs: an article for a news publication; photography coverage of a news piece, or a photo essay for a news publication; a podcast segment; radio coverage of a news piece; research for a news piece; or a video clip for television or online publications.

For the purpose of this report, 'assignment' can either be used alone, or with other similar terms, namely 'gigs' and 'projects'.

What is a contract?

A **contract** is an official document—digital or physical—upon which a freelancer and an employer affix their signatures, to show their agreement to the terms and conditions of a service of a particular assignment or project.

It could also mean a 'meeting of the minds', a moment in time where a freelancer and an employer have agreed upon the terms and conditions of a particular assignment or project, without the need for any document.

What is freelance work, and what is freelance labor?

**Freelance work** means a freelancer's service in exchange for a fee or salary. **Freelance labor**, on the other hand, is the application of a freelancer's expertise—in audio, photo, research, text, or video—to achieve a desired result for a particular assignment or project.

Labor lawyer Atty. Noel Neri explains that the terms 'labor' and 'work' can be used interchangeably, and it will be the same with this report.

### III. Abstract of the Study

Freelancing in journalism is becoming a norm in the Philippines. The ease of practice, coupled with an increase in work opportunities, is making journalists shift to this newer, more flexible form of labor. But the institutions that can help support this transition to freelancing are not yet in place.

The NUJP has proposed and launched this study to look into the need for establishing a guild that would focus on the needs of freelancers in the industry.

The research team employed a two-step methodology—an initial survey on 30 journalists, followed by a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with six to eight participants each—to obtain firsthand data, and, eventually, find patterns in freelancers' experiences. Their responses would be the set of core concerns that the guild aims to resolve.

Results show that the current systems in place in Philippine journalism are causing harm to both freelancers and the industry alike, and that there is a great demand for an organization that will commit itself to protecting freelance journalists. The NUJP sees that establishing the Freelancers' Guild will be a positive step towards addressing that demand.

## **PART 2: The Feasibility Study**

It has long been in the NUJP's plans to conduct a thorough review of the state of freelance journalism in the Philippines. The union was able to push through with this in 2021, through a grant from the IFJ.

The agreed-upon mode of research was to launch a feasibility study on freelancers, with the proposal submitted and approved on June 16 and July 3, respectively.

Further, the team decided to divide the research process into two methods: a preliminary survey, which would be supplemented by a more in-depth series of discussions with select freelance journalists in various subfields of journalism.

### **I. The Freelancers Survey**

The first part of the study is the freelancers survey, a 48-point questionnaire rolled out via online survey portal SurveyMonkey.

The survey contained a short introduction to the study, and an initial question with a Yes/ No option ("Are you a freelance journalist? If yes, please proceed to the next question."). With the exception of the name, all questions in the survey were required to be answered.

The research team began the deliberations for the survey on July 1, 2021, and finalized a set of questions by July 15, 2021.

The survey was released on July 18, 2021, and was scheduled to end on July 27, 2021, with a target number of 30 respondents from all regions of the Philippines.

However, due to difficulties in meeting the desired number of respondents by the supposed deadline, the survey period had to be extended for five (5) more days. The challenges will be discussed in the subsection "Challenges Observed During the Survey Period".

The team closed the survey on August 1, 2021.

The survey questions were divided into four parts: “Freelancer Profile”, “Economic and Working Conditions”, “Health and Well-being”, and “Safety in Coverages and at Work”.

Each part is described in more detail below:

Part One, “Freelancer Profile”, contains basic or standard questions, like the respondent’s name, age, gender, and location, as well as years of experience, scope of coverage, and the like. These questions are required, in order to establish the demographics of Filipino freelance journalists.

The questions in Part Two, “Economic and Working Conditions” range from their average monthly income from journalism, and outside it; monthly average number of assignments/gigs/projects, and rate for each assignment/gig/project; and on work insurance and upkeep of their equipment like cameras, hard drives, and laptops.

Part Three, “Health and Well-being”, is a closer look into freelancers’ priorities regarding their physical and mental health. Questions range from the average number of hours of work, and of rest, that they allot for in a day; rest activities they can do in a day; as well as access to mental healthcare, and the fears that they have as Filipino freelance journalists.

The last part, “Safety in Coverages and at Work”, tackles safety issues that the freelancers may have experienced or noticed while on assignment, and even off assignment. These include forms of abuse—emotional, gender-based, mental, physical, sexual, and verbal; common perpetrators; and access to support such as peer counseling and legal assistance. Further, respondents were asked what specific support they needed to perform well as freelancers, and what specific support they were looking for in a freelance journalists’ guild.

While the survey process mostly went according to plan, certain issues arose during this period.

First: There is a lack of awareness and understanding on what or who a freelancer is. Some of the respondents declined initially to answer the survey, claiming that they did not qualify. Only upon explaining to them what a freelancer is did they agree to participate. This confusion has caused a delay in the accomplishment of the freelancers survey, compelling the team to extend the survey period for an additional five days.

Second: As explained in the subsection "Survey Questions", the survey form was a 48-point questionnaire. The length may have contributed to some of the respondents' non-completion of the form.

The team secretariat noticed that most of the non-completers stopped answering by Part Three, and did not proceed anymore to Part Four. Thus, the team was forced to tag the incomplete entries as "void responses". In addition, there were also non-freelancers who answered the form. These were also tagged as void.

