MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM

MONITORING REPORT 2024

BY ECPMF - EFJ - IPI

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MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) tracks, monitors and reacts to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by an alliance led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19 Europe, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBC Transeuropa). The project commenced in 2020 and is funded by the European Commission. www.mfrr.eu

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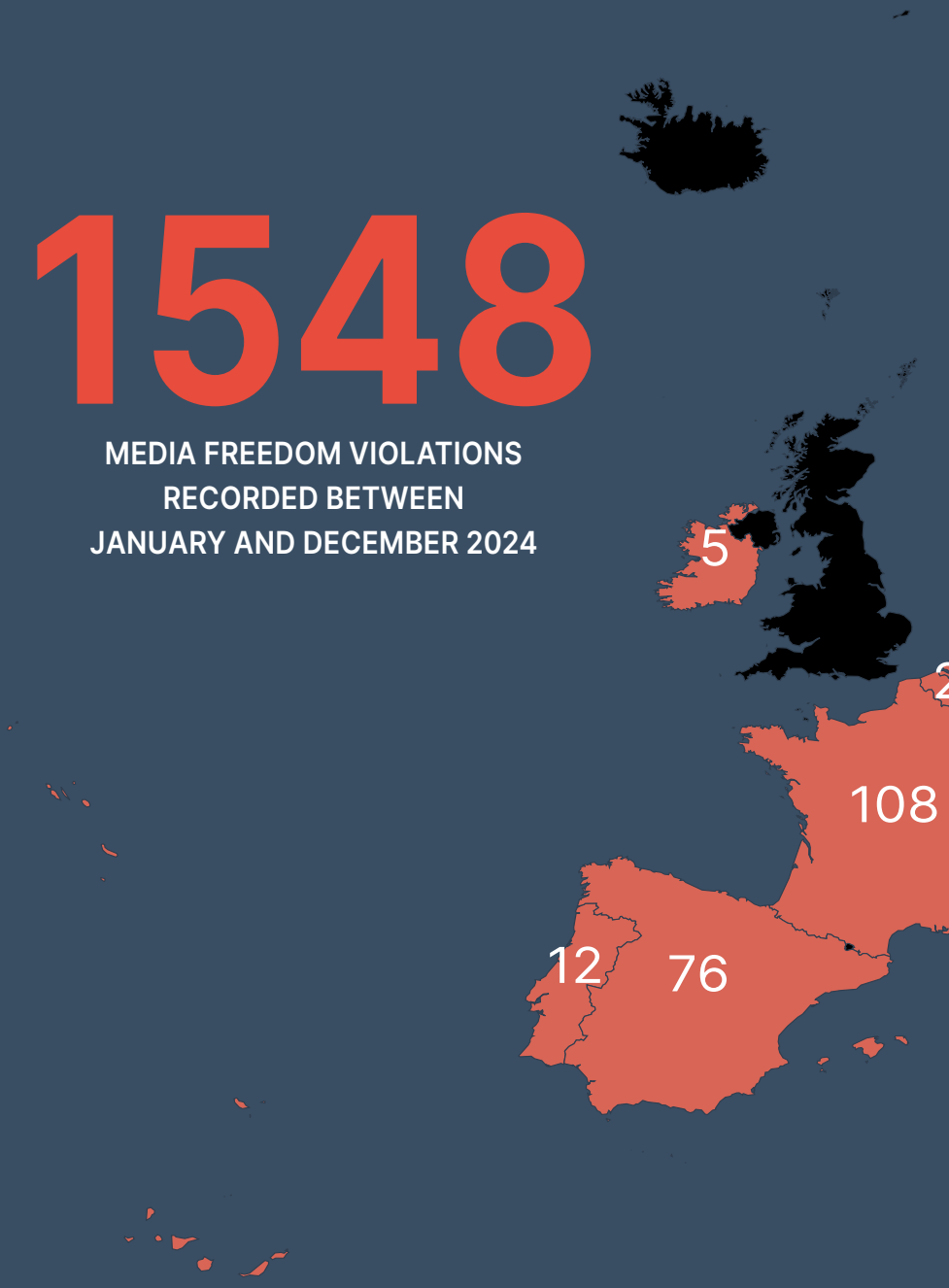
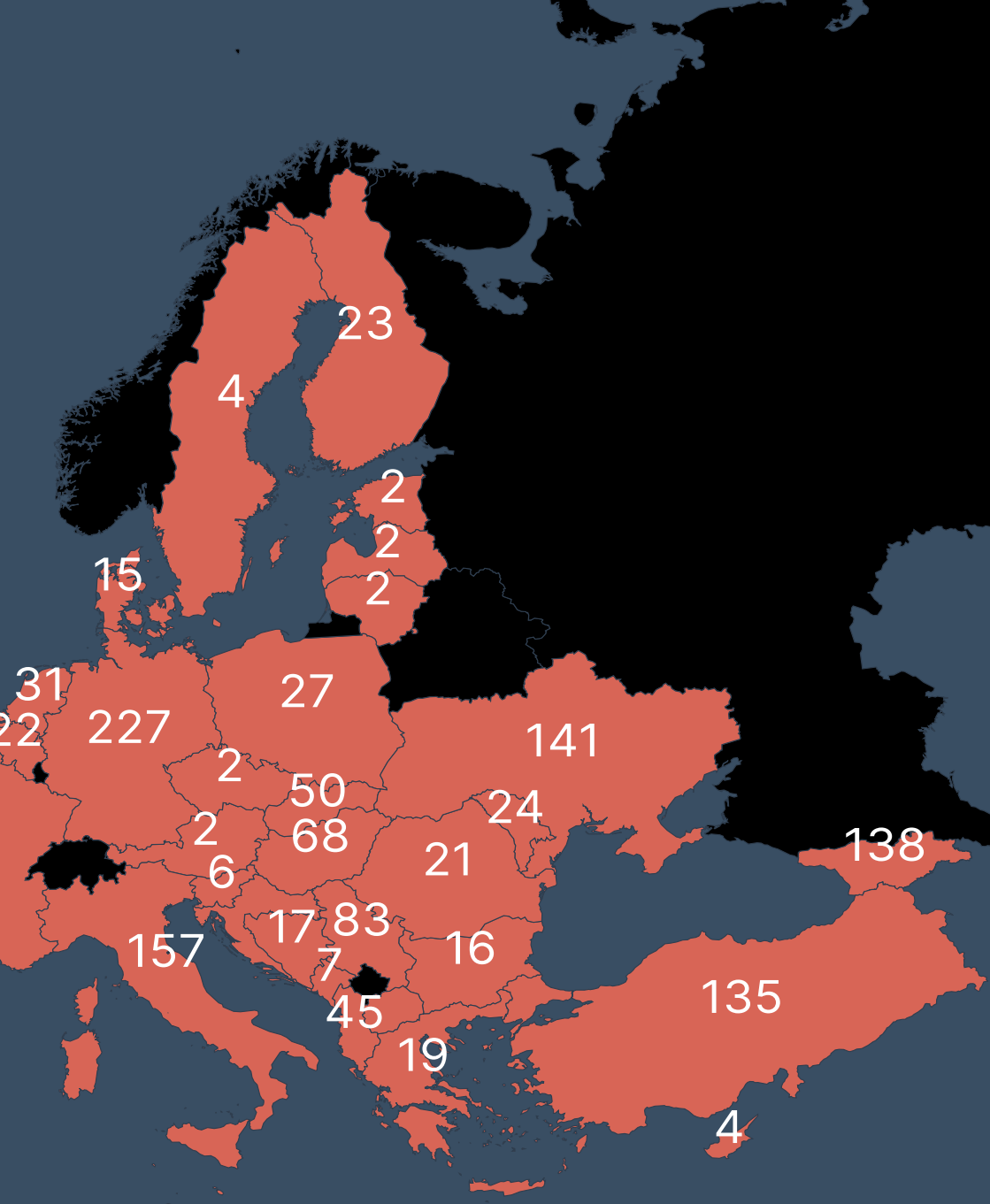
MEDIA FREEDOM VIOLATIONS
RECORDED BETWEEN
JANUARY AND DECEMBER 2024





Map with alerts in all countries (EU MS + CC including Ukraine and Moldova)

INTRODUCTION

The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) monitors press and media freedom violations in European Union (EU) Member States and candidate countries. This monitoring report covers the full year of 2024. On our monitoring database, Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF), 1,548 press freedom violations (alerts) have been documented for this period, impacting 2,567 media-related persons or entities located in 35 countries. Blocking of journalistic activity and intimidation and threatening of media workers were the most prominent types of violations during this period, followed by discrediting, harassment, insults, and bullying.

This report provides insights into the state of media freedom from different perspectives. The overall issues and trends of press freedom violations in EU Member States and candidate countries within the reporting period are outlined in the Overview chapter. It provides insights on types of press freedom violations recorded, the perpetrators (sources), as well as the type of places (situational context) where the incidents happened. Three thematic chapters are dedicated to the selected topics of spoofing attacks, media freedom violations related to elections, and environmental reporting.

Furthermore, twelve country reports present a summary of the state of media freedom and the most relevant threats in six selected EU Member States: Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and the Netherlands; as well as an in-depth analysis of the following six EU candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

In the 27 EU Member States, MapMF reported 942 alerts impacting 1,446 persons or entities related to media. Journalists and media workers were subjected to an increased number of threatening and intimidation, blocked journalistic activities, editorial interference, as well as spoofing, including deep fakes. Physical attacks, attacks to equipment and other property, hacking and DDoS attacks, and legal incidents also remain a concern. Private individuals remain the main perpetrators, with a worrying number of attacks performed by government and public officials. Online attacks, again, increased further to become the most common type of attacks, followed by those that took place during protests.

In the nine candidate countries, MapMF documented 606 alerts impacting 1,121 persons or entities related to media within the reporting period. Candidate countries face similar challenges in regard to press freedom as documented in EU Member States, albeit with differences in frequency and severity. Threatening and blocked journalistic activity are the two most frequent types of attacks in candidate countries. However, compared to EU Member States, candidate countries have an alarmingly high amount of arrest, detention and imprisonment cases ranking as the third most frequent type of attack, with most alerts recorded in Turkey and Georgia. Private individuals are the most frequent perpetrators followed by an alarming number of attacks perpetrated by police and state security, also with most cases recorded in Turkey and Georgia. The number of attacks perpetrated by the judiciary at court

are also outstanding, with most cases recorded in Turkey. Though there is a decrease of recorded online attacks in candidate countries, the number of targeted journalists or media companies within these attacks are higher compared to the previous year, mainly due to hacking and DDoS attacks often attacking multiple persons or organisations.

The three thematic chapters address pressing topics highlighted by MFRR. Spoofing attacks involving impersonation, identity disguise, or the falsification of data with the intent to deceive and manipulate have been a worrying threat to media freedom in 2024. Frequent recorded incidents of spoofing involved deep fakes posing as journalists and media workers, as well as fake websites imitating the design and structure of legitimate news portals to spread false information.

Elections have been a major topic for 2024. Over 50 national, local, and regional elections – including the European parliamentary elections on 9 June – have taken place throughout the year. Media freedom was targeted at various levels in relation to election reporting; including attempts at influencing media coverage through editorial pressure or financial means, or threats of legal action. On multiple occasions there was also an increased risk of physical and verbal attacks, specifically at demonstrations or polling stations.

Press freedom violations faced by journalists covering environment-related topics, like climate and environmental issues, is also addressed as a new theme in a dedicated thematic chapter. Examples included obstructive measures taken by private companies or state authorities to obscure news investigations into environmental developments or natural disasters. Journalists also faced increased risks of verbal and physical attacks at demonstrations related to the climate or environment.

This report has been compiled by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), and the International Press Institute (IPI), as part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) project which tracks, monitors, and supports journalists, media workers and outlets that have been targeted. The project is co-financed by the European Commission.

Past reports can be accessed on the MapMF website, and the alerts for this report can be accessed through the Alert Explorer here. The alert explorer is continuously updated and collects as well as visualises all alerts documented by the MFRR Monitoring Officers.

