



U.S. AGENCY FOR
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U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOBAL MEDIA INITIATIVES: OUTREACH TO FOREIGN MUSLIM AUDIENCES

This section is provided by the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

Four of the five broadcast entities under the supervision of the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) provided programming for countries with large Muslim populations in 2019. The entities are Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), the Voice of America (VOA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. (MBN—Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa), and Radio Free Asia (RFA).

- RFE/RL produces content in 15 languages targeting markets with majority-Muslim populations, including the following: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It also creates content for, and disseminates content to, Muslim-majority regions in the Russian Federation, including Bashkortostan, the North Caucasus, and Tatarstan.
- MBN revamped Alhurra TV to create distinctive programming that offers an outlet for independent, reformist thinkers, as well as moderate voices, to audiences throughout North Africa and the Middle East on topics such as politics, religion, and culture.
- MBN continued its successful "Raise Your Voice" initiative across television, radio, and digital platforms, which encouraged Iraqis to speak out against terrorism and look for solutions to unite their country.
- VOA has been particularly successful in reaching non-Arabic-speaking Muslim audiences in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Balkans, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Tanzania, among other places. VOA saw significant audience growth in 2019, particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, among other countries.
- RFE/RL and VOA provided news and information to Afghanistan and the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region in Dari and Pashto. Together, these two entities reached 69 percent of Afghan adults each week.
- RFA broadcasts to the more than 16 million religious and ethnic minorities, including Uyghur Muslims, in and around the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of northwestern China.
- In partnership with RFA, the online news operation BenarNews reached predominantly Muslim audiences in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. BenarNews countered terrorist narratives by publishing credible domestic news, features, analysis, and commentary in text, video, and pictures in Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Bengali, English, and Thai.

- MBN's "Raise Your Voice" in Iraq and "Maghreb Voices" in North Africa, RFE/RL's "Not in My Name" in the Balkans, and VOA's documentaries and call-in programs in Nigeria gave audiences a platform to speak out against terrorism.

THE MIDDLE EAST

Arabic: The Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. (MBN) broadcast in Arabic to the Middle East and North Africa region, home to an estimated 317 million Muslims and 19.8 percent of the global Muslim population (according to Pew Research Center). MBN has seven bureaus/production centers in the region in addition to its main studios in Virginia and a network of regional correspondents. MBN used three platforms: television (Alhurra TV and Alhurra-Iraq TV), radio (Sawa Levant and Sawa Iraq), and digital (Alhurra.com, RadioSawa.com, Maghreb Voices, Irfa Saatak, El Saha, and various corresponding social media pages). Topics include freedom of speech, religion, and the role of women in society and politics.

MBN opens the door to moderate and independent voices discussing topics not covered in the mainstream press. For example, "Islam Hurr" is a weekly program that focuses on the interpretation of Islam and looking at the positives that can come from religion. Hosted by respected Islamic scholar Islam Bheiry, the program discusses modern misconceptions of Islam with well-known Islamic reformers and thinkers. "Word of Truth", hosted by Lebanese writer and activist Joumana Haddad, highlights controversial voices in the region that have been suppressed for delving into topics considered taboo, such as government corruption, political and social oppression, religion, and social issues.

In FY 2019, MBN began the largest transformation of Alhurra Television in its 14-year history, modernizing the look and feel of the entire network. The number of newscasts was doubled to 12 hours per day and a new line-up of fast-paced, thought-provoking programs was added to engage viewers, focusing on topics not found in other Arab media outlets. During that time, Alhurra also developed its first investigative reporting department and launched the weekly series "Alhurra Investigates", reporting on the political, religious, and financial conflicts of interest in the halls of power. This wide-angle lens approach to investigative journalism has uncovered stories that are considered too sensitive or taboo in the region.

Also in 2019, Radio Sawa re-launched its stream targeting the Eastern Mediterranean countries including Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and the Arabic-speaking population of Israel. Programs on the new stream include "Jawlat Assabah," a three-hour morning program; "Sawa Alhawa," a daily call-in show; "Boukra Afda," a daily program that targets the youth; and "Sawa Alleyla," a daily long-form program that interviews newsmakers and wraps up the news of the day.

