

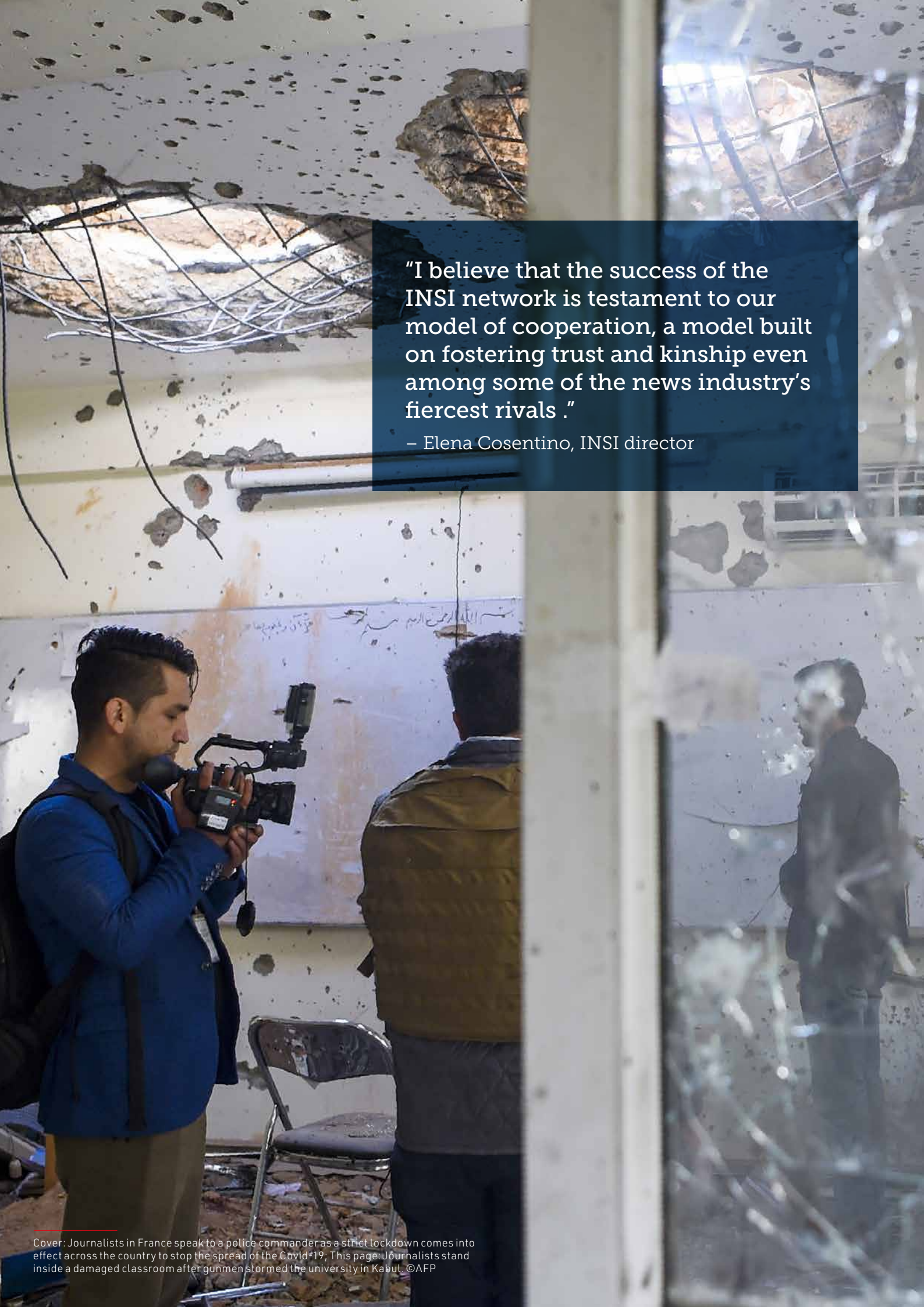


INSI

INTERNATIONAL NEWS SAFETY INSTITUTE

Annual Report 2020

JOURNALISM | SAFETY | RESPONSIBILITY | ACCOUNTABILITY



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– Elena Cosentino, INSI director

Introduction

If, while reflecting over the year gone and next year's challenges, you leaf through previous INSI annual reports as I just did, you won't find even one painting a rosy picture of the state of journalists' safety worldwide. Pessimism and grim predictions always abound and for good reason - there are always new wars breaking out and media crackdowns as well as major cultural, political or technological fault lines being weaponized against journalists.

The risks are always too many, and the protections never enough.

But the year 2020 surely has got to take top prize as an annus horribilis in its own right - sandwiched as it has been between a pandemic that has killed hundreds of journalists, stifled newsgathering and enabled media-crushing authoritarians and the most volatile US election season in living memory, turning the country into a place where journalists now wear war-zone PPE to cover a small town rally.