Ukrainian journalists stand before a demolished Lenin monument in Sudzha, Russia, amid Ukraine's incursion into the Kursk region
picture alliance / Sipa USA | SOPA Images

OVERVIEW ON GENERAL ISSUES AND TRENDS

Journalists, media workers and their families, as well as media outlets across Europe, have been subjected to various attacks and threats in 2024. In order to identify the main issues and trends, it is important to understand which types of attacks journalists and media workers have faced, who the perpetrators were, and in which contexts the incidents happened. This chapter provides quantitative insights on these questions, shining two separate spotlights on EU Member States and EU candidate countries. While EU Member States and candidate countries share certain media freedom issues, there are also differences between the two groups.

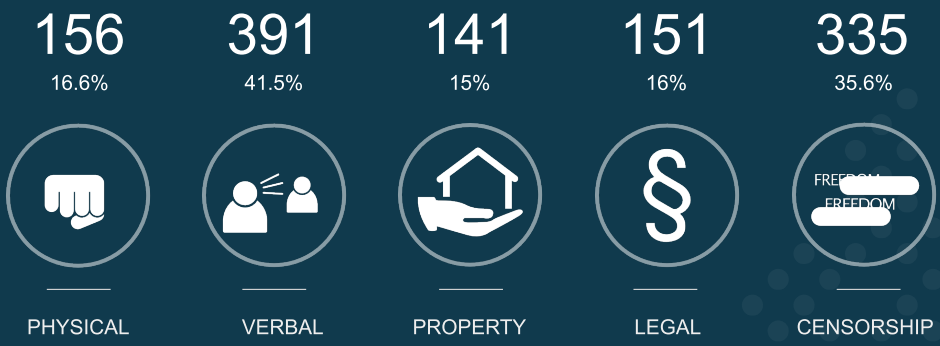
Overall, the number of attacks against media workers reflects an increasingly hostile environment for journalists and media companies. Media workers face verbal attacks, physical assaults, attacks against property, censorship and interference, as well as legal incidents. Private individuals are the main perpetrators, reflecting a growing public hostility to journalists from certain groups in society, often egged on by political extremists who like to portray independent media as enemies of the country. Legislation and public officials increasingly discredit journalists or block journalistic activity. Anti-media laws, including foreign-agent laws, further restrict media freedom. Journalists were also frequently blocked and attacked while reporting about elections or environmental topics. Additionally, media workers face an increasing amount of online attacks, including online harassment, death threats, hacking, DDoS attacks, and spoofing.

The grouped analysis of EU and candidate countries can shed light on existing and emerging issues, based on hundreds of documented cases. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the situation can vastly differ with some issues being more prevalent in certain countries than others and should be assessed on a case by case basis. The individual situation for some selected countries is additionally analysed in the country chapters below. Beyond this, statistics and further insights on overall issues or addressing single countries can be retrieved through the MapMF Alert Explorer by selecting flexible filters combined with the charts feature accessible at the top left of the explorer.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE EUROPEAN UNION

In the EU Member States, MapMF reported 942 press freedom violations involving 1,446 attacked media-related persons or entities. This is an increase of 48 % compared to 2023, where 635 press freedom violations have been recorded involving 927 attacked media-related persons or entities.

Main types of attacks in EU Member States



Blocked journalistic activity became the most frequent type of incident in EU Member States. In total, 207 alerts were documented, constituting every fourth incident (22.0%), and affecting 308 media related persons or entities. This is a tremendous increase compared to 76 alerts (12%) recorded for 2023.

Most prominently, blocked journalistic activity involved journalists being prevented from accessing reporting locations (140 alerts) including arbitrary denial of accreditation or general obstruction from reporting. Such cases mainly happened when journalists reported on protests, with private individuals and police being the main perpetrators, or during political events and press conferences with public officials and political parties frequently involved in the obstruction of press work.

Secondly, blocked journalistic activity also involved blocked access to information (42). In these cases, journalists received no answers to enquiries, were denied access to information or not provided with answers, primarily by government, public officials, and public authorities.

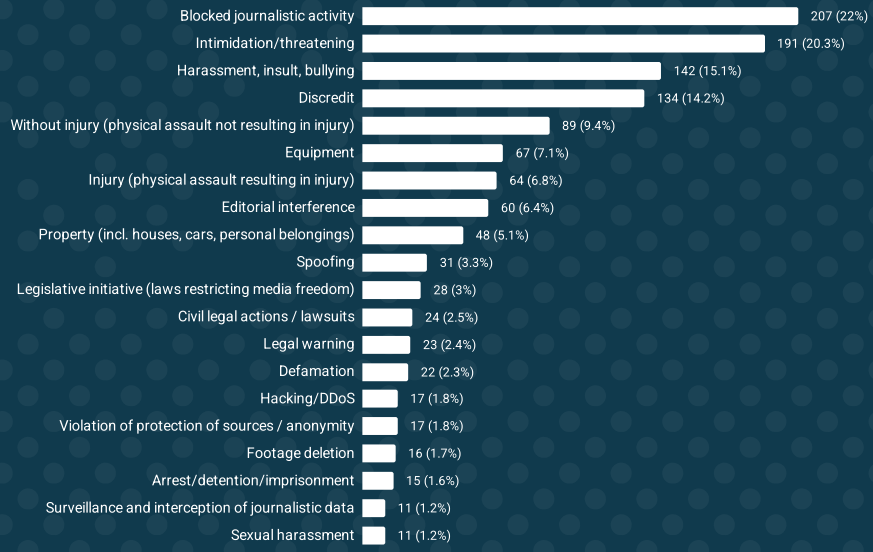
Thirdly, blocked distribution of journalistic content accounted for 27 alerts and ranged from blocked social media accounts to newspaper deliveries blocked by the farmer protests.

There has also been a significant increase of editorial interference with 60 incidents in 2024 compared to 19 in 2023. The rise of spoofing is a major issue with 31 cases recorded compared to 6 in the previous year.

As the second most common type of attack, journalists have been subjected to intimidation and threats, being involved in every fourth incident (20.3%). In 2024, MapMF recorded 191 incidents targeting 367

media-related persons or entities with threats and intimidation, compared to 110 incidents in 2023 and 158 targeted persons or entities. Especially worrying were the numerous death threats journalists received in 2024. Other verbal attacks also increased compared to the previous year, involving harassment, insults, and bullying (142 alerts), smear campaigns (134), and sexual harassment (11).

Top 20 detailed types of attacks in EU Member States



Physical assaults were involved in every sixth incident (16.6%) affecting 203 media workers, including 64 cases resulting in injuries, and three cases of sexual assault. Physical attacks were mainly perpetrated by private individuals (120 alerts). However, police violence remains a concerning issue with 22 cases recorded, 10 of which resulted in injuries. Most frequently, journalists have been physically attacked while reporting from protests, but also during political or sporting events.

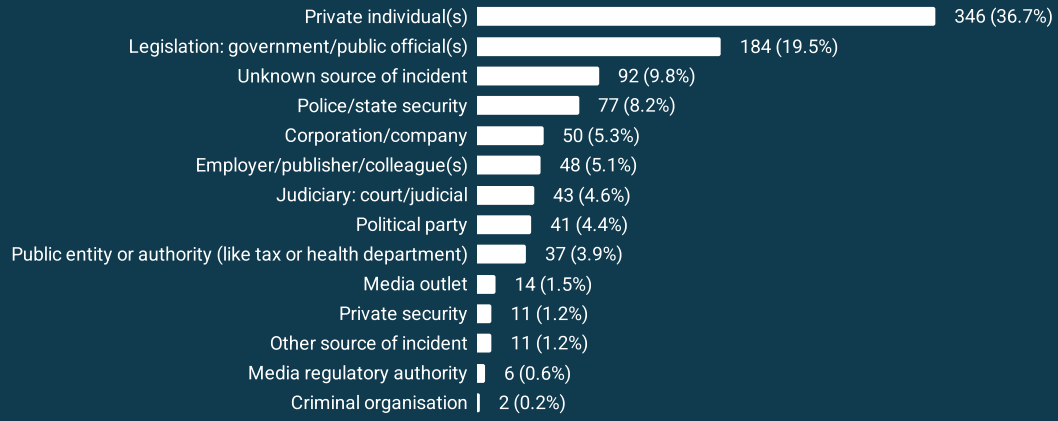
Journalists and media faced attacks to property in 141 cases (15%), involving mainly attacks against equipment (67 alerts), but also to general property like houses, cars or personal belongings (48 alerts). Instances involved, for example, numerous cases of vandalism on media houses and even private homes, up to an explosive thrown at a journalist's home. The perpetrators of such attacks mainly constituted private individuals or remained unidentified.

MapMF recorded 17 cases of hacking and DDoS attacks, including 14 directed at media companies, as well as three incidents targeting a journalists union and press organisation, including a DDoS attack against the website of MFRR's consortium partner International Press Institute (IPI). Furthermore, MapMF recorded 11 cases of surveillance and interception, and five cases of raids.

Legal incidents remain a worrying issue, with 151 documented alerts. In nearly every sixth incident (16.0%), journalists and media workers faced legal attacks which ranged from legal warnings and complaints, to lawsuits, convictions, as well as arrests and detentions. Especially worrying are legislative initiatives restricting press freedom through laws, with 28 incidents recorded in the European Union. This topic was discussed in more detail in MFRR's mid-term report in a thematic chapter on 'Anti-media laws' and is addressed in this report within the individual country chapters.

Considering the perpetrators, private individuals remain the most frequent source of press freedom violations with 346 incidents making them responsible for over one third of violations (36.7%). MapMF recorded a worrying number of attacks from legislation and public officials with 184 incidents (compared to 109 in 2023), which accounts for nearly every fifth incident (19.5%). The majority of such cases cover verbal attacks including discrediting and threatening, while blocked journalistic activity, editorial interference, or legal threats like warnings and lawsuits are frequently instrumentalised by authorities to curtail press freedom. Many perpetrators remain unknown (92), especially in relation to online attacks or vandalism. Furthermore, MapMF notes an increase of attacks perpetrated by employers, publishers, and colleagues (48 alerts), as well as political parties (41).

Sources of attacks in EU Member States



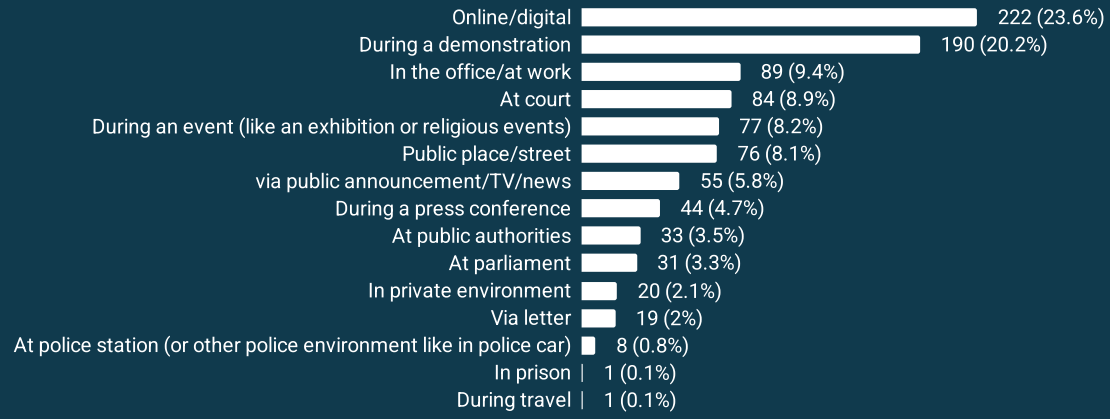
Considering the context of attacks, online attacks further increased, covering 222 incidents (23.6%) in EU Member States, and overtaking protests as the most frequent environment where media workers were attacked. Online attacks mainly involve verbal assaults including several death threats, but also hacking and DDoS attacks, surveillance, as well as blocked distribution of journalistic content. The majority of perpetrators of online attacks were either private individuals (29.3%) or could not be identified (26.1%). However, government and public officials (22.5%) as well as corporations and companies (11.7%) were responsible for a worrying proportion of online attacks.

Attacks during protests remain a worrying issue, with 190 incidents (20.2%) and affecting 269 media-related persons or entities. The most common perpetrators during protests remain private individuals

(76.8%), but police also take a worrying share of 19.5% with 37 documented incidents. Especially worrying is the high number of physical attacks journalists faced during protests, often accompanied by frequent obstruction of journalistic activity or verbal assaults.