MBN won the prestigious Webby Award for the mini-documentary “The Power of Forgiveness,” produced by its Egypt-centered digital platform El Saha. The documentary chronicles the story of a Muslim-American mother whose son was gunned down on the streets of Cincinnati. Her son, who served in the Navy, was killed and left on the streets so that the perpetrators could steal his \$40. She talks about the pain of losing her child and the strength her faith gave her to forgive the men who murdered her son.

Iraq: Every week, over half of Iraqi adults – some 17 million people – consumed USAGM content in Arabic or Kurdish. Nearly two thirds (63 percent) of Iraqis said they relied on Alhurra-Iraq TV, Radio Sawa Iraq, and MBN’s digital properties for news and information during the past week. VOA’s Kurdish Service reached 45 percent of Iraqis living in the Kurdish-speaking north weekly.

Alhurra-Iraq TV and Radio Sawa Iraq reported on citizens’ efforts to rebuild Iraq following the devastation caused by ISIS. The network also covered the protests throughout Iraq as citizens took to the streets to speak out against government corruption and unemployment. “Raise Your Voice,” a multi-platform campaign for Iraqi audiences across television, radio, and digital platforms, continued to provide an Arabic-language, non-sectarian platform for citizens to exchange ideas and speak out about the fight against terrorism. Citizens also discussed the effects of terrorism, extremism, and intolerance on Radio Sawa Iraq’s program “What’s Your Opinion?”

Kurdish Regions: The VOA Kurdish Service’s primary target audience is Iraqi Kurds, but it also produces special programming relevant to Kurdish-speaking populations in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Eurasia, as well as the approximately one million Kurds in Europe and North America. It is the only international broadcaster that speaks to the Kurds of the Middle East in their main dialects: Sorani and Kurmanji. The Kurdish service has expanded its staffing in Washington, D.C., and its stringer network in the region in order to focus on extremism, ISIS activities, and U.S. policies toward the region and ISIS. The Kurdish Service’s FM transmitters in Erbil, Sulaimania, Kirkuk, Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra broadcast VOA content, and its website streams video reports. The Service also produces TV programs for broadcast on NRT TV and on NRT’s website. VOA Kurdish offers regional and international news coverage, interviews with experts and newsmakers, stringer reports, panel discussions with Kurds in the greater Middle East and in the diaspora, and call-in shows that link listeners with guests who discuss topics of interest.

VOA Extremism Watch Desk: The Watch Desk generated hundreds of multimedia stories on terrorism and extremism. Publishing in 19 different languages, its stories were closely followed by more than one million users on Facebook. Content is translated into English and is shared with VOA’s language services, VOA Central News and USAGM colleagues at MBN, RFE/RL, and RFA. The Extremism Watch desk takes an in-depth look at the stories behind the headlines to give audiences what most Western media do not report. The VOA Extremism Watch Desk maintains a social media presence on Twitter

and YouTube and has established a blog on VOAnews.com. The Watch Desk has broken news on terrorism and produced special projects such as “Descent into Jihad,” which was translated into more than 20 languages.

Persian: To expand Farsi-language programming, in March 2019, USAGM launched VOA 365 as a 24/7 satellite television and digital network targeting audiences in Iran. VOA Persian leads the project, in cooperation with RFE/RL’s Radio Farda. VOA 365 was created to confront the disinformation efforts of the Iranian regime and enhance U.S. efforts to speak directly to the Iranian people during a pivotal time in U.S.-Iran relations. Under the network umbrella of VOA 365, VOA Persian added specialty web and TV programming focusing on the issues of corruption and inequality in the Iranian regime that sparked continuing widespread protests. VOA Persian provided uncensored information despite Iranian government efforts at censorship.