But this disastrous year has also yielded some very positive developments, at least within the INSI network and the wider media community. It has been a year when INSI members have risen to the challenge and given their best to each other, in terms of cooperation, assistance and mutual trust.

While video conferencing has no doubt facilitated logistics and attendance, it's our members' enthusiasm, initiative and commitment to the shared values of the network that has spurred and fed the huge increase in our activities this past year.

We trebled the number of live events we held over the course of 2020, as compared to 2019. Between January and November, we ran 35 meetings for members, including briefings and Q&As with experts. Many of these events were held in response to members' specific suggestions or requests.

Confidential information sharing groups, from the crisis in Belarus to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, have also been attended in large numbers, bringing together the best and most committed editorial and safety managers of the world's top news media outlets.

One could argue that this extraordinary rallying of purposes was, at least initially, borne out of self-interest. When the novel coronavirus first appeared and then exploded in early 2020 few had a real plan, prior

experience or established safety protocols to deal with a deadly pandemic. News organisations desperately needed to benchmark against one another, put their heads together and swap hypotheses and strategies. And they did, pretty fast, all the time and without hesitation.

But even once that emergency phase was over, the full-on engagement with INSI by our members didn't wane. They have continued sharing what they know and reaching out to their peers for, and with, advice and support on a regular basis.

I believe that the success of the INSI network is testament to our model of cooperation, a model built on fostering trust and kinship even among some of the news industry's fiercest rivals - over the common priority of keeping journalists and journalism - healthy, safe and alive and kicking.

This is exactly what we needed and will need even more going forward.

Even as good news reached us towards the end of the year, with the end of the pandemic finally in sight, no vaccine will ever be developed for 2020's infectious legacy of disinformation.

With the politicisation of science and the viral disappearance of facts having run amok throughout countries once seen as bastions of media freedom, brave and rigorous journalism everywhere, at every level, in every department, is now seen by increasingly large swathes of the population as anathema.

As we continue to work to prepare our journalists and protect them from the real-life consequences of such tectonic shifts in our democracies, we can rest assured that our INSI network will help keep the enemies of journalism at bay, as long as we stand united.

- Elena Cosentino, INSI director

Members activities

Online meetings/briefings

The Covid-19 pandemic completely changed how INSI interacted with our members in 2020. As the virus spread around the world, in person meetings, including the long-running News Safety Group, were cancelled from February onwards, to be replaced by video conference sessions. These online briefings proved extremely successful, drawing record numbers, and allowing us to hold many more meetings for a broader spectrum of our membership from all around the world, many of whom were 'meeting' for the first time, all in a cyber-safe and confidential environment.

The coronavirus crisis entirely dominated the first part of the year. From January 2020, INSI took a prompt and robust stance in investigating and preparing members for the potential threats posed by the virus. Particularly noteworthy were the timely, in-depth briefings and Q&As with medical specialists and health officials from

the UK and US. From PPE sourcing to Covid-safe filming protocols, from antibody testing and contact tracing to mental health, we held 13 well attended meetings between January and April alone. This meant members were able to brainstorm and benchmark against their peers in real time, as every news organisation in the world scrambled to come up with new safety protocols for an emergency without any precedent.

During the early days of the pandemic we also conducted several 'flash-surveys' of our members on critical, practical issues – like working from home, testing or the use of masks. This was in response to the urgent need of news organisations to see what colleagues were planning or doing.

Director Elena Cosentino also responded to dozens of individual requests from members for help on a wide range of issues including Covid. This quick and personal response to members' individual needs is one of the most tangible and appreciated features of INSI membership.



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe speaks during a press conference in Tokyo. ©AFP



AFP photojournalist Alberto Pizzoli and TV journalist Arman Soldin pose in the intensive care unit treating Covid-19 patients at the San Filippo Neri hospital in Rome. © AFP

By early summer journalists found themselves back in the field, reporting on the Black Lives Matter protests, police brutality and the prospect of the most dangerous US election in living memory. Coupled with the Covid-19 risk posed by anti-mask protesters, the unusually acrimonious race for the White House led one member to describe Donald Trump's America as a "hostile environment for the news media", a place where journalists need the PPE traditionally reserved for war zones.

Other notable meetings and expert briefings that brought over 40 members together at a time included a session on the impact of the new security law on journalists in Hong Kong, as well as the increasing repression against foreign correspondents in mainland China. In Europe, we focused on the uprising against the government in Belarus and took a practical look at the weaponry in play on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh and the implications for the deployment and safety logistics of news teams.