MapMF also recorded an increase of incidents occurring in the context of journalists' offices, ranking now as the third most frequent environment with 9.4% (89 alerts compared to 33 alerts and rank six in 2023), involving mainly editorial interference and acts of vandalism. Further notable increases have been recorded in the context of press conferences, at parliament, and via public announcements, which were mainly perpetrated by government and public officials.

Contexts of attacks in EU Member States



Source: mappingmediafreedom.org
The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2024 and 31/12/2024 for European Union Member States, based on the documentation status of 30/01/2025. One incident, and thus alert, can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and being performed by more than one type of actor. Especially legal incidents, where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert.

SPOTLIGHT ON CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

In the nine monitored candidate countries, MapMF documented 606 alerts impacting 1,121 persons or entities related to media. Candidate countries face similar challenges in regard to press freedom as documented in EU Member States, albeit with differences in frequency and severity.

It should be noted that MFRR started monitoring Georgia in 2024. Due to the nation-wide protests and political unrest in the country since the start of the year, a great number of attacks have been recorded in Georgia during protests and related to the elections, including numerous physical attacks, blocked journalistic activity, and insults, affecting the overall data on candidate countries.

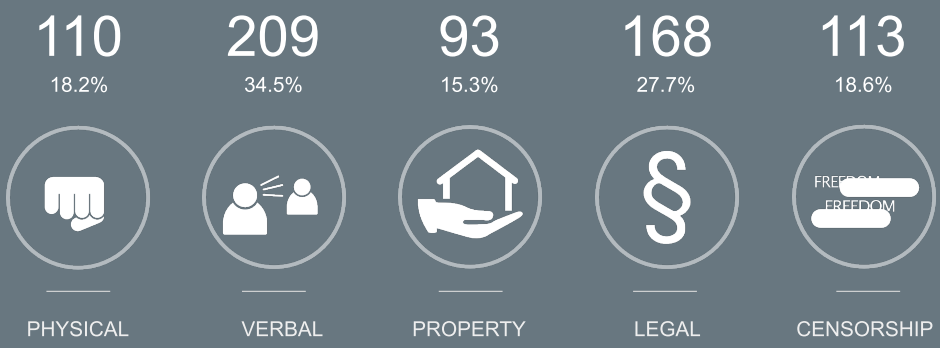
Intimidation and threatening is the most frequent type of attack (106 alerts, 17.5%) in candidate countries, closely followed by blocked journalistic activity (91 alerts, 15.0%). The third most frequent type of attack is arrest, detention and imprisonment with 83 incidents (13.7%), with most cases recorded in Turkey and Georgia. MapMF recorded 53 physical attacks resulting in injuries, with most cases documented in Georgia and Ukraine.

Private individuals are the main perpetrators of press freedom violations in candidate countries, accounting for every fifth incident (20.0%) with a total of 121 documented cases. However, the second most frequent perpetrators are police and security, being responsible for an alarming number of 106 incidents (17.5%), with most cases in Turkey and Georgia. Also the number of attacks faced by media workers perpetrated by the judiciary are outstanding with 82 documented alerts, with most cases occurring in Turkey.

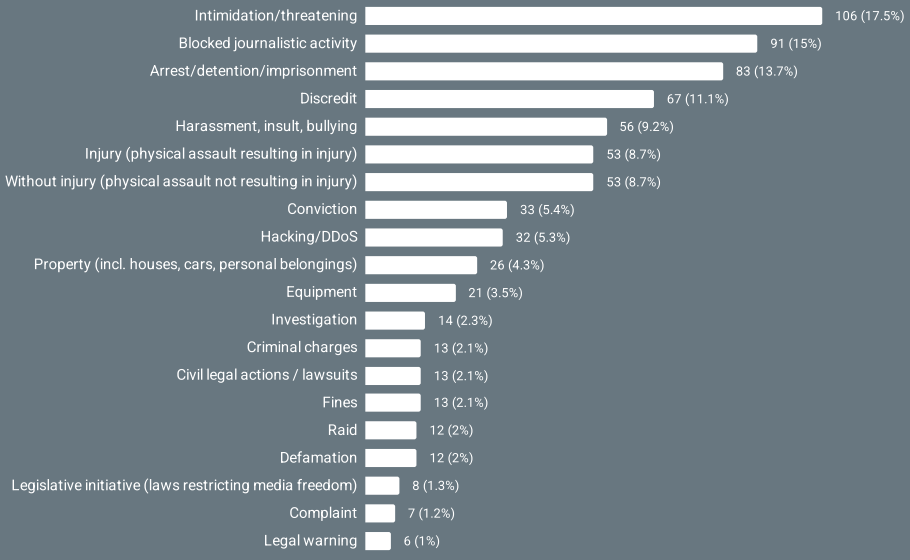
Considering context, online attacks represent the main environment where media workers are attacked, with 137 incidents (22.6%). Though the total number of recorded online attacks is lower than in the previous year (150), the number of targeted media-related persons and entities within these attacks increased (293) compared to the previous year (188). This is mainly due to cyber attacks like hacking or DDoS attacks targeting multiple media entities at once.

The following charts show more details on the number of alerts in candidate countries recorded for each category concerning types of attacks, sources, and contexts. Individual country issues are analysed in the country chapters or are retrievable through the Alert Explorer.

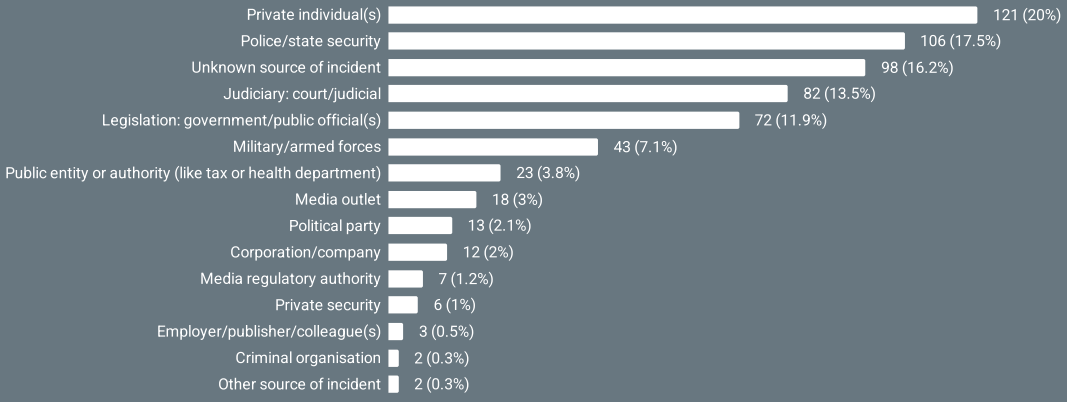
Main types of attacks in candidate countries



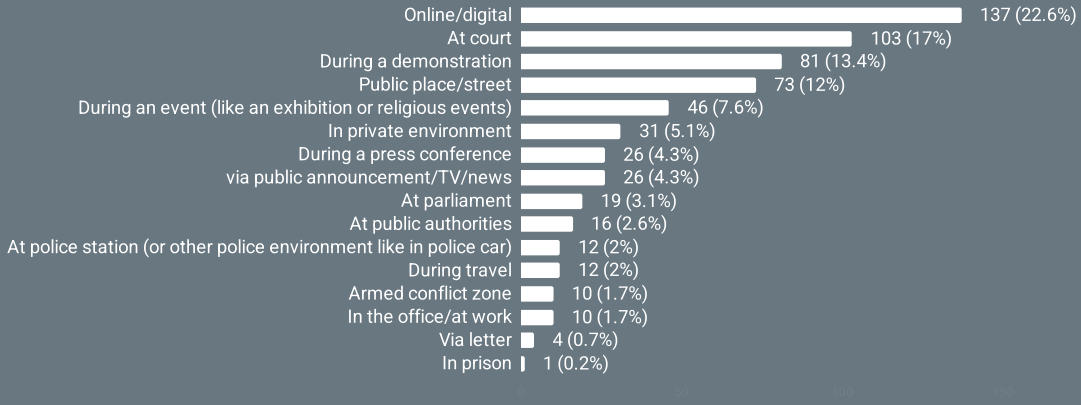
Top 20 detailed types of attacks in candidate countries



Sources of attacks in candidate countries



Contexts of attacks in candidate countries



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Empty chairs with names of missing and imprisoned journalists, writers, and activists are displayed in Kyiv on 15 November, 2024.
picture alliance / Anadolu | Danylo Antoniuk

Thematic Analysis

Focused programmer working on a code
Unsplash / Mikhail Fesenko

SPOOFING ATTACKS INCREASINGLY USED AS A SMEAR TOOL

In 2024, MapMF documented 37 spoofing cases, targeting 72 media professionals or media-related organisations, compared to eight incidents in 2023. MapMF considers spoofing to be any form of impersonation or identity disguise targeting a given media worker or media outlet by falsifying data with the intention or effect of deceiving or manipulating. These involve altered photo, voice, or video material including artificial intelligence (AI) generated deep fakes, as well as fake websites and articles that appear to be published by legitimate news outlets or media professionals. These attacks were mainly carried out for propaganda purposes, to damage reputation, as well as to promote commercial products with fraudulent advertising.

Journalists targeted in fraudulent advertisements

Fabricated stories and manipulated content, where media professionals deceptively promote advertising campaigns, undermine the credibility of the media and pose significant risks by luring individuals to fraudulent platforms.

In July, the Hungarian news portal 24.hu reported that it had been the target of numerous cloning websites that published articles using the names and images of its journalists to promote medicine and financial investments. In Denmark, journalists from DR, TV 2, and BT have been targeted with fabricated stories luring people to cryptocurrency platforms. One

notable example occurred in January 2024, when 501 fraudulent ads featuring the photo of DR radio presenter Anders Lund Madsen appeared on Facebook newsfeeds in just eight days. The rise of artificial intelligence also facilitates deep fakes. In the Netherlands, NOS journalists Malou Petter and Jeroen Tjepkema were targeted by deep fakes promoting illegal online casinos, as was Belgian news presenter Hanne Decoutere. In Germany, Deutsche Welle journalist Tina Gerhäusser even appeared in a video introducing a doctor on air to promote hypertension products.

Russian propaganda on the rise

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, European media in particular have also been increasingly affected by Kremlin propaganda, starting with Ukrainian media. As a notable example, in April, a fake video circulated on Telegram claiming Ukrainian TV channel 1+1 was using 1+1's branding to spread pro-Russian disinformation. In Germany, three AI-generated audio files were played during an anti-government protest, containing false apologies from the broadcaster Tagesschau for "deliberate manipulation" over its reporting, including on Ukraine.

In France, the international broadcaster France 24 was one of the most targeted outlets by Russian propaganda fabricated stories ahead of the International Olympic Games. Two fake France 24 videos were shared online and on Russian Telegram channels: an investigation on suspected water pollution in Paris and a false warning on terrorist attacks.

In September, the press freedom organisation Reporters Without Borders (RSF) discovered a video, falsely labeled as content from the BBC, with the logo of Britain's public broadcaster, claiming RSF authored a study on Nazi beliefs among members of the Ukrainian military. The video was officially taken up by Kremlin authorities, including by Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Cybersquatting of legitimate websites as part of the Doppelgänger disinformation campaign

Instances of cybersquatting of legitimate websites, purported to be created by legitimate news outlets or media professionals as part of Kremlin propaganda, became a worrying trend in 2024, with a further rise in the second half of the year.

In early September, the Counter Disinformation Network, a collective of journalists and researchers from across Europe, published a report detailing a mass spoofing campaign targeting European media, which, according to independent investigators, was orchestrated by Russia. Concretely, a Moscow-based company called the Social Design Agency (SDA) was accused of orchestrating the attacks in cooperation with unspecified Kremlin officials. Targeted media outlets included websites from Germany, France, Estonia, Italy, Ukraine and Poland.

The findings were earlier echoed in warnings issued by the European External Action Service's (EEAS) Stratcom service in June.

The fake websites created within the scope of this campaign were very similar to legitimate sources in appearance, with similar designs and names, but with one or a few different letters in the domain address. These domains were registered between January and May 2024, just months before the European parliamentary elections of June 2024. Most of the content was aimed at promoting Euroscepticism, undermining political institutions and policies, and influencing voters, especially in the context of the European elections.