In 2019, VOA’s Persian Service provided global and regional news related to Iran and information about U.S. policy toward Iran and the region, including in-depth broadcast and digital coverage of the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Web traffic for VOA Persian surged just before the Iranian authorities slowed the Internet to a crawl/stop in mid-November 2019. Radio Farda, which is available on radio, online, and on the VOA 365 satellite channel, is a Persian-language alternative to government-controlled media in Iran. Radio Farda breaks through government censorship, providing accurate news and a platform for informed discussion and debate to audiences in Iran. Radio Farda excels at connecting with audiences in Iran and heavily uses citizen journalism submitted by Iranians. VOA and RFE/RL reach a combined audience of 23 percent of Iranians each week.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

South Asia: VOA and RFE/RL report on South Asia in Bangla, Dari, Pashto, Rohingya, and Urdu. During 2019, VOA provided news coverage of ISIS and other terrorist activities, as well as U.S. policies and activities to address the threat. Broadcasts spanned radio, television, online, and social media.

Afghanistan: VOA and RFE/RL together reach 69 percent of Afghan adults each week on radio, TV, and digital platforms through their Dari/Pashto services to the country, VOA’s Ashna and RFE/RL’s Azadi. In 2019, VOA Ashna, whose programs are aired on national broadcaster RTA based in Kabul, devoted a significant amount of coverage across all broadcast platforms to President Trump’s Strategy for Afghanistan and U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad’s efforts to revive the Afghan peace process. VOA interviewed key leaders including Afghanistan CEO Abdullah Abdullah, National Security Advisors Mohammad Hanif Atmar and Hamdullah Mohib, and former President Hamid Karzai. These interviews were complemented by comments and analysis from U.S. military and NATO leaders, among other experts. Despite tensions

over United States policies in the region, almost eight in ten (78.9%) weekly users of VOA Ashna content say they trust news from VOA, and more than eight in ten (83.5%) say that VOA has increased their understanding of current events.

As a surrogate national public broadcaster, RFE/RL's Afghan Service, Radio Azadi, provides in-depth coverage of local issues and events affecting the Afghan people's daily lives. In 2019, Radio Azadi continued its online project, "Who Was the Victim," to highlight the damage Afghan families suffered from violent extremism. Short video profiles posted to Radio Azadi's Pashto and Dari homepages and social media platforms showed terrorism's true impact on citizens.

Afghanistan/Pakistan Border Region: VOA Deewa Radio and RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal broadcast in the Pashto language to the millions of Pashtuns in the critical northwestern tribal and semi-tribal region of Pakistan, close to the Afghan border where militant and terrorist groups maintain a presence.

VOA Deewa's broadcasts focus on countering terrorist narratives and engaging leading influencers in the region, with particular outreach to women. The Service's digital operations challenged material produced by ISIS, ISIS-K, and other terrorist groups. VOA Deewa is credited regularly for mobilizing pro-democracy and anti-terrorist voices in the region. RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal also targets audiences in the border region. The Service regularly reports on topics that local domestic media will not cover out of fear of violent retribution. The Pakistani government shut down Radio Mashaal's offices in Islamabad in January 2018; however, RFE/RL continues to report to a large audience despite interference from both the Pakistani government and extremist militants. In 2019, Radio Mashaal broadcast a special radio project focusing on how extremists seek to impact and radicalize youth via social media.

Pakistan: VOA Urdu's coverage has concentrated on terrorism in Pakistan. VOA Urdu shed light on Pakistani electoral politics with original stories on abducted peace activists, violence targeting local candidates, and the influence of fake news. VOA Urdu's "View 360" program is broadcast on AAJ TV, and a 2019 survey found that USAGM reached an audience of 6.9 million adults in Pakistan each week.

Bangladesh: The VOA Bangla Service focused on the Rohingya refugee crisis and the threat of violent extremism and human trafficking inside the camps involving the Rohingya youth. In FY 2020, VOA will release a one-hour documentary, "A Day in the Life of a Refugee." The program chronicles a single day of refugee activities around the world. Shot by more than 100 journalists simultaneously, the program will be versioned into multiple languages and distributed globally on all VOA platforms.

In July 2019, VOA launched a five-day-a-week radio show in Rohingya, the language spoken by Muslim refugees that have fled Myanmar. Titled "Lifeline," the 30-minute radio show is available

through shortwave radio. The program focuses on the lives and needs of the refugees, providing them with valuable information on security, family reunification, food rations, available shelter, education and health including vaccinations and water purification. In addition, a daily segment of the program offers refugees the opportunity to share their stories, extend greetings to their families and learn about the hazards of joining extremist groups. Overarching objectives are to counter Muslim extremists' narratives and recruitment efforts in the camps and inform the Rohingya about the U.S. and the international community's involvement in the crisis.