How we interact with members going forward is something INSI will closely consider in the months ahead, particularly the best ways of reaching the greatest number of members and the best way to share their experiences among the wider network.

Email groups

We continued to develop our confidential email groups that provide members with a real-time outlet for exchanging safety information about developing stories, drawing on the experience of staff and safety experts in the field. Topics for the email exchanges included Covid-19, the US Black Lives Matter protests which saw journalists targeted by police and protesters, the explosion in Beirut, the Belarus uprising that led to mass arrest of journalists and the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Tigray, Ethiopia.

Exclusive advisories and briefing reports

We produced numerous highly-detailed written advisories, many covering Covid-19-related safety issues: from clarification on the early science surrounding the disease in January, to working safely through the pandemic as the world locked down, and maintaining mental health as the crisis appeared to be without an end.

Most of our online meetings and briefings for members were also followed up with detailed briefing notes distributed to all members so that no detail or lesson learned got lost.



Covid-19 travel restrictions database

INSI commissioned researchers in the US and Europe to develop interactive databases to help members plan their travel during the pandemic. In the US, the database goes state by state, detailing travel restrictions around the country, essential as INSI members deployed staff to cover the elections. The European and Middle East database does the same but on a country level, from Austria to the United Arab Emirates. INSI will continue to update these databases which will be available in the members area of the new website.

Legal project

We have made great progress in our cooperation project with Trust Law of the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Encouraged and supported by the TRF's CEO and

INSI trustee Antonio Zappulla, we have mapped the available legal avenues for journalists at the receiving end of various forms of online abuse.

Legal experts from law firms across Europe, Australia, the US and Japan have drafted, pro-bono, a "Know Your Rights" guide for journalists in most of our membership countries: the US, UK, Germany, France, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden, Brazil, Australia, Ireland and Japan. The research, under the supervision of coordinating law firm Dechert in France, provides a comparative analysis of legal trends across the different jurisdictions and will be completed by the end of the year. We hope it will contribute to the global fight against online attacks against our colleagues.

Many thanks to Naseem Khan who is managing this exciting project for INSI.



Top left: AFP video journalist Sonia Logre puts on personal protective equipment to work inside the intensive care unit for patients infected by Covid-19 at the Policlinico di Tor Vergata hospital in Rome; Bottom right: Police push a group of journalists after dispersing a crowd gathered for a rally in Hong Kong. © AFP

New INSI website

As 2020 draws to a close we are putting the finishing touches on a new INSI website. Though it will have a newly designed public-facing area, the redeveloped members-only section is the most exciting and important change.

This new members area will house exclusive content such as our Covid-19 travel restrictions databases in a safe and easy to use format that will provide an important showcase for prospective INSI members and an invaluable resource for those who've already joined.

New members and board changes

INSI membership has continued to grow in 2020 despite the financial pressure placed on our industry by the pandemic which has caused widespread job losses and general belt tightening across the media landscape. Our members' continued support of INSI's mission despite these financial pressures is a testament to the value they place on what we do.

This year we were delighted to welcome new members National Public Radio and the Atlantic Monthly from the US. Our board was further strengthened by Liz Corbin, deputy media director and head of news at the European Broadcasting Union, Andrew Roy, the head of foreign news at the BBC and Tim Singleton, the head of international news at Sky News.

Journalists wait for the result of the US presidential elections on Black Lives Matter Plaza in front of the White House. © AFP





A medic assists a member of the media after police fired tear gas and rubber bullets during a demonstration calling for justice for George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. © AFP

Online harasssment project

Besides Covid, most of our efforts in 2020 were focused on delivering a groundbreaking project with Facebook and Google to mitigate the devastating impact of online harassment on our industry. Several years in the making, 2020 was the perfect time to launch, as the impending US elections caused a massive increase in online, and offline, aggression against journalists.

Throughout 2020 the more than 40 news organisations that make up INSI sat down with the technology companies for a series of meetings aimed at developing real world solutions to online problems. INSI opted for a practical approach to the project, mainly focusing on the difficulties members face when reporting online harassment to the technology companies and possible solutions. We also looked at ways our members could improve their own internal processes for reporting harassment.

We'd like to thank Facebook and Google for providing us with this open communications channel and their commitment to making improvements. We are also grateful to our project manager Rebekah Ingall for her invaluable support.

Though the project will end in December 2020 the connections made between members and the technology companies will continue, along with a concrete output in the form of best practice guidelines for newsrooms.