According to U.S. government sources, this campaign against European media was part of a wider disinformation campaign called Doppelgänger, which has allegedly been taking place since at least 2022, in Europe, but also in the U.S. and across the Middle East. On 4 September 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that American authorities had identified 32 fake websites with domain names similar to those of existing media companies based in the U.S. and Europe, including at least 14 European media outlets, mainly in Germany, France, Estonia, Italy, Ukraine, and Poland.

While many other media outlets were likely impacted, Doppelgänger exposed the large-scale nature of the phenomenon.

Cybersquatting as an element of smear campaigns

In France, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) discovered in July that an active fake RSF website and four other passive internet domains had been created to disseminate content denigrating RSF while promoting channels owned by the Vivendi group, including CNEWS, which is controlled by media tycoon Vincent Bolloré. Characteristics of the original site were cloned, as well as images and logos that made the fake site appear trustworthy. RSF found that the Paris-based agency Progressive Media, acting on behalf of Vivendi, was behind the disinformation and smear campaign, leading to numerous threats against RSF.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a cloned website imitating the "Coalition for Free and Fair Elections" accused a local broadcaster, Radio Čapljina, of being financed and influenced by the husband of a Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ) candidate for mayor of Čapljina. The article, published in the run-up to the 2024 local elections, showed how fake websites can be used to spread disinformation in support of political agendas.

Manipulative content used by politicians

MapMF also recorded several cases of manipulative content used by politicians to discredit critical reporting and serve their agenda. Incidents included the use in public debates of a manipulative video portraying Serbian journalist Dinko Gruhonjić as a political opponent, leading to numerous death threats. In Poland, an environmental report of Kanal Zero journalist

Maria Stepan was taken out of context by the right-wing opposition party Law and Justice (PiS) and used in an anti-government video presented at a congress and political council of the party in Przysucha. In Spain, Alvise Pérez, a member of the European Parliament, published online manipulated screenshots of messages alleging that Canal Red journalist Raúl Solís had made sexual advances towards a minor. Pérez deleted the posts, but the montage led to a smear campaign against Solís, including homophobic insults.

The growing proliferation of spoofing cases shows the vulnerability of European media outlets and journalists, which often lack resources to combat this phenomenon, and are not always even aware of the existence of fakes imitating them. Tech platforms also lack instruments to prevent such disinformation campaigns, which get as much visibility, if not more, than trustworthy content.

A voter signs the register after casting their ballot at a polling station in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 26 October, 2024
picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com | Maria Giulia

PRESS FREEDOM AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS DURING SUPER ELECTION YEAR

During the so-called 2024 super election year, 25 EU Member States and candidate countries held local, regional, parliamentary, or presidential elections. In addition, the European Parliament election was held on 9 June.

Independent journalism is vital for democracy, ensuring citizens can make informed choices about their representatives. Press freedom, journalist safety, editorial independence, and fair rules on political spending and communication are essential for free and fair elections.

During elections, journalists and media face heightened threats as political campaigns intensify. These include attempts to influence coverage through financial or editorial pressure, silencing criticism via legal threats, discrediting, or harassment, and increased risks of physical and verbal abuse, particularly during demonstrations or at polling stations.

Regarding elections, a total of 209 alerts involving 417 media-related persons or entities were recorded on MapMF during the monitoring period. Verbal attacks (40.2%) and censorship (30.6%) were the most common types of violations.

Physical safety of journalists covering elections

Journalists covering elections were subjected to physical violence on several occasions. In more than half (59.1%) of the recorded cases, the perpetrators were police or state security officers.

The situation was especially alarming in Georgia, where at least 75 journalists were physically attacked within 29 incidents, mostly by the police, while covering the parliamentary elections and the ensuing demonstrations. On 26 October, the ruling party Georgian Dream, which has been accused of pro-Russian foreign policy, vote-bribing, democratic backsliding and authoritarianism, won the majority of seats in parliament. This sparked large-scale demonstrations against the results, as protesters claimed that the elections were fraudulent, and demanded a recount and a new election. The second wave of demonstrations started on 28 November, when the ruling party announced it would suspend Georgia's EU accession process until 2028. Police and ruling party-affiliated violent groups engaged in widespread violence and torture against protesters and journalists.

Most of the recorded physical attacks related to elections in Georgia occurred during demonstrations, but some of them took place at polling stations. MapMF recorded 21 cases in which journalists suffered injuries, some of them serious. Several journalists were also detained or arrested while covering the demonstrations, and three journalists attempting to cover the elections were banned from entering the country.

After local elections, journalists in eastern Turkey faced physical attacks and obstruction by police while covering public protests against a decision by electoral authorities to block the newly elected mayor of Van, Abdullah Zeydan, from taking office. Several journalists covering the protests were also detained. During another incident, journalists from Anadolu Agency, Demirören News Agency, and İhlas News Agency were shot at by unknown perpetrators as they were covering a dispute at the local ballot box in the Sur district of Diyarbakır. There were no reported injuries as the journalists rapidly vacated the scene.

Welt TV reporter Steffen Schwarzkopf was physically assaulted and injured by a man in Erfurt during a live broadcast outside the Thuringian parliament in Germany. In Serbia, Marko Miletić, editor-in-chief of the Mašina news portal, was physically assaulted by activists of the Serbian Progressive Party at a polling station in Belgrade while investigating alleged electoral fraud. In Bulgaria, bTV camera operator Petar Kartulev was physically attacked while covering a polling station during parliamentary elections.

In France, MapMF recorded four xenophobic attacks related to the European and French legislative elections, marked by the rise of far-right parties. The hostility escalated when two women journalists were physically assaulted and sexually harassed by far-right party Rassemblement National supporters at a campaign meeting held by Jordan Bardella. Free-

lance photojournalist Axel Gras was physically attacked and injured by police while covering a demonstration, which was organised in Paris to protest the election results.

Death threats and smear campaigns to deter critical reporting

Journalists and news outlets covering elections were often discredited and harassed, usually by public officials and authorities, political parties, or private individuals, and also faced many serious cases of threats and intimidation. The verbal attacks occurred mostly at polling stations and other election events (32.1%), but also online (27.4%). On several occasions, journalists and news outlets were targeted with large scale smear campaigns online.

MapMF recorded eight cases of death threats against journalists reporting on elections. The situation was especially alarming in France, where far-right supporters sent death threats to three journalists. Journalists covering the aftermath of the local elections in Turkey also received death threats. In Bulgaria, journalists investigating alleged voter fraud at polling stations were repeatedly threatened.

Supporters of Romanian far-right presidential candidate Călin Georgescu threatened journalists, and even the family of reporter Dragoș Pătraru. The wife of journalist Mihai Gâdea was also targeted by a social media influencer who had promoted the far-right candidate. Pro-Russian politician Georgescu won the first election round on 24 November, but his campaign allegedly used over one million euros in undeclared funds, and cyberattacks on election infrastructure were linked to a "state actor." On 6 December, Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the results.

Interference and obstruction used as a tool to control elections coverage

MapMF recorded 15 cases of editorial interference related to elections. In Hungary, news outlets belonging to the pro-government publishing house Mediaworks circumvented election rules to promote ruling Fidesz party candidates ahead of the local and EP elections. The Romanian government and National Broadcasting Council were criticised for enabling broadcasting of electoral materials as editorial content.

An alarming example of editorial interference was revealed when in February the Romanian management of a group of local newspapers and news outlets, owned by the Hungarian Mediaworks publishing house, informed the editors-in-chief and marketing managers of the outlets that arrangements would be made with Romanian political parties to publish unmarked campaign articles. Additionally, the interim director of the National Library of Romania targeted investigative journalist Emilia Șercan on social media and exposed that she had been researching the doctoral thesis of politician Mircea Geoană, who was running as a presidential candidate.

In Italy and Spain, journalists denounced management pressures related to election reporting. Legislative developments in Italy regarding the regulation of media coverage during the upcoming European elections raised significant concerns about media freedom and the impartiality of public broadcasting.

Journalists covering elections were repeatedly obstructed or blocked from accessing polling stations and election related events. The situation was especially alarming in Georgia, where the work of journalists covering the 26 October parliamentary elections, and ensuing demonstrations, was severely hindered by authorities and private individuals.

Other forms of censorship and interference in different EU Member States and candidate countries included access blockings of social media accounts and online news articles, as well as spoofing. Additionally, websites of news outlets were targeted with Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks, either in suspected retaliation to their reporting, or severely hindering their work during elections.

Legal threats against journalists and media outlets reporting on elections

In addition to arrests and detentions, journalists and news outlets faced a variety of other legal threats due to their election coverage. Turkish journalists Altan Sancar and Ömer Akın were under investigation by authorities due to their reporting on alleged election irregularities and voter fraud during local elections.

Similarly, in Hungary, the Józsefváros Municipality of Budapest filed a lawsuit against news outlet Index due to an article about election abuses and vote-buying related to local elections. Additionally, the Fidesz-KDNP candidate for mayor of Miskolc tried to prevent the publication of an interview he had given to news outlet Borsod24, threatening legal action and HUF 2 million (€5,118) in damages.

A media regulatory body in Georgia issued fines against government-critical Formula TV and TV Pirveli, as well as Mtavari Arkhi Channel, for refusing to broadcast ruling party Georgian Dream's political campaign ads. The country's Personal Data Protection Service requested access to data obtained by Gazeti Batumelebi from a confidential source, after the independent media outlet revealed evidence suggesting that the Georgian Dream had undertaken unprecedented efforts to collect, categorise, and use voters personal data. In Malta, the media regulator fined radio station RTK103 for failing to provide air time to candidates of far-right party Imperium Europa during the European Election campaign.

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Protesters confront police in Valencia, Spain, on 9 November, 2024, over the handling of storm Dana flooding
picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com | Elena Fernandez

THREATS FACED BY JOURNALISTS COVERING ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE ISSUES IN EUROPE

As natural disasters, extreme weather and other impacts of climate change cause major harm and concern across Europe, journalists reporting on environmental and climate issues are facing a variety of threats and obstruction due to their work. Critical, investigative journalism on environmental issues is a crucial tool to protect the environment and address the climate crisis. Raising public awareness and interest in environmental and climate issues is a key to managing the ongoing crisis and to protecting nature and its inhabitants.

Journalists who cover these issues are targeted by politicians, companies and business owners, who do not want the media to shed light on environmentally harmful activities. Climate related issues and natural disasters cause civil unrest and spark protests, and journalists covering these events often face physical and verbal attacks.

In 2024, a total of 69 press freedom violations related to environmental reporting were documented on MapMF across EU Member States and candidate countries. Nearly half (42.0%) of the alerts were related to censorship, including violations such as obstruction, blocked access to information, footage deletion or blocked distribution of journalistic content.

Journalists obstructed and attacked during protests

Many activist groups organise protests demanding state action. Journalists who cover these demonstrations are often targeted alongside protesters. Demonstrations were the most common (44.9%) context of recorded violations.

Especially alarming was that over half (51.6%) of the violations related to demonstrations were perpetrated by police. Público journalist Fermín Grodira was injured by police officers while covering a demonstration against the Valencian government's actions during the DANA storm, which claimed the lives of over 200 people in October 2024. In Greece, journalist Giorgos Androutsos was injured and arrested by police while covering a demonstration organised by seasonal firefighters whose short-term contracts expired at the end of the severe forest fire season.

Police arbitrarily detained journalists who were covering climate demonstrations in Italy and Germany, a protest against an energy company in Belgium, and a protest against the environmental impact of the Olympic Games in France. Additionally, police obstructed the work of journalists or denied their access to environmental protests.

In Ireland, an editorial photo agency was forced by the police to hand over images taken while covering water pollution protests in Dublin, in which guards and protesters clashed violently. As a local journalist union stated, this move was extremely dangerous to photojournalists, who regularly face verbal and physical abuse while on assignment. If they are perceived to be taking images for the police, they might be at even greater risk of being targeted.

Private individuals were the perpetrators of nearly half (48.4%) of the violations related to demonstrations. Telecinco reporter Adam Salvia was injured by protesters while covering the royal visit to Paiporta, Valencia, in the aftermath of the DANA storm. In Germany, a journalist filming a hunger strike camp organised by climate activists near the Chancellor's office in central Berlin was physically assaulted by a drunken passer-by. Journalists were also physically attacked, verbally harassed, obstructed and their equipment was damaged by demonstrators while covering farmers' protests in Spain, Germany and Albania.