Central Asia: RFE/RL and VOA delivered exclusive reports about events in the region. RFE/RL is the only Western media outlet in Central Asia that broadcasts in all the major languages (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Russian).

RFE/RL's Central Asia Newswire provides objective news to media outlets in a region ranked among the most restrictive media environments in the world. The Central Asia Newswire provided content in four local languages and Russian, free of charge, to interested media outlets in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The Newswire has more than 1,300 subscribers, and its content is regularly published by 270 media outlets. It averages 1,100 content citations weekly, and its stories are republished or re-posted on average more than 5,500 times each month, including by nationwide broadcasters with audiences in the millions.

Kazakhstan: RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, known locally as Radio Azattyq, reports on stories that would receive little or no coverage from local media, providing a platform for audiences in Kazakhstan to engage and share ideas. Azattyq delivers multimedia content via its Kazakh and Russian-language websites, YouTube channel, mobile platforms, and social media. Radio Azattyq aims to set the information agenda, offering objective news and perspectives in Kazakh and Russian, also emphasizing visual elements and audience interaction. The Service's weekday TV news program, "AzatNEWS," covers Kazakhstan and international stories that were suppressed, or did not receive widespread attention, such as ISIS recruitment and radicalization of Kazakh youth. In 2019, the Kazakh Service published a series of reports about what became of the families of jihadists who left Kazakhstan to fight in Syria.

Kyrgyzstan: RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service, Radio Azattyk, connects Kyrgyz society with informed reporting and debate on topics collectively neglected in Kyrgyzstan, such as interethnic tolerance, minority rights, abuse and torture within the justice system, Islamic radicalism, and corruption in the government. Azattyk has affiliate partnerships with the main state and private TV channels and radio stations, as well as partnerships with a dozen leading online media. RFE/RL reaches 44 percent of Kyrgyz adults weekly.

Tajikistan: RFE/RL's Tajik Service is the only Tajik-language media consistently challenging the state's tightly controlled press and propaganda. It does so with high-impact reporting on the most

popular digital platforms about local politics and economics, societal issues, and human rights. Radio Ozodi's local network inside the country affords it unique reporting opportunities, including exclusive coverage of a deadly November 2019 attack on a Tajik-Uzbek border outpost in rural western Tajikistan, claimed by the Islamic State. The Service's reporting was picked up by major news outlets including BBC, Newsru, RBC, Ekho Moskvyy, msn.com, timeskz.kz, RTVI, and dozens of other outlets.

Turkmenistan: RFE/RL's Turkmen Service, Radio Azatlyk, offers Turkmen-speaking audiences professional and locally-sourced information about current affairs within their society. The Service is the only international media broadcaster operating in Turkmenistan providing news from inside the country on human rights, civil society, freedom of the press, as well as the conditions of religious and ethnic minorities. RFE/RL has neither a bureau nor accredited journalists in Turkmenistan, yet through a local network, it provides authoritative reporting, original videos, and photojournalism from inside the country. Azatlyk's coverage of food shortages, wage arrears, forced labor, homelessness, housing conditions, and travel restrictions on Turkmen citizens has on several occasions prompted government action to improve facilities and social services. As Azatlyk's popularity has grown, authorities have intensified their pressure on the Service's local correspondents.

Uzbekistan: RFE/RL's Uzbek Service is one of the few sources of reliable news and information for people in Uzbekistan. The Service relies on a wide network of local sources to uncover news and engage audiences. Thousands of reliable contacts on Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, and IMO act as citizen journalists, sending news, photos, and videos from all corners of Uzbekistan. The contacts also help verify information, since the Service is prevented from having a local bureau. The Service frequently breaks important stories, including an October 2019 report on a secret executive order by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev calling for a nationwide crackdown on pro-Islamic sentiment, the banning of headscarves and beards, and putting the State Security Service in charge of supervising all religious affairs.