And third: An issue of reach also arose during this period. In the earlier stages of the survey period, it seemed that only Metro Manila freelancers were answering the form. Prior to the launch of the survey, the regional chapters of NUJP were requested to recommend members who were freelance journalists. Only a few freelancers answered. This concern also contributed to the five-day extension of the original deadline.

And to help in assessing the responses and finding emerging patterns in freelancers' experiences, the team sought the services of statistician Chloe Mirabueno.

The survey responses were emailed to her on August 2, 2021, and she was given two weeks to review all these. The team received her assessment on August 15, 2021.

The findings will be discussed per survey part. Please note that the Philippine peso rates in the following section have been converted to US dollars.

### Part 1: Freelancer Profile

From the assessment, it can be assumed that the typical Filipino freelance journalist is: 20-25 years old (23%); male, or male-identifying (53%); based or located in Metro Manila/ the National Capital Region, or NCR (47%).

In addition, the typical Filipino freelance journalist is: working as a contributor (57%), for a multimedia/ online outlet (90%), and has an NCR-based employer (73%); covering or producing for national news (60%); and is earning from work outside journalism (96%).

On years of experience, the responses were almost divided equally between beginners, with zero to five years of experience (42%), and long-time practitioners, with more than 10 years (50%).

Most notable among all of these percentages are the freelancers' choice of platform (multimedia/ online), location of employer (NCR-based), and scope of work (national news).



Lastly, it is also crucial to note that 96% of the respondents earn outside journalism or media work. Using this figure, it can be said that freelancers' income from journalism alone is not enough to sustain their varying needs.

## Part 2: Economic and Working Conditions

More than half (57%) of the respondents are earning above P15,000 (\$296) per month from journalism.

This may seem like a high amount, but this should be viewed in contrast to the mean number of assignments/ gigs/ projects that freelancers work on per month, and the minimum monthly pay in the Philippines.

According to the survey, a typical freelance journalist has zero to 10 assignments/gigs/projects in a month (81%); and most of these pay less than P5,000 (\$98). In comparison, the minimum pay per month in the Philippines is around P13,962 (\$275). The monthly amount was computed using the P537 (\$11) minimum wage per day, multiplied by 26 days, as advised by Atty. Neri.

In relation to this, freelancers with employers based in Metro Manila/ NCR are earning higher than those whose employers are outside the region. None of the freelancers with provincial employers earn above P15,000 (\$296).

There also seems to be a gender pay gap among the respondents. Half (50%) of the female respondents earn between P5,000 and P15,000, while the males' income was evenly distributed among the low (below P5,000, or \$98), mid-(P15,000-P25,000, or \$296-\$492), and high (above P35,000, or \$689) monthly income brackets. Mx. Mirabueno notes that this may change with a bigger sample size.

Another concern that emerged from this section is the apparent difficulty that freelancers have in finding or getting assignments/ gigs/ projects (63%).

The struggle to find work in journalism could be a leading factor that drives freelancers to seek [additional] employment outside it, not to mention the higher pay-per-gig that non-journalism jobs offer: 69% of these gigs pay above P5,000 (\$98).

## Part 3: Health and Well-being

Journalism has been known to be [a stressful line of work](#). But despite its hectic nature, freelancers seem to be getting the recommended amount (five to eight hours) of rest and sleep in a day, at 43% and 70% respectively.

Nevertheless, only 39% of the respondents are able to do at least four of the rest activities identified in the survey. Of these, food/ eating well is their highest priority (83%); taking a vacation after an assignment is the least (20%).

In addition, the stories that journalists work on—freelancers included—may be taking a toll on their mental well-being. Some 57% of the respondents answered that they experienced mental health concerns while on assignment. The most prominent factors were anger; anxiety caused by job security; and vicarious trauma from covering very sensitive issues such as poverty and violence.

And among those who experienced mental health concerns, 41% sought help from any of the following: mental health professionals; an organization; or family and friends. Only 12% received help or support from their employer/s.

#### Part 4: Safety in Coverages and at Work

Work in journalism exposes journalists to a lot of abuse. A total of 21 respondents (70%) said that they have experienced these—in various forms—on the job. Only four of the respondents (13%) have not.

Also a concerning matter is the number of freelancers who were not aware that they were being subjected to abuse; five respondents answered this (17%).

Among the various forms of abuse that freelancers have experienced, verbal abuse is first on the list (67%), followed by mental (48%), and emotional (43%). Physical abuse is the least, at 5%.

Furthermore, the government—from all levels—was identified as the leading perpetrator of abuse (57%). This statistic seems to reflect the situation of other Filipino journalists who have been humiliated in public by various government officials in official briefings and press conferences, most notably during this pandemic. Abuse from colleagues and peers (43%) comes next, followed by strangers (38%).

Lastly, female journalists are five (5) times more likely to experience abuse than their male colleagues.

In terms of reception, freelance journalists are also no strangers to hostility from their audience for a story that these freelancers have published or worked on.

54% of the respondents said that they received backlash or harassment because of this, with cyberbullying as the leading cause (62%), followed by verbal harassment (54%), and death threats (46%).

Only 17% did not receive any adverse reaction, while 29% were unaware.