Dangers of covering natural disasters and heated issues such as mining and waste management

Natural disasters such as forest fires, landslides, floods, earthquakes and storms are a major issue for many European countries. Accurate and timely information before, during and after such catastrophic events is crucial, and journalists and media have an important role in keeping the public informed and safe. However, journalists covering natural disasters face a multitude of threats and obstruction.

In Madeira, Portugal, journalists covering forest fires were repeatedly obstructed by authorities, and CMTV journalist Beatriz Henriques Ferreira and photojournalist João Beirão were physically attacked by the president of the Barroca Parish Council. Journalists covering the aftermath of the DANA storm and related protests in Spain were physically attacked and obstructed both by police and private individuals. In Greece, Alpha TV journalist Rena Kouvelioti was seriously injured by an operator while reporting on oxygen welding at a construction site. Kouvelioti went to the scene where a company was welding next to dry grass in a public area, posing a serious risk of a wildfire.

Mining as well as waste management, trafficking and burning are highly debated issues across Europe, and journalists covering these issues are often targeted by companies and authorities, but also by public figures and private individuals. In Albania, Syri TV journalist Freard Rista was physically assaulted by a business owner while investigating alleged illegal waste dumping. Similarly, in Croatia, Faktograf.hr journalist Melita Vrsaljko and her camera operator were physically attacked by the owner of the property while documenting an emerging illegal landfill. Vrsaljko was later harassed and physically attacked by the landowner's relative in an attempt to get her to delete footage of what had happened the previous day.

In January 2024, news outlet N1 was accused of "misinformation and unsubstantiated claims" by global mining group Rio Tinto, after publishing a critical article on the opening of a lithium mine in the Jadar Valley. In recent years, Rio Tinto has explored the Jadar region for lithium, but plans to open a mine were halted by the Serbian government after weeks of massive protests. However, the government approved the mining of lithium in August 2024, and President Aleksandar Vučić publicly discredited media which had critically reported on the mining operation and had covered the massive protests against it.

Legal threats as a tool to silence environmental and climate reporting

Journalists and media outlets reporting on environmental and climate issues repeatedly faced legal threats due to their work during the monitoring period. In Turkey, journalists were investigated by police due to their reporting on environmental issues.

Post- and pre-publication legal warnings were sent to journalists and media outlets to prevent them from reporting on environmental and climate issues. Italian oil company Eni threatened Rai program 'Petrolio' with legal action prior to the broadcast of an episode which revealed how the oil industry has orchestrated a systematic disinformation campaign for decades to cast doubt on the relationship between fossil fuels and climate warming. Similarly, a waste incinerator company in Spain threatened the producers and authors of a documentary with legal action. The film was an investigative documentary into illegal waste trafficking between EU countries.

In November 2024, Italian oil company Eni filed a criminal defamation lawsuit against civil society organisation ReCommon's Program Director Antonio Tricarico, due to an interview

given to public broadcaster Rai's leading investigative show 'Report'. In the interview, Tricarico highlighted the overlapping timing of Eni being awarded the mining licence of the giant gas field of Zohr, off the Egyptian coast, and the tragic kidnapping and murder of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni. In recent years, ENI has filed lawsuits or threatened legal action against several journalists, activists, whistleblowers, and court witnesses who have criticised its activities.

How politicians verbally attack journalists who ask critical questions

Verbal attacks were the second most common type of violation related to environmental and climate reporting. Especially alarming was that over a third (35.0%) of these violations were perpetrated by politicians. The speaker of the Georgian parliament publicly discredited journalist Gela Mtivlishvili due to an investigation she had published about a natural disaster which occurred in the mountain locality of Shovi in August 2023, in which 33 people were killed. The politician claimed that the article was "full of lies" and part of a "disinformation campaign".

Minister of Environment of the Slovak Republic Tomáš Taraba verbally attacked TV Markíza reporter Martina Töröková after the journalist asked him about issues with the permission to shoot bears in Slovakia. Similarly, Minister of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania, Belinda Balluku, publicly discredited Syri TV reporter Ermal Rizaj after the journalist asked her about the safety of the port of Durrës. In August 2024, a major incident occurred in the port, involving the illegal shipment of hazardous waste from Albania to Thailand.

COUNTRY REPORTS

This chapter provides insights into the state of media freedom in six selected EU Member States and six candidate countries, sorted alphabetically. These countries were selected based on recent, worrying developments which are not necessarily reflected in the number of alerts recorded.

It is important to highlight that the alert numbers alone cannot be interpreted as equating the severity of press freedom in any given country. This is mainly due to different population sizes and the varied nature of violations. The different reporting situation can also influence the number of recorded alerts, and some attacks might not be reported because of fear of retaliation or due to different conceptions of what constitutes a media freedom violation. Furthermore, not all systemic and structural issues can be measured by MapMF. Even if fewer alerts were recorded in comparison to the previous year in a given country, systemic issues may still persist.

As a result, the state of media freedom in various countries cannot be compared based on the number of alerts recorded alone, and alert numbers should not be interpreted as a ranking of countries. Furthermore, countries which are not analysed in this report do not necessarily perform better compared to analysed countries or compared to their performance in previous years.

Nevertheless, the recorded violations do provide insights into the state of media freedom in individual countries. To interpret the situation, the following country chapters provide quantitative and qualitative analysis considering the types of attacks, the actors involved in these, and the contexts in which they were committed, combined with insights into the overall political situation in the country affecting media freedom.

EU Member States

Belgium

In Belgium, 22 incidents were documented, impacting the work of 36 media workers or entities. The period was marked by several elections from the local to the European level. MapMF monitored a notable increase in incidents compared to 2023 (8).

Two legal actions were taken in the run-up to the local elections to prevent the dissemination of information of public interest. In October, a journalist for Wilfried was sued by former mayor Claude Eerdekens for an investigative portrait that included testimonies of alleged moral and sexual harassment by the mayor. Another case concerned a decision by the Belgian court to ban the newspaper Le Soir and the media of the Rossel group from publishing an article on a legal procedure against a candidate in the municipal elections, the newly elected Maxime Degey.

This ruling, which amounts to a worrying return of preventive censorship, was not the only one. Other preventive censorship cases in October, included a procedure initiated by the Belgian Minister of the Interior, to delete the archives of the Sudmedia group on an episode of the Qatargate corruption scandal and to prevent the group's media from using this information in the future. The Namur Court rejected the requests, calling on the constitutional ban on preventive censorship.

In addition, the decision taken in September by a French-speaking court in Brussels to declare itself competent to rule on the possible censorship of an RTBF investigation before it was broadcast dangerously opened the door to censorship, which falls under civil law, on the pretext of unfair commercial practices.

The election period also saw an online smear campaign against the Flemish media by the far-right political party Vlaams Belang over critical coverage of the East Flanders Public Prosecutor's investigation into allegations of electoral fraud in the Flemish municipality of Ninove. The historic victory of the far-right Forza Ninove in Flanders also led to verbal and physical harassment of supporters of the French-language RTBF and RTL journalists, whose safety was put at risk.

The run-up to the municipal elections also triggered massive Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks by a pro-Russian hacker group. For example, newspapers De Standaard, Het Nieuwsblad and the website of Belga Agency were slowed down and inaccessible for more than an hour as a consequence of the attacks. The Flemish Press Council was also targeted by the hacker.

This year, MapMF recorded three cases of physical attacks, impacting the work of eight media workers or entities, in comparison to no recorded attacks in 2023. In Bertem, a video journalist from Regional Broadcasting Brabant (ROBtv) was forcibly prevented from reporting on a fire while a group of journalists from BRUZZ, VRT NWS, and VTM were physically attacked in a farmer's protest in Brussels, with some forced to delete their footage. Another worrying case occurred at an environmental protest in Antwerp when two journalists were obstructed by local police in their coverage and held in administrative detention for nine hours with their equipment confiscated.

Another major incident involving the public authorities occurred in Denderleeuw when the premises of the Kurdish-language Stêrk TV and Medya Haber (Medya News) were severely damaged and computers confiscated during a raid by the Belgian Federal Police under a European Investigation Order (EIE) on suspicion of financing terrorism.

Verbal attacks online are another concern. Of the five recorded cases in 2024, one journalist for VRT NWS had his full name and hometown revealed on X while being falsely accused of drug use. Tscheldt.be, which claims to be a satirical website, also continued to harass jour-

nalists covering its legal battles, such as Standaard journalists Mark Eeckhaut and Christoph Meeussen, or De Morgen reporter Bruno Struys.

Despite generally high standards enshrined in the Constitution of Belgium, the country faced many press freedom violations perpetrated by state related persons and entities (judiciary, police, politicians in power), which can be considered a worrying development.

France

In 2024, the MapMF recorded 108 alerts involving 214 media workers or entities related to the media in France. Verbal abuse was the most frequent type of attack, constituting 50.9% of cases with 55 incidents. These attacks often took place online and were perpetrated mainly by private individuals.

Journalists covering the legislative and European elections faced escalating hostility, particularly those reporting on the far-right's rise. Among the journalists affected, France Inter's Salomé Saqué received numerous death threats. The news website StreetPress was threatened with a "bomb attack" ahead of a protest against the far-right, and cyber-harassed with a racist and threatening email referring to the elections, sent 52 times.

Violence against the press escalated off-screen when far-right Rassemblement National (RN) supporters sexually harassed a female journalist during a campaign rally led by Jordan Bardella.

One particularly worrying case occurred in July, when it was revealed that the far-right website Réseau Libre had created and published a list of 180 individuals – including at least 58 journalists – under the headline "List of candidates who were to be "shot in the back of the head". All of them had signed a tribune in support of independent journalism months earlier.

The year 2024 was marked by an increase in xenophobic threats both online and offline, with a total of 15 incidents compared to 4 in 2023. A disturbing example involved a volunteer at Radio Balises, who found racist and homophobic death threats written on his car windshield.

Though MapMF recorded fewer physical assaults (11) compared to 2023 (39), worrying examples persisted, including attacks by the police and by private individuals, which accounted for five and six incidents respectively. Two women journalists were attacked while broadcasting live in the street: an RTL journalist was covering a mass shooting in Dunkirk, when she had to run away from a man and leave her equipment behind, while Brazilian journalist Verônica Dalcanal was sexually assaulted by individuals during the Paris Olympics.

MapMF recorded 14 attacks on property, including seven attacks on media premises, such as Le Poher on three occasions and Radio BIP / Média 25 on two occasions.

Riot police push back journalists near Semalens, France, on 10 February, 2024, amid protests against the A69 highway project
picture alliance / NurPhoto | Alain Pitton

Investigative journalists facing pressure to hand over sources remains a concern. MapMF monitored four cases of arbitrary detention, highlighting attempts of judicial authorities to criminalise investigative journalism. A Blast journalist was arbitrarily detained for 32 hours, and two photojournalists were arrested in Paris Saint-Denis with one of them forced to give a DNA sample. In December, the case of a journalist investigating possible fraud at a law firm who was detained and had his equipment seized and searched, raised concerns about the protection of sources.

Disclose journalist Ariane Lavrilleux faced further threats of prosecution for revealing a national defence secret as part of her reporting on France's actions in Egypt. Although the charges were dropped in early January 2025, the surveillance and judicial pressure she has been subjected to have highlighted the urgent need to strengthen legislation to protect journalistic sources.

Incidents of censorship and interference tripled in 2024, with 34 cases compared to 11 in 2023. Journalists and media outlets have been refused access to events, had blocked access to some information or to social media accounts.

Difficulties in accessing information culminated in the Mazan mass rape trial, which tried 51 men accused of raping Gisèle Pelicot, drugged by her husband. A court ordered a "partial closed hearing," against Gisèle Pelicot's wishes, during the broadcast of rape evidence, later overturned. Photojournalist Frederic Munsch was twice stripped of his accreditation and ultimately banned from the trial after documenting threats of sexual violence by the

accused. In addition, at least four attacks on the press by the defendants were recorded, including threats of physical and sexual violence, and obscene gestures.