For the first time since the VOA Uzbek Service went on air in 1972, a VOA journalist received accreditation from the Republic of Uzbekistan to work as a foreign media correspondent inside that country in 2018. In 2019, USAGM sponsored its first ever journalism training in Uzbekistan. VOA and RFE/RL trainers gathered 30 Uzbek journalists, journalism educators, and other media professionals in Tashkent to learn about "Digital Storytelling and Social Media Engagement." VOA Uzbek successfully transitioned in 2019 from radio broadcasts on SW or MW to primarily digital and social media content.

EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

Burma/Myanmar: The RFA Burmese Service, after nearly a year off air because of a dispute with the government over use of the word “Rohingya,” returned to television in Myanmar on the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) network without compromising its editorial standards. Through local interviews and originated reports the Service covered ethnic cleansing in the Rakhine State, fighting between ethnic Rakhine insurgents, and civilian deaths at the hands of the military. RFA Burmese’s Facebook following increased sharply over the past two years to 4.8 million. RFA Burmese is continuing its radio broadcasts that are popular in rural areas and providing an array of content on social media platforms.

VOA Burmese broadcasts daily news to Myanmar covering the Rohingya refugees, regional ethnic conflicts, as well as U.S. politics, science, and technology. USAGM research conducted in 2018 shows that VOA Burmese broadcasts reached 10.8 percent of the total population. Socialbakers, a leading social media analytics firm, reported VOA Burmese’s Facebook page is the sixth most popular among media organizations in the country

China: The RFA Mandarin Service's digital media team produces high-quality web videos on topics such as China's facial recognition technology, as well as features on the difficulties that Uyghurs and other Muslims endure in the XUAR. The team’s “709” Crackdown video won a National Murrow Award in 2019.

The RFA Uyghur Service and several other services, including Mandarin and Cantonese, report on the situation in the XUAR to all their audiences in China, as well as audiences throughout the international community. The RFA Uyghur Service is the only broadcaster delivering uncensored news in the Uyghur language within the XUAR with breaking news on Uyghur dissent, crackdowns, detentions, and human rights abuses. The coverage includes Beijing’s ongoing “strike hard” anti-terror campaign which has left hundreds dead and an estimated one to three million others held as detainees in the XUAR internment camps, including family members of six RFA Uyghur Service reporters. The Uyghur Service recently added a new radio show, “Fresh Air,” and a new TV talk show, “The View,” to its successful programming lineup.

RFA Uyghur won a prestigious Min magazine award for Best Multimedia Feature for its investigative report on the Uyghur diaspora in Europe over the years. The Service's use of citizen journalism has proven invaluable in its reporting. A Uyghur woman living in the U.S. recognized her mother from a video taken by a tourist in Xinjiang and the Service’s on-the-ground networks helped to identify individuals missing in Xinjiang.

Indonesia: VOA Indonesian counters extremist narratives in the world’s largest Islamic democracy with balanced and objective reporting that complements local media. It provides global perspectives

and a deeper understanding of American policy, society, and values in a mature and competitive media market. "Muslims in America" and "Muslims Abroad" are just two of the Service's television programs, the latter airing on Indonesia's state TV, TVRI, as well as local stations during Ramadan. The Service also launched its first women's program, "SH+E Magazine" for MYTV, Indonesia's brand-new women's channel; its first YouTube series called "Amerikuy," which explains various facets of life in the U.S. through the lens of Indonesians and Indonesian-Americans; and its first podcast talk show "KUDOS," which showcases inspiring stories and individuals from the Indonesian diaspora in the U.S. More than one out of five Indonesians (39 million) tune in to VOA Indonesian. VOA's programs are carried by more than 400 radio stations, 40 national and local TV stations, and numerous digital affiliates, as well as on VOA's website and social media accounts. The Service generates nearly 250,000 weekly page views on its website, over 200,000 weekly engagement actions on social media, and hundreds of thousands of weekly video views on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

Thailand: The VOA Thai Service operates on an affiliate-based strategy, with programs on FM radio and TV affiliates in Thailand. VOA's Thai Service has 25 affiliate radio stations across Thailand, nine of which are in the predominantly Muslim south, where nearly 7,000 people have been killed since 2004 by separatists who want to establish an Islamic state. VOA Thai has launched collaboration with local educators in the south to hold an online classroom experience in which university students learn about American culture and values from VOA staffers. The Service also produces interfaith stories from interviews with religious leaders who traveled or lived in the U.S. The Service recently produced a weekly video report for placement with a 24-hour news channel and collaborated with several other local stations on special events.