Getting harmed on the job also seemed comparatively low. Less than half (32%) of the respondents said they have been harmed at work. However, only 17% of them received any form of support from their employer/s.

On the contrary, all those who faced legal implications for a story they published or worked on (21%) received legal aid from their employer/s.

## II. The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The second step in the study was conducting the focus group discussions, or FGDs, with select Filipino freelance journalists.

The team held a series of FGDs on three consecutive Saturdays, for three subcategories, namely, the women's discussion (August 21, 2021), the visual journalists' discussion (August 28, 2021), and the correspondents, stringers, and writers' discussion (September 4, 2021).

Each FGD was held and recorded, with the participants' consent, on meeting app Zoom. And although the indicated duration was only two hours long, each discussion went beyond the limit, due to the rich exchange of anecdotes and information from the participants as well as the moderators.

Meanwhile, the initial target number of participants for each discussion was six; but this was eventually raised to eight per group. This was done to have at least a minimum of six freelancers per date, in case some withdrew before, or were suddenly unavailable on the day of their FGD. The September 4 FGD had the most number of participants, with eight; the August FGDs both had six participants present during the discussion.

The team also strove to have a 50-50 rate—in terms of sex (except for the women's FGD) and location—in order to have a diverse set of participants. All FGDs were able to meet the female to male (regardless of gender) ratio; and only the August 28 FGD had the most number of NCR-based participants.

Similar to the survey period, the team encountered certain issues prior to the schedule of the FGDs. These issues are identified below.

First, most of the invited freelancers did not confirm or were unavailable on the given date and time. Thus, it was a challenge to meet the desired minimum number of participants.

The sudden unavailability of several confirmed freelancers also became a concern: A total of six were no-shows on their scheduled FGDs. The team's

workaround to this was to invite these absentees to another schedule (one freelancer), or hold a one-on-one discussion with them (two freelancers).

And third, diversifying participants' locations was a challenge. At one point, most of the freelancers who were confirming their attendance came from NCR. The team had to widen its reach in order to bring in participants from outside regions.

After careful assessment, it can be concluded that the main concerns of each FGD group do not stray too much from each other.

"Very low" pay or rates for freelancers, low pay from local outlets or publications, as compared to their international counterparts, stressful work environments, lack of support—gender-based, legal, mental, peer—from news companies or employers, and the existence of sexism and abuse, both from outside sources and colleagues in the industry, are valid worries that freelancers share with each other.

Put together, these make up for an overall culture of exploitation in freelance journalism here in the Philippines.

But there were also certain matters that were relevant to only a specific group. These will be broken down per date below.

Please take note that the names of the participants have been omitted to protect their privacy.

#### August 21 FGD: Women

As distressing as the industry is for journalists, it is even more so for women in this line of work.

This is why the NUJP research team deemed it necessary to set aside a discussion that was exclusively for women, in order to allow the female participants more breathing room, and especially a safe space, to air out their concerns—some of which might be difficult to talk about in the presence of men.

Issues such as the "gender pay gap", the "second shift", valid concerns on safety in the field, and a culture of misogyny in journalism were all discussed during this opening FGD, the points of which will be identified below.

As identified in the freelancers survey, there seemed to be a gender pay gap between the male and female respondents.

One particular freelancer's experience seems to prove this: She discovered that she was receiving "half or three-fifths" of what a male colleague was receiving, for the same amount of work:

*"When I asked the management about it, they said it was because of [his] experience. But isn't it the same requirement that they asked for for the output? Why would it be a different rate if we're giving the same requirement?"*

*"I don't know if it has something to do with female producers being easier to manipulate."*

While none of the other respondents shared a similar experience, this disparity in pay between the sexes is an important matter to look into further.

Another concern that emerged during this exclusive discussion with female freelancers is how the bigger burden of housework still falls on them, despite having full-time paid work to attend to—an experience called the "second shift" by sociologist Arlie Hochschild.

One freelancer said: *"You have work that you need to finish for your paid work, and then you also have work that you need to do at home. As a woman, you are expected to still attend to traditional chores... especially now that we work from home."*

All of the other participants expressed their agreement.

This situation is not limited to women in journalism, as reports of women, in various other careers, having difficulties balancing their professional and home life made the headlines in the early stages of the pandemic.

But what this point does is illustrate how media work can be sometimes unfavorable to women's situations, especially for female journalists who have partners and children.

One of the biggest issues that was discussed during this women's meeting is the overall culture of misogyny and sexism that still exists in the industry.

The participants were in agreement in saying that female freelancers experience various forms and degrees of abuse and harassment based on their sex.

Two participants shared being harassed by their sources for a story, while another opened up about having safety concerns while being on assignment in a male-dominant community in the southern Philippines.

One other participant also raised the sexist view that her own colleagues have of women in the industry:

*"These microaggressions really happen to me all the time. Every time I encounter males in the field, [it's there]. And as a woman, I'm not taken seriously; I'm not treated as there for official work, [but as someone they could play with]."*

## August 28 FGD: Visual Journalists

The second FGD in the series was for freelance visual journalists.

The sub-industry of visual journalism in the Philippines is also rife with issues and concerns, most of which affect freelancers in this field.

Central to the participants were topics on gender representation, exclusivity among photojournalists and photographers, and extremely low pay for freelancers. These would be explained below.

One of the crucial points raised is the gender imbalance and lack of representation for queer photographers in the field.