Other instances of censorship included editorial interference, as experienced by journalists from the local daily Courrier Picard in Amiens who were ordered by town hall officials to remove a critical statement. Finally, the growing influence of media tycoons like Vincent Bolloré (*Vivendi Group*) continues to threaten media pluralism. The disinformation campaign targeting Reporters Without Borders (RSF) using cybersquatting practices, showed the extent of the means used to promote Bolloré channels and silence critical voices.

Hungary

The government's hostility towards remaining independent media and civil society organisations intensified, as the widely criticised Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) began operating. In the run-up to the local and European elections, the already suffocated media landscape in Hungary faced pressure not only from Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his ruling Fidesz party, but also from the opposition.

In total, MapMF recorded 68 press freedom violations in Hungary targeting 150 media-related persons or entities. Government and public officials were the most common (23.5%) perpetrators of press freedom violations, followed by public entities and authorities (13.2%).

Nearly half (45.6%) of the recorded cases were related to censorship and interference. Media outlets critical of the Fidesz government were denied access to press conferences, and struggled to receive responses from authorities. Previous assessments have described the Hungarian government's discriminatory approach to journalists' questions as illegal and in violation of press freedom laws.

The newly established and widely criticised SPO began operating under the mandate of the law on the protection of national sovereignty adopted by the Hungarian Parliament last year. In June, SPO launched its first investigation against independent news outlet Átlátszó and civil society organisation Transparency International Hungary Foundation, stating it "investigates organisations that use foreign funding to influence the will of voters or support such activities". After the investigation was concluded, SPO accused Átlátszó of foreign influence and espionage. In July, SPO published a report accusing independent Hungarian media outlets of "Western pro-war propaganda".

MapMF recorded six waves of DDoS attacks against the websites of ten different news outlets in Hungary, some of them attacked more than once. Additionally, news outlet 24.hu reported that fake websites disguised as the news outlet, using the names and images of its journalists, published misleading articles trying to sell medicines and financial investments to consumers.

Although the number of incidents was still fewer than the large-scale DDoS attacks in 2023, the issue remains a grave concern for press freedom in Hungary. The perpetrator behind the numerous DDoS attacks against Hungarian media in 2023 labelled themself as 'Hano' in server logs left behind during the attacks. The DDoS attacks, which hindered editorial work and caused severe financial damage to nearly 50 Hungarian media outlets, ceased for a few months at the end of 2023, but in January 2024, MapMF recorded two new attacks, which indicated that 'Hano' had continued their operation. However, by the publication of this report, no further DDoS attacks by 'Hano' had been recorded.

In total, 18 election-related alerts were documented during the monitoring period, and the cases of editorial interference were especially alarming. Several publicly funded local newspapers or news outlets belonging to the pro-government publishing house Mediaworks were criticised for circumventing election rules to promote ruling Fidesz party candidates.

Media were regularly targeted with legal attacks, such as lawsuits and legal warnings filed by corporations, politicians and authorities. In an unprecedented move, PM Orbán filed civil lawsuits against several news outlets in relation to their reporting on critical statements made by Hans Reisch, CEO of the Spar Austria Group. Although Orbán lost most of the lawsuits in the second instance, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the prime minister in the case against news outlet Pécsi Stop. Critics warned that the landmark ruling could also affect the lawsuits against the other news outlets.

Journalists and news outlets were also often targeted with discrediting comments and harassment campaigns, most often by public officials, pro-government media, and other Fidesz allies, but also by opposition leader Péter Magyar.

Italy

Press freedom in Italy experienced a significant decline during the monitoring period, with MapMF documenting 157 violations affecting 209 media-related persons or entities. Under the right-wing administration of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her party, Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), incidents of verbal attacks, censorship attempts, and legal actions by politicians and political parties targeting journalists and news outlets critical of the government continued to rise.

MapMF recorded an alarming number of 19 cases related to editorial interference. Concerns over the editorial independence of the public broadcaster RAI were reflected in 16 documented instances of alleged editorial interference, prompting criticism and fuelling fears of the broadcaster transforming into a government propaganda tool. Noteworthy censorship incidents included the cancellation of Antonio Scurati's antifascist monologue in April and disciplinary actions by RAI management against Serena Bortone, the host of the program where the speech was scheduled to air.

The proposed sale of leading news agency AGI to Antonio Angelucci, a Lega politician, sparked protests from journalists who were worried about losing editorial independence. Within a week, editors-in-chief of Il Messaggero, L'Espresso, and La Svolta were dismissed, raising concerns about political pressure and interference. These events underscore Italy's tangled media landscape, where media ownership often overlaps with political and business interests, leading to conflicts of interest and threats to journalistic integrity.

Journalists were often arbitrarily blocked from accessing court hearings, press conferences and other events, and struggled to get responses to their information requests. Especially alarming was the fact that prosecutor's offices repeatedly failed to properly communicate with the media, and journalists were banned from attending or filming public interest trials.

Private individuals were the primary source of press freedom violations in the country, constituting over a quarter (28.7%) of the documented cases, directly followed by government and public officials (26.8%). Private individuals targeted journalists with verbal harassment, attacks to property, and physical violence. MapMF recorded seven serious incidents where media professionals were injured by private individuals during assignments, and five cases in which journalists received death threats due to their work. Additionally, anti-vaxxers targeted and vandalised the editorial offices of various news outlets across the country.

Public officials often verbally attacked media professionals critical of the government. These incidents included PM Meloni's public attack on Carlo De Benedetti, owner of the newspaper Domani. Similarly, the PM publicly condemned the Fanpage investigative team who had exposed the fascist, racist, and antisemitic statements of members of the youth wing of leading coalition party FdI.

The Italian government introduced several controversial legal reforms affecting press freedom. Federico Mollicone, an FdI deputy and Culture Committee Chairperson, proposed a reform for "verified news" to allegedly counter disinformation. Journalist associations, opposition parties, and media criticised the bill, citing threats to press freedom and media pluralism. Additionally, FdI Senator Gianni Berrino's amendment to the already controversial Balboni bill aimed to increase defamation penalties, with possible jail terms up to 4.5 years and fines up to €120,000 for journalists.

In July, the Chamber of Deputies approved the so-called 'Nordio bill', drafted by Minister of Justice Carlo Nordio, which included, among others, provisions that would make access to information of public interest more difficult, especially regarding wiretaps. Additionally, in December, the Council of Ministers approved the amendment to the European delegation law presented by Enrico Costa of opposition party Azione, prohibiting the publication of pre-trial personal precautionary measures until the end of preliminary investigations. The so-called "gag law" was widely criticised by media professionals and press freedom advocates, who have deemed it as an authoritarian measure serving those in power and hindering the work of journalists.

Journalists and media outlets were constantly targeted with a variety of legal threats, which made up nearly a quarter (22.9%) of the documented violations. MapMF recorded an alarming number of vexatious lawsuits, with criminal and civil defamation lawsuits regularly exploited against journalists and news outlets, especially by politicians, political parties, and public authorities, in attempts to silence independent and critical journalism. Pre- and post-publication legal warnings were often used by politicians of the ruling parties.

In March, the Perugia Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation against three Domani journalists for allegedly breaching secrets, following a complaint by Defence Minister Guido Crosetto. In July, police raided journalist Simone Innocenti's home and the Corriere Fiorentino offices, seizing devices. Innocenti was investigated by the Florence prosecutor for allegedly revealing and using state secrets in collaboration with public officials.

Slovakia

Since the populist Prime Minister Robert Fico and his coalition government regained power in late 2023, independent Slovak media have faced increasing pressure and threats. The state of press freedom in Slovakia sharply declined, particularly following the assassination attempt on PM Fico in early May. MFRR partners organised a fact-finding and solidarity mission to Bratislava in November 2024, and observed the increasingly hostile environment for journalists and media.

In 2024, MapMF recorded a total of 50 press freedom violations targeting 66 media-related persons or entities. Most of the recorded violations in the country (58.0%) were related to verbal attacks. Journalists and newsrooms faced continuous discrediting and smear campaigns, mainly from government officials, but also private individuals. Politicians repeatedly blamed independent media for the attack on PM Fico, claiming that critical stories about

Fico's government were the reason for the assassination attempt. In the aftermath of the shooting, several Slovak news outlets were threatened with arson attacks online.

Throughout the monitoring period, high-ranking government officials instigated and fuelled large-scale smear campaigns against journalists and news outlets, and expressed serious accusations and insults against them publicly. The situation escalated in October, when PM Fico verbally attacked several Slovak media outlets, accusing them of being “possessed by the devil” and calling them “bloodthirsty bastards”.

MapMF recorded six cases of gender-based verbal attacks on women journalists in Slovakia. In February, Ľuboš Blaha, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, targeted journalist Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová online with personal insults, accusations of bias, and fabricated rumours about her sex life. Afterwards, far-right conspiracist Daniel Bombic, or ‘Danny Kollár’, posted Kovačič Hanzelová's phone number on his Telegram channel. In June, Bombic again targeted Slovak women journalists on social media with vile, sexist insults.

People gather in Bratislava on 21 February, 2024, to mark six years since the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová
picture alliance / CTK | Vaclav Salek

Bombic's Telegram channel spreads far-right disinformation, Covid-19 conspiracies, and doxxes journalists, particularly targeting women journalists. Backed by right-wing Slovak politicians, his channel is the most popular Slovak-language account on the platform. Living in London, Bombic faces criminal proceedings for extremism and multiple arrest warrants.

The most alarming developments involved several anti-media laws proposed or passed by the government. Slovakia's parliament approved a bill labelling civil society organisations receiving over €5,000 annually in foreign funding as 'foreign-supported'. The most worrying development occurred in June when parliament passed a bill to dissolve public broadcaster RTVS, replacing it with a government-controlled entity, STVR. Critics denounced this as an attack on press freedom, conflicting with the European Media Freedom Act.

Amendments to media and access-to-information laws were proposed in May, introducing a "right to a correction" and allowing officials to charge for extensive information requests. The controversial law was passed in October, introducing severe penalties for journalists and media outlets, imposing fines ranging from €1,000 to €15,000 for failure to publish corrections and granting politicians the power to demand corrections without proving falsehoods in published articles. Additionally, in November, the government announced plans to establish specialised courts which would exclusively handle cases against journalists and media. While framed as a practical reform, critics warned that the proposal was part of the government coalition's crackdown on independent media, aimed at intimidating and silencing dissent.

In April, two prosecutors overseeing the murder case of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová resigned due to the abolition of the Special Prosecutor's Office. Press freedom advocates expressed concerns as Kuciak's case was the first one to be affected and the new prosecutor will have to familiarise themselves with thousands of case file pages.

Investigative journalist Karolína Kiripolská was interrogated by the police in relation to her report on religious sects AllatRa and Creative Society. Her testimony followed a summons from Žilina regional prosecutor Martin Kováč, who was investigating Czech journalist Kristína Ciroková for alleged "promotion of movements suppressing basic rights" due to her reporting on the sects. The Investigative Center of Ján Kuciak (ICJK) criticised the prosecution's questioning as manipulative and an attempt to intimidate journalists working on public interest topics. On 18 October, the Slovak General Prosecutor's Office terminated the investigation into Ciroková, declaring it was not a criminal offence. Subsequently, Kováč was dismissed from his position due to his handling of the case.

MapMF recorded four cases of alleged editorial interference and management pressure within Slovakia's leading commercial television channel TV Markíza, which reportedly shifted its editorial line for the benefit of the Smer-led government after the arrival of news director Michal Kratochvíl. The channel's management also reportedly imposed retaliatory sanctions on journalists Michal Kovačič and Viktor Vincze due to their public criticism of the situation and their union activities.

The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, 31 incidents were documented, impacting the work of 32 media workers or entities. Additional cases of attacks on journalists were also monitored but remain unpublished due to safety concerns or ongoing investigations.

The most common type of attack in the Netherlands was verbal abuse, which accounted for more than half of the recorded violations of press freedom (51.6%), perpetrated by private individuals in the vast majority of cases.