East and Southeast Asia: VOA English to Asia broadcasts news and information to the English-speaking population in the East, Southeast, and South Asian regions, especially to university students. The Service produces a daily Asia news program for radio and multiple daily and weekly feature programs on everything from business, technology, health, sports and education. Many of these programs are aired by university radio stations in the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. The Service produces an English-language video series, also versioned into different languages, which is distributed through affiliates in Asia and social media platforms such as Facebook.

BenarNews is an RFA-affiliated news portal for Muslim populations in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, who are exposed to terrorist narratives. The news portal counters those narratives by publishing credible domestic news, features, analysis, and commentary in multiple formats and languages, including Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malaysia, Bengali, English, and Thai. BenarNews recently won a Gracie award and a New York Festivals Finalist award for its special project "The Rohingya: World's Least-Wanted People."

EUROPE AND EURASIA

In February 2017, USAGM launched the Current Time TV and digital network, providing Russian speakers globally with access to balanced, accurate, topical, and trustworthy information. Current Time TV is seen in 20 countries via 92 distributors (cable, digital streaming, or satellite companies which take the entire channel) and more than 51 affiliates (stations which carry one or more Current Time programs). Nine Current Time affiliates are within Russia itself. A nationally representative survey of Russia conducted by Gallup from April to June 2018, found that the Current Time weekly audience was measured at 4.1% of Russian adults aged 15 and older (4.2 million people).

The Russian Federation and Ukraine: VOA's Russian Service regularly addressed terrorism-related issues and threats in Europe, the United States, and other areas of interest to the target audience. Special emphasis was given to providing timely, accurate, and authoritative coverage of U.S. government reaction to a campaign of repression by the Russian-imposed authorities in Crimea, who are targeting members of the Muslim Crimean Tatar community and others who have spoken out against Moscow's annexation of the peninsula. VOA Russian also placed special emphasis in exposing what appears to be Moscow's killing of its enemies in the West in an effort to destabilize Europe. RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service reported that an elite Ukrainian police unit apprehended a suspected 30-year-old member of the Islamic State (IS) extremist group in the Zhytomyr region west of Kyiv. The Russian citizen, hiding in Ukraine, was detained based on a notice by Interpol.

Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and the North Caucasus: The Tatar and Bashkir communities are the two largest Muslim communities in Russia. RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service is the only major international media organization producing content in both languages. The Service regularly covers extremism-related issues, and on November 2019 reported on a Tatar Muslim man serving a prison term for being a member of an Islamic group banned in Russia. The man was on a hunger strike to protest prison conditions and what his mother called "pressure" imposed by the prison's administration.

RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service serves audiences in the North Caucasus region, including Chechnya, which are predominantly Muslim. The Service's reporting, in both Russian and Chechen, is focused on violent extremism, political and economic disenfranchisement, human rights violations, corruption, and police brutality—concerns that unite all of the region's ethnic groups.

Azerbaijan: VOA Azerbaijani continued its coverage of issues associated with religious radicalization to violence and efforts to counter terrorism by interviewing current and former officials, as well as political experts and civil society activists. RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service is widely cited for its reporting on issues including corruption tied to the ruling family, political prisoners, and electoral fraud.

The Balkans: RFE/RL's Balkan Service has more than 150 affiliates in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Kosovo. The Service boosted digital operations with a social media campaign called "Not in My Name" in Bosnian and Albanian, which aims to engage audiences in responsible dialogue about the risks of extremism. "Raise Your Voice" and the Facebook page "Not in My Name" help young audiences in Bosnia and Kosovo confront extremism and radicalization.