Prior to this particular dialogue, the Philippine photography industry had just come from a heated and divisive debate on women in photography: Camera brand Canon revealed its 2021 Philippine ambassadors, which, quite visibly, had no female or queer photographers in it.

The lack of diversity in the brand's roster caused a furor among feminist photojournalists and photographers, and led to the eventual withdrawal of one of the identified ambassadors.

In connection to this, the female participants of the second FGD expressed their disappointment at how the industry at large views women in the field. One female participant argued that women are often viewed as "glorified interns", relegating women—regardless of gender—to more "secretarial" or feminized jobs, instead of getting actual photography assignments.

One male participant admits that a "gender bias" does exist. For context, gender bias means the preference of one gender over others for matters such as employment or hiring; this usually skews in favor of cisgendered (straight) men.

Further, there also seems to be a glaring lack of representation of LGBTQIA+ freelancers in the field.

Another participant, who is a non-binary photographer, says that, despite the progress made in gender conversations in the Philippines, queer and non-binary freelance photojournalists and photographers are still not getting enough recognition and respect.

He says: *"We are just tolerated."* He adds that he is often the butt of jokes of male colleagues.

In the wake of the Canon 2021 ambassadorship incident, female photographers were compelled to [speak up](#) about the sexism and harassment that is commonplace in the field of photography and photojournalism.

One of the female participants said these often come in the form of microaggressions: *"There are unwanted touches, massages, or unsolicited comments."*

One of the male participants admits to enabling these in the past.

There was a consensus among the participants that women's and gender studies & workshops must be given to all practicing photojournalists.

Low pay is a common lament among media workers, freelancers included. In visual journalism, this comes in the form of "lowballing" photographers into accepting these low rates and/or not allowing freelancers to dictate or simply to negotiate their desired rates.

During this FGD, some participants revealed that local outlets would use photographers' images often, without pay, without permission, or both.

One of the photographers shared that a local news outlet published their photos without permission, while another publication, a tabloid, published their photos without pay.

In a similar experience, another participant revealed that their photo was "grabbed" (used without permission, or going through a proper discussion prior to use) by a local politician, for use in said politician's social media account.

In the worst cases, sometimes outlets don't pay at all.

The same participant adds that a local publication still owes them fees of around P5,000 (\$98) for their published photos. They noted that the amount could be higher, because they eventually gave up going after the

With all of these horror stories, it is important to emphasize in this report that the Philippines has its own intellectual property law, the Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines, and that [copyright infringement is punishable by Philippine law](#).

Another important argument raised in the meeting is the discrimination towards freelancers—and provincial freelancers—in visual journalism.

Some of the participants have said that some long-time colleagues enable the exploitation of newer, younger photographers entering the industry.

One male participant said that there is also discrimination towards freelancers:  
*"There are colleagues who look down on [me], because I'm a freelancer."*

The situation is worse for freelance photojournalists in, and from, the provinces. Two of the participants who hailed from the provinces noted that they felt discriminated against by their colleagues, simply because of their place of origin. [Their experience reflects the outdated Filipino notion that those who are based in the Philippines' capital region are superior, in intellect, skill, or social standing, to those from other regions.](#)

Lastly, the issue of mental health was also discussed.

Some of the participants said that they experienced extreme anxiety from covering sensitive subject matters, such as the Philippine government's war on drugs, the Marawi siege, and stories on indigenous peoples of the Philippines. Despite these, none of the participants received support from their employers, and were forced to seek help on their own.

#### September 4 FGD: Correspondents, Stringers, Writers

The last FGD was reserved for correspondents, stringers, and writers.

Freelance journalists in this sub-field of journalism are also exposed to a lot of labor concerns, such as the competition in the industry, deplorable working conditions in the regions, red-tagging among journalists, and the prevailing practice of contract-less transactions, which often contribute to freelancers/exploitation.

These would be discussed in detail below.

Industry rates were a leading concern. The abysmal rates in local journalism has created an atmosphere of competition among freelance writers and stringers.

Most of the participants said they were forced to pitch their stories to various international publications—where rates are eight to ten times more than their local counterparts—to help sustain their needs.

Having said that, international outlets also have their share of issues. Some of the participants said that there are international editors who view publishing freelancers' stories as a "reward" in itself.

The stress of local journalism also seems to be enticing freelancers to take up jobs or make a living outside journalism, such as managing a small business, creative work, or writing for corporate clients or government agencies.

One participant even admits that she was obligated to accept a project from a local politician because it paid better than her work in journalism. This practice may prove detrimental to any journalist and to the industry: Working for a



politician can become a potential conflict of interest, and may also give rise to other similar ethical concerns.

Another shared experience among the participants is demanding and going after local publications for their pay.

One journalist shared that one major broadsheet owes him for worth twelve published stories; he has not received his pay as of writing.

Another credits the slow rollout of their professional fees to the modernization of modes of payment—e.g. cashless transactions like bank transfers or PayPal payments—for which a lot of publications were not ready or prepared.

Aside from non-payment, freelancers also experience difficulties in upgrading their equipment on their own. Legal, authorized software is extremely expensive, as well as new hardware like laptops, recorders, et cetera. Shouldering these would only lessen the already-small fees that freelancers get.