Out of 16 incidents of verbal abuse, 13 involved intimidation and threatening, including several death threats. Since the beginning of the year, news portal NU.nl reported numerous death threats posted in the comments section of their articles. Among the perpetrators, an individual harassing the news portal for over six years was reported to the police as the threats were for the first time specific enough to be qualified as a death threat under Dutch law. In February, a journalist was threatened with death via an anonymous private message from a fake X account, including the mention of the name of his hometown. In November, a case attracted media attention, when the authorities swiftly opened a criminal investigation after YouTuber Jan Roos called for journalists covering the local Ameland festival to be shot, on the Channel RoddelPraat, followed by 286,000 followers.

Threatening phone calls and threats at the workplace were another form of harassment faced by journalists. In March, one journalist working for RTV-Connect was threatened with physical violence, while workers for a News Agency were harassed with numerous calls and threats of legal action for "spreading false news." Another worrying incident within the workplace involved a man who had been convicted of physical violence against a neighbor. The man entered Brabants Dagblad newsroom in Tilburg to confront the journalist who was reporting on him, but the journalist was not in the office at the time. In September, a De Gelderlander journalist received a call and was told to look over her shoulder, especially in the traffic, for reporting on its illegal animal rental company, while another journalist dropped a story about suspicious business activities in Gendringen after being threatened with reprisals along with his family in a public space. In October, a freelance journalist was even threatened with having his throat slit, as well as that of his wife and child, unless he took a story offline.

Cases of threats to the safety of journalists are the most worrying, involving surveillance and interception of confidential data such as home addresses. The most frightening case documented by the platform concerned a freelance journalist who was targeted with an explosive thrown at his front door in South Amsterdam.

The hostility towards the press is also reflected in the six documented cases of physical attacks on journalists, with five cases carried out by private individuals. In three cases the journalists were injured, including the case of a freelance journalist being pushed hard from behind because of his journalistic work and falling against a door frame. Four physical attacks affected photographers and camera operators.

In September, one was injured during a demonstration in Eindhoven, while a photographer working for the Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant was pushed to the ground by a football player during a match in Kloetinge-Hoek. Other cases involved a freelance photographer who was violently forced to delete pictures while covering a reception center for asylum seekers in Ugchelen.

Cases of press freedom violations, mostly monitored and verified in collaboration with PersVeilig and the Dutch Journalists' Association (NVJ), showed that media workers are increasingly at risk in both the public and private sphere.

Candidate Countries

Albania

MapMF recorded 45 alerts in Albania, involving 54 persons or entities related to media, compared to 23 documentation of press freedom violations in 2023.

Verbal attacks account for 60.0% of all incidents. Worrying development shows that 10 out of the 27 verbal abuse cases against journalists and news outlets were initiated by public officials. Since the beginning of the year, Prime Minister Edi Rama repeatedly used derogatory language against Albanian journalists. In September, Rama singled out media critical of him and the government as "countless digital channels of disinformation" spreading lies and fostering distrust.

Syri TV and journalist Ermal Rizaj were told by Deputy Prime Minister Balluku to be scripted and politically motivated when asking critical questions over an illegal shipment of hazardous waste from Tirana. Reports on the arrest of former President Illir Meta pending a corruption investigation triggered hostility toward the press. In October, MP Monika Kryemadhi accused BIRN Albania in a press conference of publishing manipulated stories over his arrest. She also verbally abused an ABC News correspondent, suggesting undue influence or political bias.

The investigation by the Special Prosecutor's Office against Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK) into Former Prime Minister Sali Berisha for "passive corruption" in connection with the "Partizani" affairs also prompted massive media coverage, with journalists being verbally abused by Berisha.

The use of negative rhetoric by public officials to discredit and discourage critical voices poses a risk to the legitimacy of smear campaigns against independent media and civil society representatives who are increasingly under threat. In October 2024, the Council of Media Ethics of Albania (KSHM) was the target of coordinated smear campaigns by two online platforms, Sot.com.al and Prapaskena.com, for being allegedly corrupt and biased. In response to the publication of a shadow report on media freedom in Albania, Prapaskena intensified the attacks by targeting Blerjana Bino, a SafeJournalists researcher and executive director of SCiDEV, along with the independent think tanks SCiDEV and OBCT.

Hostility towards the press is also reflected in the eight documented physical assaults. In the most recent cases, top news journalist Alketa Shaba and a camera operator were assaulted during a live broadcast, while investigative journalist Freard Rista was pelted with stones as she was investigating an alleged illegal waste dumping. In November, journalist Lorena Resulaj was forcibly prevented from interviewing Mayor Roskovec in the municipal car park.

Blocked journalistic activity was documented with ten attacks in 2024 compared to four in 2023. Journalists faced a particularly hostile environment at parliamentary sessions, often

forcibly prevented by state security to cover subjects of public interest. In October, a group of at least five journalists were physically pushed by the Guard of the Republic and the Administration of the Assembly outside the plenary hall, preventing them from covering parliamentary developments, including protests of the ruling Socialist Party deputies who were trying to enter the session.

In terms of legal incidents, two of the three attacks involved the violation of journalists' sources. At least five former journalists from Radio Television Albania (RTSH) were summoned to the Tirana police station for questioning and phone searches over statements they had made about mass RTSH dismissals. In February, the Albanian Supreme Court set a dangerous precedent for all journalists when it ruled that the confiscation of jounalist Elton Qyno's equipment in 2023 was lawful. This followed Qyno's refusal to reveal his sources after publishing confidential documents relating to a high-profile investigation. In the third case, MP Pranvera Resulaj sued journalist Afrodita Hysaj for defamation over satirical content.

With the number of recorded press freedom violations having nearly doubled in 2024 compared to 2023, the high proportion of attacks attributed to political leaders is a deeply worrying trend, as it tends to normalise hostile behaviour towards the press.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2024, the MapMF recorded 17 alerts involving 21 media workers or entities related to the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

In nine incidents journalists were verbally abused, including three cases involving public officials. Journalists from the news portal "Capital" in Banja Luka reported being insulted by Šipov mayor Milan Kovač in an interview phone call.

Two other verbal attacks involved Elmedin Konaković, Minister of Foreign Affairs of BiH. In April, he accused Bosnian investigative outlets of being "part of the media-judicial mafia" at a press conference, following reports on his ties to the international drug cartel "Tito and Dino". Konaković also posted a video targeting journalist Avdo Avdić, editor-in-chief of Istraga.ba, portraying him as biased and manipulative. As condemned by the Safejournalists Network, Konaković's continued attacks on media workers risk to normalise hostility toward the press and increase threats against journalists.

In December, journalist Avdić learned from the police that a drug lord and criminal from Slovenia had plotted to murder him for publishing details about his criminal activities and where he was hiding before his arrest. Editor of the news portal Prometej, Franjo Šarčević, received online death threats following his column about the celebration of BiH's Independence Day. Nataša Miljanović Zubac, an investigative journalist for Radio Television of Republika Srpska (RTRS), also received a death threat at her son's cottage in the village of Ljubomir. The MFRR promptly requested increased police protection for the journalist,

who has been the target of at least seven criminal acts since the arson attack on her car in 2022, including a physical assault in Trebinje.

Another assault of violence was targeted journalist and former editor of the Times.ba portal, Mirza Dervišević, who was punched several times in the head by an individual for the second time.

In addition to death threats and physical violence, MapMF monitored instances of smear campaigns. A prime example included Slobodna Bosna's journalists, who were labeled as "Islamists" waging "a campaign against Serbia" by Serb media over its reporting on Serbian authorities suspected of financing two media outlets (Nacionale and Periskop) in Kosovo and the Federation of BiH.

Another case involved Radio Čapljina, targeted by spoofing site "podlupombih.ba," before the 2024 local elections. The site falsely claimed the broadcaster was funded by the husband of the HDZ candidate for Čapljina mayor.

In 2024, the MapMF recorded four legal incidents. Out of the two criminal complaints, one was initiated by Federal Minister of Labour and Social Policy Adnan Delić, urging Sarajevo Cantonal Prosecutor's Office for an investigation into sources of leaked documents shared with journalists from Hayat TV, Slobodna Bosna, and Istraga.ba, exposing an attempted illegal allocation of state funds. One troubling incident involved the summoning of photojournalist Nidal Šalji by the Bijeljina Prosecutor's Office for the crime of using a drone while filming former concentration camps in Republika Srpska, despite there being no legal basis for such a charge.

In the face of these worrying developments, urgent action are necessary, including swifter investigations to protect journalists and counter the normalisation of hostility towards the media in BiH.

Georgia

In 2024, press freedom in Georgia deteriorated to a critical level, with journalists facing legal harassment, intimidation, physical violence, and detainment. MapMF documented 138 cases of media freedom violations, affecting 241 persons or entities related to media. In 51 cases (37.0%), the police and security forces were identified as the perpetrators. However, affected journalists also reported to the MFRR that their cases have not been investigated, and those responsible have not been held accountable.

Journalists and media workers were physically attacked, verbally assaulted and intimidated, and detained. MapMF documented 44 cases of physical assault on journalists, 30 of which resulted in injury. In 14 cases journalists' personal properties and belongings were attacked. In at least 10 cases, their equipment and personal belongings were confiscated or destroyed.

Simultaneously, government-led smear campaigns aimed at discrediting independent journalism continued unabated. Another pressing issue was barring independent media, especially online media, from entering and reporting from the Parliament.

This unprecedented assault on journalists coincided with the scaling back of democratic freedoms across the country. In 2024, the media environment in Georgia had become increasingly hostile and dangerous, with legal and institutional tools weaponised to harass and silence critical voices including those of independent journalists.

On May 28, the Parliament of Georgia overturned President Salome Zourabichvili's veto on the foreign agent law titled 'Transparency of Foreign Influence'. Although the law has yet to be fully implemented, its adoption has already had a chilling effect, damaging press freedom in Georgia.

According to the mission findings and the mission report, conducted by Council of Europe's Safety of Journalists Platform and members of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) consortium, the law already leads to self-censorship, intimidation of journalists' sources, and a hostile environment, preventing journalists from reporting from the field. If enacted, this restrictive legislation would provide authorities with a powerful tool to discredit and suppress free press and civil society. The reintroduction of the foreign agent law sparked widespread protests during which at least 21 journalists were subjected to physical assaults from the security forces.

On 4 August 2024, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced critical Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadygov, editor-in-chief of Azel.tv, to three months of extradition detention. Sadygov was arrested on August 3, as reported by his wife Sevinj Sadygova, who posted footage of him being escorted into a car by law enforcement officers. MFRR partners called on the authorities in Georgia not to extradite journalist Afgan Sadygov to Azerbaijan and to release him from extradition detention.

The crackdown of journalists escalated significantly during the critical parliamentary elections in October. The MapMF recorded 83 election-related violations of media freedom involving 41 media workers. Related to elections, journalists and camera operators faced physical attacks (29 cases), verbal assaults and intimidation (24 cases), and had their equipment damaged (9 cases). Independent journalists were labeled as "agents," "stateless," and "enemies of the country."

Additionally, during the pre- and post-election periods, foreign journalists were barred from entering Georgia. Among them were Czech journalist Ray Baseley and Swiss photojournalist Stephan Goss. No explanation was provided for the denial of entry other than an official document citing "other cases envisaged by Georgian legislation." In different instances, Belarusian journalist Andrei Mialeshka and Armenian media founder Arsen Kharatyan were also barred from entering Georgia with reference to the same document.

Journalists cover opposition protests near the Georgian Parliament in Tbilisi on 26 October, 2024, following disputed election results
picture alliance / Sipa USA | Kommersant Photo Agency

Since November 28, when large scale protests erupted following Georgian Dream's PM Irakli Kobakhidze's announcement to pause membership negotiations with the European Union, the situation further deteriorated. From this date forward, MapMF documented 43 press freedom violations involving at least 85 journalists and media workers. In almost 70% of the cases (30) police and security forces were the source of the incident.

Among the injured journalists, Aleksandre Keshelashvili of the independent news outlet Publika.ge was severely beaten and detained by police while covering the protests. He suffered a broken nose, had his cameras confiscated, and required hospitalization before being released. Later, the police also physically assaulted Ana Mskhaladze of Publika.ge, striking her on the head and allegedly confiscating her phone.

Guram Rogava of Formula TV was brutally assaulted by riot police, as shown in footage from Radio Tavisupleba and Formula TV. He sustained serious injuries and was hospitalized. Beka Beradze, producer of Radio Tavisupleba, was beaten and detained. Investigative reporter Mariam Gaprindashvili of TV Pirveli suffered a head injury and breathing difficulties after being assaulted, temporarily losing consciousness and requiring 24-hour hospitalization.