VOA's Balkan Services provided comprehensive and accurate coverage regarding U.S. and Defeat-ISIS Coalition operations. VOA's coverage is focused on terrorist recruitment of young Muslims; actions taken by local law enforcement against ISIS fighters who returned home; and weapons from the Balkans, which have made it into the hands of ISIS fighters and other terrorists in Europe. The VOA Albanian and Bosnian Services' coverage focused on the complex challenges presented by returning foreign fighters and their families and their reintegration into society. VOA Albanian aired a series of stories on family members of former fighters who have returned to Kosovo, exploring intervention programs and de-radicalization initiatives. VOA Albanian continued to inform in a region still vulnerable to internal and external destabilizing forces, including Russian influence and pervasive corruption. VOA's Bosnian Service devoted a considerable portion of its programs across platforms to issues of violent extremism and radicalization of vulnerable populations in the target area. The Service created a half-hour documentary on the radicalization of Bosnian Muslims, especially unemployed Bosnian Muslim youth, their support for ISIS, and how society and the state have fought it, generating close to 1.5 million views on Facebook and YouTube. VOA Bosnian continues to regularly report on the process of de-radicalization of those who returned to Bosnia after fighting as ISIS recruits. The Service also reported on eight Bosnian youth deported from Syria and charged with fighting alongside terrorist organizations in Syria. The Service also continues to communicate America's democratic experience and explain U.S. foreign policy interests, and strives to impact political discourse in an area that has been increasingly targeted by violent extremism and negative Russian influences.

VOA's Georgian Service was instrumental in providing value-added content on the radicalized population in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge region, including on Georgian insurgents who fought in Syria.

Turkey: In 2019, VOA Turkish partnered with public service broadcasters from France, Great Britain, and Germany to launch a Turkish language YouTube channel called +90 to challenge increased Turkish government censorship of over-the-air media, covering a range of issues, especially those affecting the nearly four million refugees in Turkey. The channel, available on YouTube, has attracted 150,500 subscribers and 13.6 million total video views since its April 2019 launch and is currently growing at the rate of 1,000 subscribers per day. VOA Turkish also has partnerships with leading Turkish TV stations, which carry its newscasts, special reports, and analytical programs.

AFRICA

Northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin: Targeting Nigeria, Niger, and Ghana—with smaller audiences in Chad, Cameroon, Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Benin—VOA Hausa's measured weekly reach is approximately 17 million people, with a focus on youth. Radio is the primary platform, with content delivered via shortwave, medium wave, and FM affiliate stations. VOA's Hausa Service challenged the terrorist ideology of Boko Haram across the Lake Chad Basin with daily multimedia news programming, interactive call-in shows, town hall meetings, and exclusive digital content. In 2020, the Hausa Service will begin several weekly radio features and expand its weekly television newscast to cover a broad range of security and extremism-related issues, including the latest in the U.S.-Iran standoff; the significance of Chad's withdrawal of its 1,200-strong force from Nigeria; Boko Haram, ISWAP and other militant groups and the impact on socioeconomic activities in their area of operations; and interviews with key government officials, military commanders, security agents, analysts, and civilian vigilante groups. VOA Hausa will also provide forums for public discourse through calls-in and roundtables at VOA's Abuja and Niamey bureaus. In 2019, VOA Hausa organized an interfaith town hall in Abuja about divisions between Shia and Sunni Nigerians. The panel included women leaders, Christian pastors and police representatives discussing restrictions on public gatherings and efforts to dispel religious misinformation.

West Africa and the Sahel: VOA's French to Africa Service broadcast to Muslim populations in Francophone Africa through television, radio, and digital media. The Service has FM programming on USAGM-owned transmitters in major cities across the region, including three in Mali and seven in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition to French-language content, the Service reached marginalized populations vulnerable to terrorist messaging with programming in Sango for the Central African Republic.

The situation in the Central African Republic has been marked by Russia's active involvement in providing arms, security advisors, and military trainers to President Faustin Archange Touadera's government, as well as displaying soft power through Radio Lengo Songo, a 24/7 FM station funded by a Russian mining company. VOA Sango programming works diligently to provide verified and balanced information to the people of the CAR, while encouraging a national dialogue aimed at bridging the religious divide between Muslims and Christians there.