Contract-less transactions are also a common practice in online & print journalism. To be clear, these contracts are the official, tangible documents that serve as proof of service, and not the simple “meeting of the minds”, which clearly occur between freelancers and employers or those who commission them.

This exercise only leads to the further exploitation of freelancers. Since freelancers do not have proof of agreeing to the terms and conditions put forth by the employer, it makes it hard for freelancers to assert their rights, as well as receive compensation (often monetary).

Similar to the participating visual journalists, correspondents, stringers, and print journalists also undergo a mental strain from covering sensitive stories. They also have not received any support from their employers.

One participant feels responsible in telling people’s stories (pieces that usually tackle subject matters such as poverty, homelessness, and indigenous people’s rights):

*“[I] want to avoid telling these kinds of stories; but you have to, because you have a responsibility to do this.”*

Another participant said they feel lonely on the job, and hopes to have a companion from work, with whom they can share their experiences.

Last among stringers and writers’ concerns is red-tagging, a form of verbal harassment done by branding an individual as a sympathizer, or even a member, of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People’s Army.

Journalists, as well as activists and other progressive figures, have been on the receiving end of these threats, especially since the last six years of the current Duterte administration, and now with an anti-terrorism law in effect.

Freelance stringers and writers, for their part, can be red-tagged simply for covering a protest, or writing a piece that is critical of the government.

One participant said that he was red-tagged during a Senate hearing, because he was covering people's stories.

This practice hinders journalists'—freelancers and employed alike—freedom to report on pertinent issues in the country.

## **PART 3: Establishing the Freelance Journalists' Guild**

An objective of the survey and the focus group discussions was to not only gather data on freelancers, but also to seek their opinion on what a freelance guild should be. This is why questions on the support they need were included in the survey, as well as the discussions.

This section will tackle the suggestions that freelancers gave (that the guild should also be able to provide, once established and fully functioning), as well as the process of building the Freelancers' Guild.

### **I. Support That Freelancers Need**

The team has divided the respondents' and participants' combined answers into four (4) major categories, namely Economic, Gender, Health and Well-being, and Safety.

The points will be itemized via numbered bullets, in alphabetical order.

#### **Economic Concerns**

- 1. Equipment Insurance**

Providing freelancers—especially those who go out on fieldwork—with this will help them work with more ease, instead of worrying about damaging their equipment or hardware while on the job.

- 2. Financial Assistance**

Freelancers have suggested a financial aid program for would-be members of the Guild, similar to NUJP's Tabang Media program. (The Tabang Media program was created and established by the union in 2013 to provide financial, material, and psycho-social support to its members. Support for Covid-19 stricken members has since been added to the program due to the ongoing pandemic.)

### 3. Freelancers Database/ Directory

Freelancers have also suggested establishing a freelancers' database, which can be given to editors, newsrooms, and other possible employers, both local and international. Having a database can help freelancers work with more ease, since they will not need to keep sourcing out for available work opportunities. This will also create a fairer playing field for freelancers, especially for the newer, younger freelancers.

### 4. Newsroom Support & Freelancers' Manifesto

Another suggestion is to get the commitment of editors and newsrooms in accommodating and aiding freelancers with their work concerns, especially about getting paid. To show their support for this, as well as other freelancers' concerns, editors and newsrooms could sign a freelancers' manifesto, which the Guild could create and/ or organize.

### 5. Professional Training

Professional training for editing (photo, video, or text), photojournalism, video production and the like will help raise the stock of freelancers, which, in turn, can help them claim higher pay. This also helps them develop as better journalists, which can only benefit the public.

### 6. Standard Rates for Freelancers

Aside from establishing a freelancers' database, freelancers are also clamoring for a standard rate matrix for specific types of services, such as photography, proofreading, and video editing. Similarly, this matrix will be sent out to editors, newsrooms, and other possible employers. Having this will help break the practice of hiring freelancers in exchange for unbelievably low fees.

### 7. Tax Assistance

There is also an apparent demand for tax assistance to be offered to members. This will be beneficial for those who file their own taxes or maintain their own receipt.

## Gender Concerns

1. Anti-Harassment Training

The female respondents and participants suggested anti-harassment training or workshops for members. This would revolve around the steps that members can take in the event that they, or a colleague, will experience harassment.

2. Gender Sensitivity Workshops

Given all the relevant events that have happened this year on gender conversations, the respondents and participants, as well as the research team, sees it important to conduct gender sensitivity workshops with the members, in order to create a healthier, safer, more conducive working environment for freelancers and employed journalists alike.

3. Harassment Desk

In relation to Number 1, the Guild could also establish its own 'Harassment Desk', complete with official numbers, to which freelancer members, or even members with no institutional support, may contact during or after an incident.

## Health and Well-being Concerns

1. Health Insurance

Similar to equipment insurance, freelancers are also asking for a unified health insurance, and/ or HMO support, that will be offered to guild members. This seems much needed, especially now that the Philippines is still going through the pandemic.

2. Inclusive Environment

Freelancers are calling for moves to create a more inclusive environment. This can help build a more caring and livelier freelancer community.

3. Mental Healthcare

[Mental health concerns among the public rose significantly in 2020, due to loss of job opportunities, a challenged education system, and fear for their safety, effects brought about by the health crisis.](#) The Philippine National Center for Mental Health reported that calls to its crisis hotline doubled in number during the pandemic.