Further journalists and camera operators from media outlets including Netgazeti.ge, OC Media, Mtavari Arkhi, JAMNews, and others were also targeted.

MFRR partners continuously called for the end of what appeared to be a targeted, deliberate attack on journalists by state security forces during pro-EU protests.

Serbia

In 2024, MapMF recorded 83 alerts involving 117 persons or entities related to media, compared to 49 documented press freedom violations in 2023. Most incidents were verbal attacks (71.1%), involving at least 14 death threats.

Independent media and critical voices face constant threats for critical reporting. Recent cases involved the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation which received death threats online, referring to the 1999 unpunished murder of journalist Slavko Ćuruvija. The hostility towards the media was also reflected in numerous hateful graffiti messages that were also aimed at television network Nova S, discovered in Belgrade.

Journalists Ana Lalić Hegediš and Dinko Gruhonjić have faced an unprecedented level of death threats. Both were harassed online and at home following their participation in the Rebedu festival in Dubrovnik and the distortion of their comments aimed at portraying the journalists as enemies of the state (see chapter on Spoofing). In the context of the June elections, Gruhonjić was further targeted by leaflets near polling stations portraying him as a political opponent, a discourse fuelled by Prime Minister Vučević.

Verbal abuses attributed to public officials remain a major concern with eleven cases documented in 2024. In November, Danas' journalist Vojin Radovanović was insulted and forcibly ordered to delete footage by Belgrade city councilor Slobodan Šolević. Other incidents involved Balkan media outlets, including Belgrade's N1, Nova RS and the magazine Slobodna Bosna. These outlets were harshly criticised by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić at a press conference for their coverage of the Rio Tinto protest against the government's approval of lithium ore mining.

FoNet journalist Tamara Skrozza's comments about the 2000 Belgrade demonstration that led to the fall of Slobodan Milošević were distorted by the news portals informer.rs and novosti.rs. Skrozza was accused of "hate speech" by Minister Dejan Ristić. This smear campaign highlighted how pro-government media and officials can use dangerous rhetoric to silence and discredit journalists, often disregarding safety risks. In one case, the government's smear campaign reached France with the French press freedom group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) targeted over its investigation into RT Balkan's links to the Kremlin.

MapMF documented 14 cases of physical attacks, most of them initiated by private individuals. In November, the deadly collapse of the roof of the Novi Sad railway station led to nationwide blockades of universities demanding an investigation into the incident. At least ten journalists were assaulted by demonstrators. Of the nine who were verbally abused, five Informer TV journalists were targeted. In this context of massive attacks, Serbian President Vučić's statement accusing RTS of putting pressure on the prosecution to investigate the incident and inciting a hunt against the government was particularly dangerous.

Two instances of physical assaults by police/state security were documented. The most alarming was that of journalist Ljubomir Stefanović, who was reportedly abducted by the Serbian Security Intelligence Agency for hours at the Voždovac police station for having publicly criticised Serbian President Vučić. His phone confiscated at the time was hacked, as well as journalist Slaviša Milanov's phone in February during questioning at Pirot's police station.

Amid growing threats to journalists' safety, Amnesty International revealing invasive surveillance of journalists and sources by Serbian Intelligence and police, using NoviSpy spyware prompted the MFRR and the SafeJournalists Network to call for stronger accountability mechanisms for state surveillance practices in line with the newly adopted European Media Freedom Act (EMFA).

Of the eight legal cases documented by the MapMF, three were initiated by the judiciary and involve the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK), which is continually harassed with lawsuits as a means of intimidation.

Turkey

Press freedom in Turkey remained under constant threat, as government crackdown on dissenting voices, extensive censorship, and judicial actions against journalists continued. During the monitoring period, MapMF recorded a total of 135 press freedom violations involving 317 media-related persons or entities. Due to the high volume of violations, MapMF was not able to document all relevant cases.

One of the most alarming developments was the re-introduction of the 'agents of influence' bill, which would enable judges to increase sentences by up to seven years for any conviction, if the crime is ruled to have been committed against the 'political interests of the state' when acting in alignment with or under the direction of foreign states or organisations. The bill has been mischaracterised as an effort to increase transparency in foreign funding of civil society organisations, drawing false comparisons to Georgia's foreign agent law. Turkey's 'agents of influence ' bill however, amends the country's espionage act to allow individuals deemed to be acting in line with foreign interests to be effectively treated as spies in judicial proceedings. In November, the parliament postponed discussions on the controversial bill, following significant backlash from civil society, journalists, and press freedom organisations.

Legal incidents made up the majority (64.4%) of the recorded violations. Arrests, detentions and imprisonment were the most common (37.8%) type of violation within Turkey, with 51 documented cases involving 128 journalists. Turkey has one of the worst records for jailing journalists, and at the time of publishing, 18 journalists were imprisoned. During the monitoring period, authorities consistently used mass-arrests and dawn raids at journalists' homes to crack down on dissenting voices. In total, 32 journalists were detained while covering or

participating in demonstrations. Both domestic and foreign journalists were often detained and banned from entering or leaving the country while travelling.

Criminal charges, investigations, interrogations and civil lawsuits were repeatedly used to threaten journalists and silence critical reporting. Defamation related lawsuits and convictions were handed to journalists on several occasions. Journalists were often accused of "spreading terrorist propaganda" or "insulting the president and public officials". Many journalists faced legal proceedings under the recently established, so-called disinformation law. Journalists and news outlets reporting on the death of the leader of the Gülen movement, which has been labelled by Turkey as a terrorist organisation under the name FETÖ, were also targeted by authorities.

At least 32 journalists were handed prison or suspended sentences due to their work. Long prison sentences of up to six years and three months on terrorism related charges were handed to eight Mezopotamya Agency journalists, reporter Hamdiye Çiftçi Öksüz, journalist Erdem Gül, as well as journalists Ahmet Altan, Nazlı Ilıcak and Fevzi Yazıcı, among others.

During the monitoring period, at least 11 journalists were targeted with death threats. In September, journalist Murat Ağırel reported he had received a death threat via a video published on social media. In the footage, a masked individual claimed that a contract had been placed on Ağırel's life and that an execution order had been issued due to his investigative journalism.

Journalists reporting on the murder trial of Sinan Ateş were verbally threatened and targeted with legal proceedings. Ateş, a former leader of the Grey Wolves, a Turkish far-right political movement and the youth wing of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), was assassinated in Ankara on 30 December 2022.

During and after the local elections in Turkey, journalists faced a multitude of attacks due to their reporting. The election results sparked protests across the country, and journalists covering the demonstrations were repeatedly targeted, mainly by the police.

Media professionals faced physical violence on multiple occasions, especially from police officers while covering protests. MapMF recorded five cases of serious physical violence, which left journalists with injuries. In February, Azim Deniz, the chief editor of privately-owned TV broadcaster Deniz Postası, was shot in the stomach and leg outside his home.

Turkish authorities repeatedly blocked access to news websites and social media accounts due to critical coverage. In October, the government-controlled media regulator RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) revoked the terrestrial broadcasting licence of independent radio station Açık Radyo and shut it down. In a significant move impacting press freedom, a broadcast ban was imposed by RTÜK following an armed attack which occurred at a police checkpoint in front of the Istanbul Çağlayan Courthouse.

Journalist Kira Oves receives first aid after a Russian missile attack in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, on 5 April, 2024
picture alliance / Dmytro Smolienko / Avalon

Kurdish journalists and news outlets, as well as reporters covering Kurdish issues, were repeatedly targeted by authorities, but also by private individuals. In December, journalists Nazım Daştan and Cihan Bilgin, reporting for Kurdish media Hawar News Agency (ANHA), were targeted and killed in a suspected Turkish drone strike while covering recent military clashes in northern and eastern Syria. The incident sparked widespread condemnation, and police detained nearly 40 journalists protesting the killing of their colleagues. Seven of them were later arrested on charges of "propaganda", because they carried photographs of the deceased journalists.

Ukraine

In 2024, MFRR recorded 141 press freedom alerts in Ukraine affecting 304 persons or entities related to media, compared to 150 alerts with 227 affected persons or entities in 2023. The overall number of attacks on journalists and the violence of specific incidents showed that issues facing journalists in Ukraine remain generally similar since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

In 2024, MFRR partners recorded 25 physical attacks on journalists, including 11 incidents involving the injury of 19 media workers. In 2024, one media worker was killed while on reporting duty in Ukraine: Reuters security officer Ryan Evans died in the eastern city of Kramatorsk in a missile attack by the Russian military, which targeted the hotel he and his reporting crew were staying at.

A worrying phenomenon over the past year in Ukraine was the number of attacks on media property, 42 of which were recorded in 2024, as opposed to 35 in 2023. Especially worrying was the increase in the number of Russian attacks on Ukrainian media offices and infrastructure, such as TV towers and broadcasting stations. 13 such incidents were recorded in 2024, as opposed to six in 2023.

Hacking and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks remained a great concern, with 25 of these recorded in 2024. While this is comparable to the number recorded in 2023 (23), the number of affected entities increased greatly (from 25 to 95), showing that cyber attacks on Ukrainian media have become much more large-scale.

Spoofing has also become an issue for media in Ukraine, with fake websites undermining trust in legitimate outlets (see separate thematic chapter about spoofing).

While numerically translating into only two incidents, cases of surveillance of journalists by Ukrainian authorities were also worrying, with the case of investigative outlet Bihus.Info having provoked especially strong reactions from Ukraine's media community. Legislative initiatives, such as the currently debated bill which would foresee up to eight years of prison for journalists publishing "confidential information" found in databases, remains of great concern.

Another category in which violations were on the rise were legal incidents, 26 of which were recorded in 2024, as opposed to 12 in 2023. This was mainly due to new arrests of journalists by Russian occupying authorities in southern and eastern Ukraine, as well as convictions and fines imposed by these authorities.

Throughout 2024, MFRR recorded six cases in which Russian occupying authorities imposed politically motivated fines on journalists. Most of these involved journalists of the Crimean Tatar ethnic minority. MFRR also recorded eight cases of arrests and imprisonment of journalists in Ukraine, all of which were performed by Russian occupying authorities.

Overall in 2024, Ukraine faced generally similar media freedom challenges to 2023, including a worrying increase in attacks by Russian armed forces on Ukrainian media infrastructure. However, there are also serious media freedom violations for which Ukrainian authorities were responsible, such as surveillance of journalists and restrictive legislative initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The monitoring report for 2024 has analysed press and media freedom violations in European Union Member States and candidate countries over the past year. MFRR monitoring officers documented 1,549 alerts affecting 2,568 journalists, media workers, or outlets during this period.

This year's report has examined three pressing issues in its thematic chapters: the rise of spoofing attacks—including deep fakes—targeting journalists, the impact of elections on media freedom, and the challenges faced by journalists reporting on environmental issues.

The trends observed in 2024 indicate a continued deterioration of media freedom in key areas. The sharp rise in verbal attacks and censorship and interference in the EU is alarming, particularly with blocked journalistic activity seeing a significant increase. Meanwhile, in candidate countries, verbal attacks have become the dominant form of press freedom violations, with legal threats disproportionately affecting media workers, highlighting broader concerns about judicial independence and legislative restrictions. The continued rise in online attacks, alongside the increasing role of unknown perpetrators, underscores the evolving threats faced by journalists in the digital age.

The MFRR remains committed to documenting and analysing these violations through the Mapping Media Freedom database. The project will continue to monitor developments, produce reports, and provide insights into the state of press and media freedom in the coming year.

DISCLAIMER

The respective alerts for this monitoring report can be viewed directly in the Alert Explorer here. This report includes all incidents from 1 January until 31 December 2024. If cases are reported and published after the publication of this report, they will still appear in the data available under the link of the Alert Explorer above, as well as under the individual links provided within the report to give an up-to-date view at any time. One incident – and thus alert – can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and performed by more than one type of actor. In particular, legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert. This means, when showing e.g. how many alerts included a certain type of attack, the sum of all shown numbers can be more than the total number of alerts and thus more than 100%.

MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

ECPMF
EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR PRESS & MEDIA FREEDOM

efj European Federation of Journalists

International Press Institute

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