VOA's Bambara Service to Mali is one of the main sources of independent news in the country, especially its northern parts, which are largely controlled by Tuareg separatists and Islamist groups. VOA now offers three programs in Bambara, which provide comprehensive news and information with an emphasis on "taboo" topics not reported in other media, as well as cultural programming, discussion, and audience interactivity.

East Africa: VOA's Swahili Service broadcasts to large Muslim populations in Kenya and Tanzania, and to smaller Muslim communities in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda on radio, on television, and online. In FY 2020, VOA will also launch FM radio stations to serve the two largest refugee camps in Kenya – Dadaab and Kakuma – where refugees have been held for more than 30 years. Programming will focus on news and information of interest to residents, including in-camp stringers providing “local news” coverage, regional issues, and United States viewpoints.

VOA Somali engaged local audiences with news, information, along with educational and cultural programming offering alternative views to terrorist narratives. Cultural, Islamic affairs and American affairs programs are among the most popular in the VOA Somali lineup. VOA Somali will also expand its weekly TV program, “Qubanaha,” to five days a week, in order to include roundtable discussions and stories focusing on ways to counter violent extremism. In 2019, the Service led coverage of a U.S. air strike that killed a senior Islamic State commander. Acting on a tip from a stringer in Puntland, a Somali Service reporter confirmed the death, quoting Puntland's Security Minister in a story for VOA's website.

“The gunman went and checked those who were breathing and started shooting at the people already on the ground. That's when I pretended to be dead, and I pulled the Quranic bookshelf on top of me to hide my head under the shelf,” Christchurch mosque massacre survivor AbdulKadir Ababora told VOA. VOA Africa Division coverage of the massacre included voices from Somali mourners in Australia, interfaith leaders in Niger preaching religious tolerance, analysis from a French counter-terrorism expert, live reporting from Christchurch, and world reaction from leaders in the United States, Germany, Turkey, and Bangladesh.

VOA's Horn of Africa Service established its first ever affiliate partner in Ethiopia, and will soon open a reporting center in Addis Ababa to take advantage of loosening restrictions on media. VOA Horn of Africa, which broadcasts in Amharic, Afan Oromo, and Tigrigna to Ethiopia and Eritrea, has extensively covered Ethiopia's democratic transition, as well as the ethnic tensions that have arisen within the country's diverse population. A 2018 USAGM survey found that VOA reached 12 percent of Ethiopian adults.

Sudan and Libya: In 2019, VOA launched daily programs on the USAGM FM radio station in Khartoum to provide facts to an anxious population, after a coup followed by continued instability within Sudan produced an information void in the country. VOA will be working in cooperation with MBN on a longer-term broadcasting arrangement for audiences in Sudan, in multiple languages.

VOA will also begin programming to refugee populations in Libya, where it will use USAGM FM stations in Tripoli, Benghazi, and Misrata to broadcast in the languages spoken by refugees. The stations will reach a sizeable population that is essentially stranded in Libya, waiting for a chance to travel into Europe across the Mediterranean. Programming will be both cautionary — the crossing is

dangerous and it is likely that, if they do land, they will be caught and sent back — and oriented to home — including audio messages from families left behind.

VOA NEWS CENTER COVERAGE

The VOA News Center supplemented its broad coverage of daily developments in the United States and around the world with several innovative multimedia projects that focused on the global effort to defeat ISIS and the aftermath of that struggle. These included a half-hour documentary on the efforts at reconciliation in an Iraqi town that had been occupied by Islamic State extremists, which involved four trips to the town over several months by Istanbul-based VOA reporter Heather Murdock. Heather was also perhaps the only Western reporter to remain in northern Syria to report on the flight of the Kurds ahead of a Turkish offensive in late October 2019. The weekly “Plugged-In” TV show – hosted by Greta Van Susteren – also focused on the reconciliation project and took its crew to Bangladesh to air an episode from a Rohingya refugee camp at Cox’s Bazar. The News Center, with enhanced collaboration from VOA’s language services, intensified its daily efforts to explain American policies, politics, and cultural practices to Muslim and other audiences around the world. This effort included the addition of new Washington beats and a regular menu of video and graphic explainers on topics ranging from the impeachment process to the Thanksgiving holiday.