[Journalists are no exception.](#) Therefore, it only seems necessary to also arm freelancers with mental healthcare, not just physical healthcare. This would mean providing guild members with easier access to mental health

professionals, therapy sessions, and purchase of medicines (for those who take prescription drugs to address their illnesses).

#### 4. Peer Support

In relation to Number 3, freelancers are also asking for a peer support program that they can easily access, in case medical solutions are unavailable or not yet needed. This will also contribute to a more caring and livelier freelancer community.

### Safety Concerns

#### 1. Freelancers' Code of Conduct

Similar to the journalists' Code of Ethics, the Code of Conduct will outline the do's and don'ts of how journalists should comport themselves, especially around colleagues. Partnered with the anti-harassment training and gender sensitivity workshops, the Code of Conduct aims to avoid cases of harassment against freelancers, particularly those that are sexual in nature.

#### 2. Freelancers' ID Card

Top among the freelancers' suggestions was to have an official, recognized Press ID card for members, especially for those who go on fieldwork. Having a recognized ID will help freelancers work with more ease. (It is a common experience for freelancers to be barred access to offices—particularly government—or certain information simply because they do not have proof that they work for a media organization.)

In that regard, it would also be beneficial to freelancers if the Guild can also lobby that media organizations should provide work IDs to their contributors.

#### 3. Harassment Desk

This is just an expansion of the Harassment Desk identified Category B, Gender: with the addition of other forms of abuse, not just gender-based, such as cyberbullying, death threats, and red-tagging.

#### 4. HEFAT (Hostile Environment and Emergency First Aid Training)

HEFAT should be provided to all members, not just those who report in hostile locations like warzones. The emergency first aid would be beneficial to anyone.

In connection to this, it would also be good to provide members with a First-Aid ID or certifications, to serve as proof that they are, indeed, capable of administering first aid.

#### 5. Legal assistance

Legal assistance would be applicable to the following: copyright/ intellectual property infringement, and how to seek remedies; review of contracts—prior to signing these; and legal aid and representation for cases such as cyber libel/ libel.

#### 6. Self-Defense Classes/ Training

Freelancers should also be provided with self-defense classes/ training, to complement the HEFAT.

## II. Guild Organizing

Organizing a new media organization will have its own set of hurdles. The team has provided several possible challenges that it may encounter during the organizing period for the establishment of the Freelancers' Guild.

### Resistance from Editors and Newsrooms

Primary among these challenges would be the expected resistance from editors and newsrooms. Organizing seems to be the natural enemy of upper management, this being no exception.

The team expects editors and newsrooms to question the Guild's proposals, such as setting a standard rate for freelancers' services, as well as acquisition of materials, and standardization of contracts for each assignment/ gig/ project that freelancers get.

However, too much heat may become counterproductive in the long run. Therefore, the team's hope is to seek the support of upper management, and for them to become eventual allies. This possibility would only give more protections to the freelancers the Guild hopes to recruit.

### Recruitment & Membership

With the existence of other media organizations (that also have freelancers as members), freelance journalists may find it unnecessary to seek additional membership from yet another media organization.

## Funding

Source of funds may also become an obstacle to the establishment of the Freelancers' Guild. Without sufficient resources, the Guild would have a hard time setting up the benefits that it wishes to provide to its would-be members, such as insurances and legal aid.

## Recognition and Other Forms of Support

Similar to funding, establishing the Guild's reputation and status can become a problem.

It would take years before the Guild would be as established as its umbrella organization NUJP, and before it can have the capacity to make or demand for actual, tangible changes to the existing norms within the industry.

# **PART 4: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## I. Conclusion

Conducting the two-step Freelancers Feasibility Study proved to be a success, since the research team was able to gather groundbreaking, firsthand information on the current experiences of Filipino freelance journalists, and in the process, gain a deeper understanding of what freelancing is and how it works.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that **freelance journalism in the Philippines is not conducive to freelancers.**

The problems that abound within it, such as the blatant disregard for freelancers' well-being, especially in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic; gender discrimination and misogyny; lack of institutional support and social protections; and the overall view that freelancers are simply expendable parts of a newsmaking machine, are systemic in nature.

The ultimate goal would be to break down these exploitative systems that have been in operation for so long.

But these take time.

**Thus, the research team sees it fit to push through with the establishment of a freelance journalists' guild in the Philippines,** to provide freelancers with a blanket of protection, while the industry adapts to fairer, newer concepts and practices

The demand is already there. And with the pandemic still going on in the Philippines, there seems to be no better time than now to pursue this endeavor.

With a functioning guild in place, freelancers will have more protection, and a recourse in times of distress and emergencies. And a thriving community of journalists could only mean an improvement to the state of Philippine journalism, which, in turn, helps improve the lives of the public it serves.

## II. Recommendations

The team has compiled the following suggestions below for future applications or continuation of this research, whether by NUJP, or by another team of journalists.

1. The team suggests that a separate study be done specifically for correspondents. Upon consultation with Atty. Neri, it has been made clear to the researchers that correspondents do not follow the same conditions that define freelance journalists. It only seems fair that a thorough assessment also be made on their situation.
2. The team also sees an opportunity to review the special circumstances of female freelancers. As proven by the research from this study, women in journalism are more likely to be exploited than the men.
3. The team suggests adding an extra filter in the survey: asking freelancers to identify if they are full-time freelancers, or part-time freelancers—freelance journalists who also have a more regular form of employment outside journalism. Doing so will help fine tune the results of the survey.