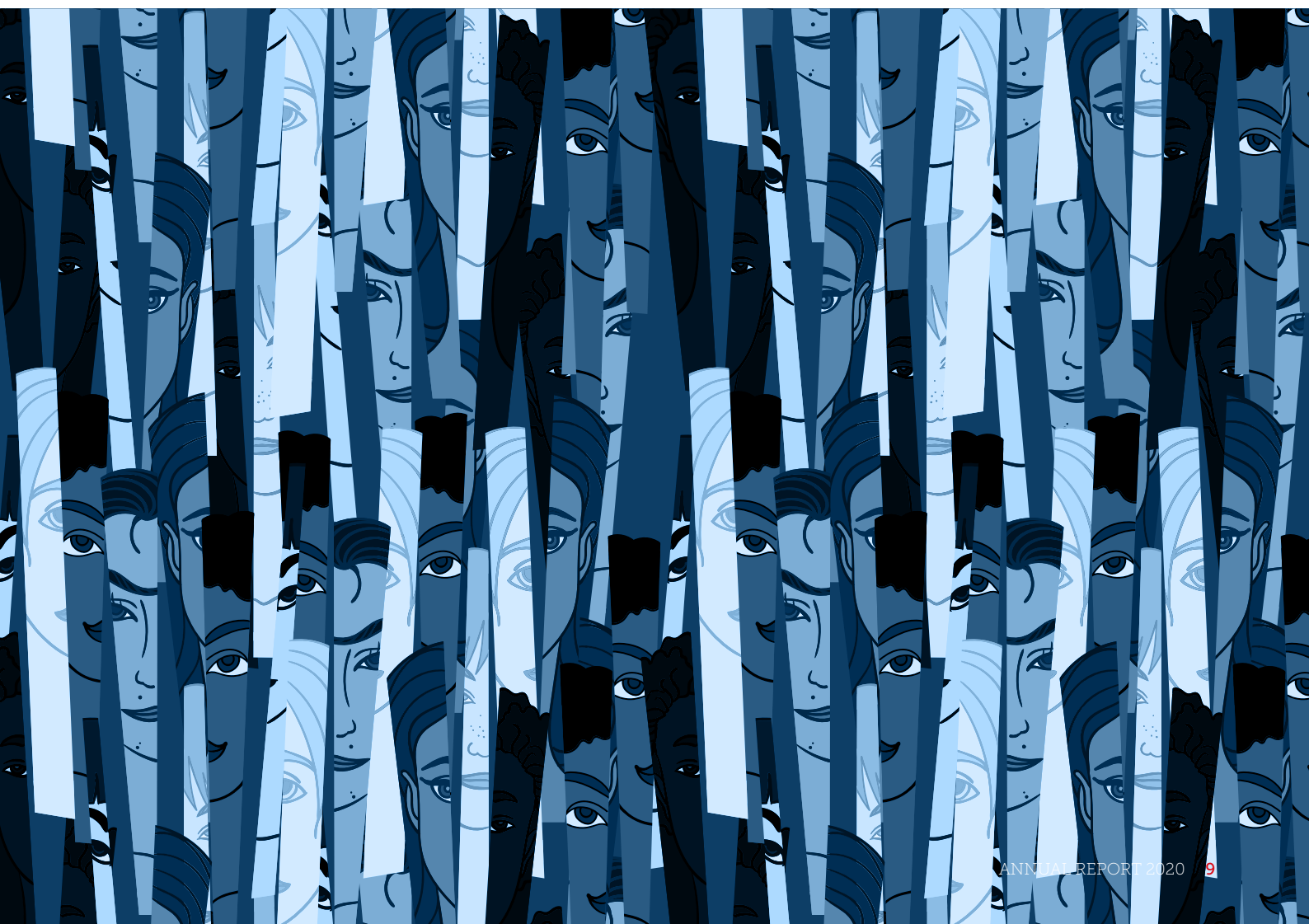
Black Lives Matter – racism in the newsroom

As part of INSI's commitment to protect journalists, including their mental health, our Naseem Khan spoke in confidence to black and ethnic minority journalists working in British newsrooms about the challenges they face covering racial injustice, while working in a media industry with an entrenched lack of diversity and representation at all levels.

Her report – “No they don’t get it.” Covering racial injustice – Dispatches from the newsroom – is a collection of powerful, sometimes shocking testimonies. The journalists describe feeling distressed, frustrated, misunderstood and under-

represented within their own newsroom, all while racial injustice was at the top of the news agenda in the weeks and months following George Floyd’s killing.

The report was eye opening for readers. One Twitter user said, “I think every journalist/editor should read this so they can hear/see the experiences of their colleagues” while another wrote, “I was going to pull a quote out of this for a tweet but it seemed too reductive – the whole PDF is essential reading. Particularly for anyone who’s ever been in a newsroom. Systemic racism is ongoing and real in journalism and it won’t change until people want it to change.”



The INSI logo consists of the letters "INSI" in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red square.

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