In addition, upon the suggestion of the statistician Mx. Mirabueno, it would also help provide a more definite look into the economic situation of freelancers if respondents can indicate in the survey their exact monthly income, instead of giving an income bracket from which they can choose.

4. The team suggests that future researchers look into “non-compete” clauses that are included in some contracts. The non-competition clause hinders freelancers’ freedom to seek more work opportunities. This should be properly looked into and assessed, preferably with legal counsel.
5. It is also imperative to future research that only freelancers—or a majority of freelancers—will conduct the study. This provides the future research team with a greater depth of understanding and perception into the state of freelancers in journalism.



# PART 5: ANNEX

## I. Survey Results

### Part 1: Freelancer Profile

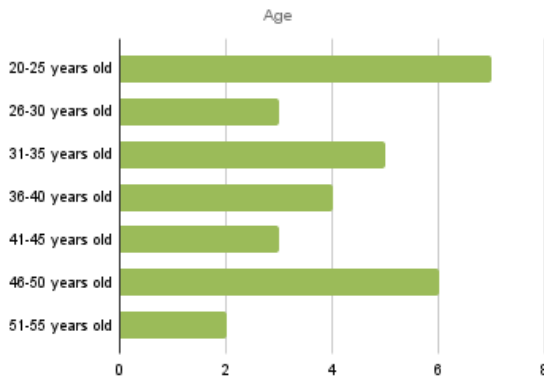


Fig. 1 - Age

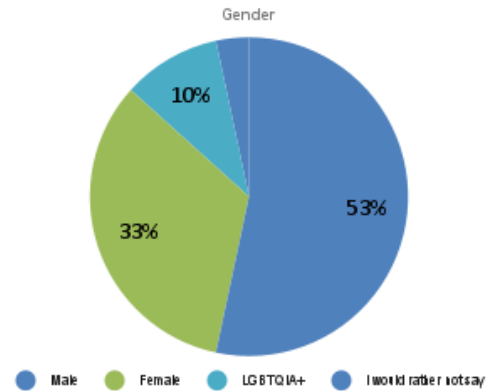


Fig. 2 - Gender

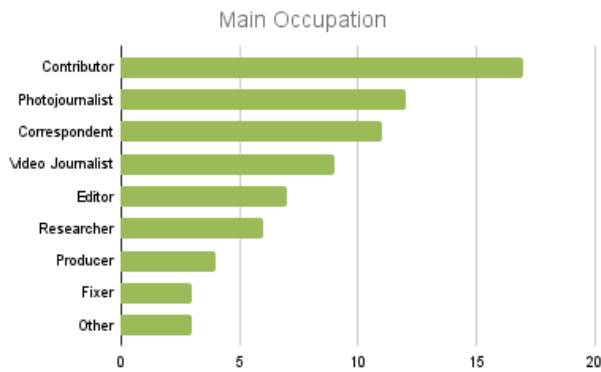


Fig. 3 - Main Occupation



Fig. 4 - Employer's Location

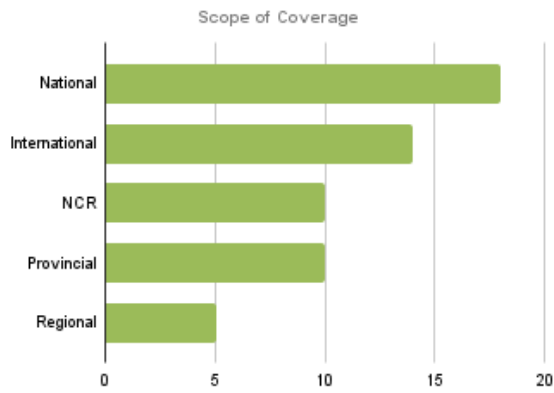


Fig. 5 - Employer's Location

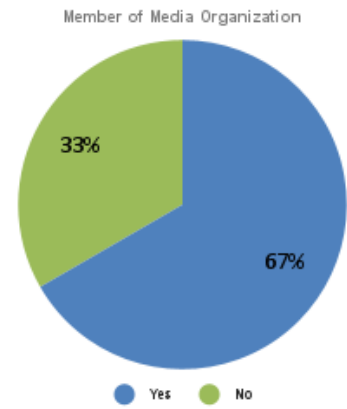


Fig. 6 - Member of Media Org

## Part 2: Economic and Working Conditions

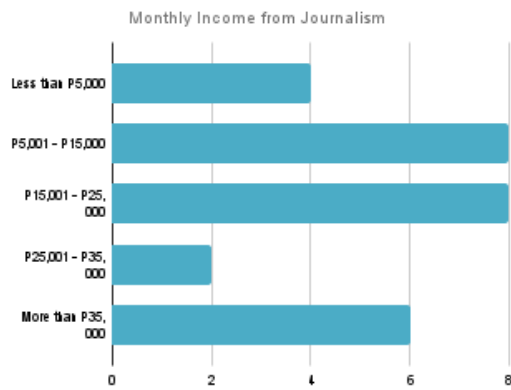


Fig. 7 - Monthly Income from Journalism

### Part 3: Health and Well-being

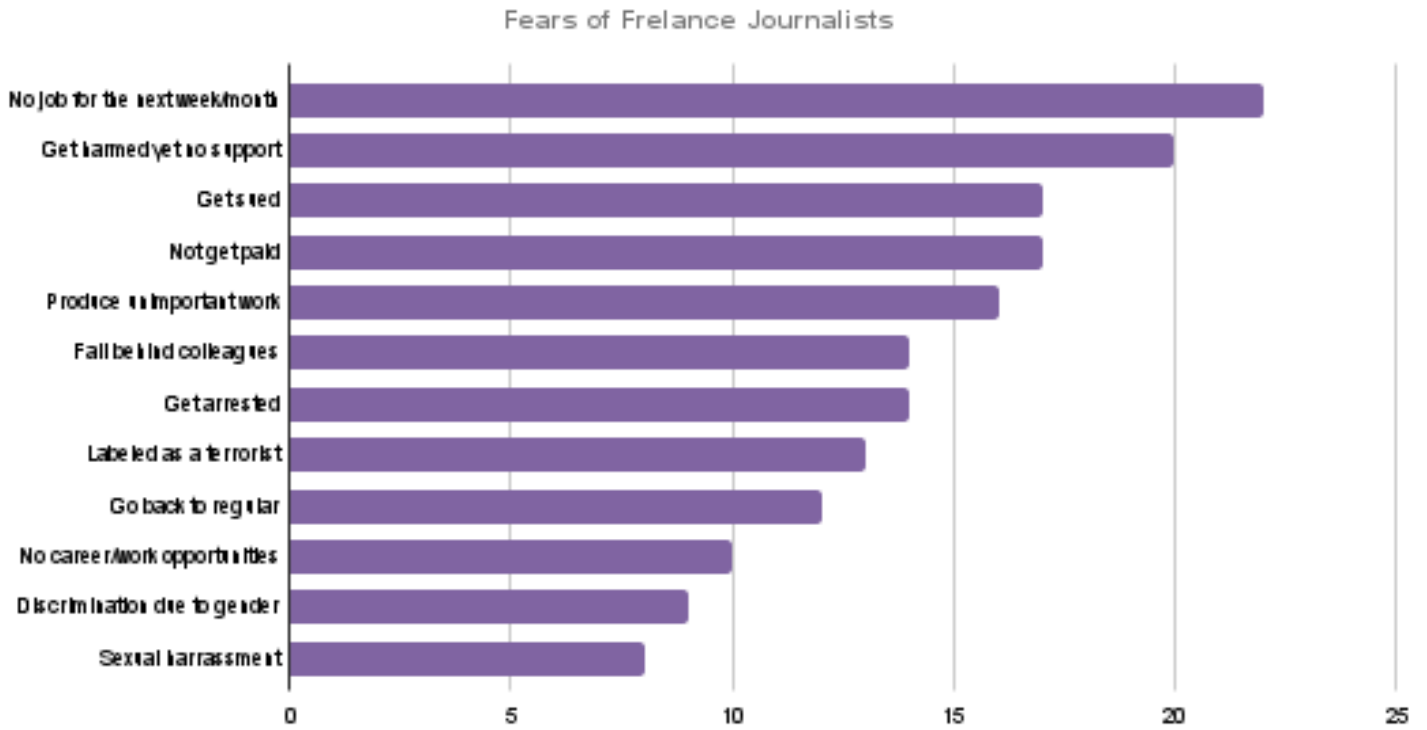


Fig. 8 - Fears of Freelance Journalists

### Part 4: Safety in Coverages and at Work

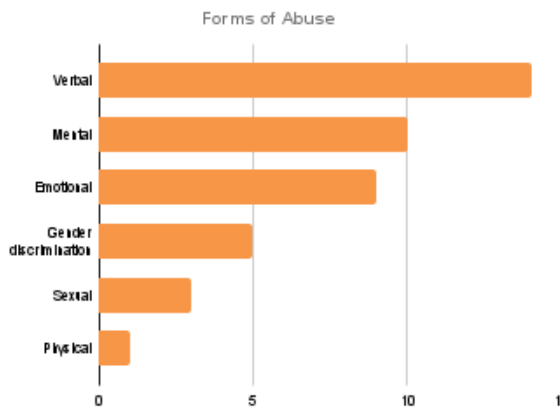


Fig. 9 - Forms of Abuse

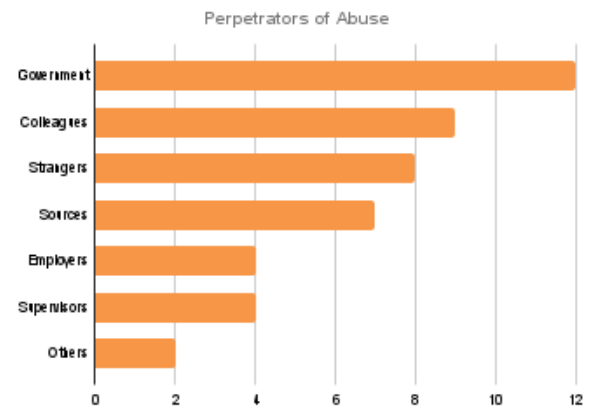


Fig. 10 - Perpetrators of Abuse