



OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

Labour rights for journalists

Labour rights for journalists and media professionals as a safeguard for independence and truthful information
(own-initiative opinion)

SOC/828

Rapporteur: **José Antonio MORENO DÍAZ**

Co-rapporteur: **Christian MOOS**

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Advisor	Ricardo GUTIÉRREZ (rapporteur's advisor, Group II) Julian PLOTTKA (co-rapporteur's advisor, Group III)
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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The environment in which journalists in Europe operate is becoming increasingly hostile. This is a threat to citizens' right to reliable, pluralist and independent information. Faced with the democratic risk posed by the growing insecurity of journalists, public authorities must take urgent protective measures.
- 1.2 The EESC welcomes the entry into force of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and calls on the European Commission to ensure its full application by the Member States.
- 1.3 The dominance of US Very Large Online Platforms, which capture 80% of digital advertising revenue, threatens the sustainability of the European media sector. The EESC, therefore, calls upon the European Commission and the Member States to establish independent support for media outlets, in addition to existing subsidies. These measures could include a VAT reduction.
- 1.4 The EESC is also concerned that concentration processes in the sector can undermine media pluralism in Europe. The EESC therefore calls upon the European Commission to use its competences in the area of competition law to guarantee competition, and therefore media pluralism, in the sector.
- 1.5 The EESC calls for a considerable increase of funds for the protection of a sound information ecosystem, which can ensure satisfactory working conditions for journalists.
- 1.6 In particular, the EESC calls on the European Commission to put forward an ambitious package with policy measures and investments to support quality jobs in the media sector.
- 1.7 The EESC calls on governments to promote social dialogue and collective bargaining for all journalists, including freelancers, through the transposition of the Directive on adequate minimum wages where applicable¹ and the Guidelines on the application of Union competition law to collective agreements of solo self-employed persons². It further calls on the European Commission and Member States to fight bogus self-employment.
- 1.8 The EESC calls on employers in the media sector to apply the EU Framework Directive (89/391/EEC). More efforts are needed to fully and effectively apply its provisions and the provisions of the related directives on the ground³, as highlighted at the occupational safety and health (OSH) stock-taking summit in 2023⁴.
- 1.9 The EESC calls on the European Commission to follow up on the Recommendation on the Protection, Safety and Empowerment of Journalists⁵, taking into account the assessment of the

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=legissum:4623532>.

2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022XC0930%2802%29>.

3 [Occupational safety and health \(OSH\) stocktaking summit conclusions - European Commission](#).

4 [OJ C, C/2025/2958, 16.6.2025](#), point 1.1.

5 <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/recommendation-protection-safety-and-empowerment-journalists>.

*Study on Putting in Practice by Member States*⁶. The EESC stresses the need for deeper engagement with journalists' organisations, to build structures that can safeguard journalists' safety.

- 1.10 Journalists are workers who are significantly exposed to stress, burnout, online harassment and digital overload. Precariousness, long working hours, deadlines and work-life imbalance can have a direct impact on health. The EESC has earlier stated that it would be useful for the Commission to consider how to follow up on the European Parliament resolution of 10 March 2022 calling for a directive on psychosocial risks to be adopted. The EESC is ready to issue an opinion on this matter.⁷
- 1.11 The EESC calls on the European Commission to monitor the application of the EU's legislative framework on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in order to secure a fair balance between giving AI providers access to European data and ensuring the protection of journalists.
- 1.12 The EESC encourages journalists' unions and media organisations to address issues related to the use of AI in newsrooms within the framework of social dialogue, in order to ensure that AI serves the factual production of news, protects press freedom, and sustains jobs.
- 1.13 The EESC calls on the European Commission to set a funding scheme for projects that develop the AI literacy of journalists. The Commission should consider possibilities to co-fund 'European Journalism Academies', which offer dual training for journalists and see whether it would be possible to subsidise for the period of training part of the salaries for young journalists from media companies that meet high standards concerning quality journalism and working conditions.

2. General comments

2.1 Introduction and background

- 2.1.1 The journalism profession in Europe is under intense pressure. In addition to a decline in press freedom, the violations of which (physical violence, intimidation, judicial harassment, hostile legislation, etc.) are documented by the Council of Europe⁸ and European Union⁹ platforms, journalists are also faced with 'deplorable working conditions in most EU Member States', as the MPM2025 report¹⁰ attests. Research outlines that journalism's ability to hold the powerful to account is diminishing: 'Journalism, in its current trajectory, does not fulfil its Fourth Estate or "watchdog" function, and critically, this influences people's understanding of society¹¹.'

⁶ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bca5a5bd-090a-11ef-a251-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁷ OJ C, C/2025/114, 10.1.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/114/oj>.

⁸ <https://fom.coe.int/en/accueil>.

⁹ <https://www.mfrr.eu/>.

¹⁰ [Monitoring Media Pluralism in the EU](#), 2025, p. 6.

¹¹ The Impact of Changing Work Practices in Journalism in Ireland, Emer Connolly, 2024.

- 2.1.2 As stated in the annual report of the Council of Europe’s Platform for the Protection of Journalism, ‘in a democratic society, it is vital that journalists operate independently of political, commercial, or corporate influences. This independence hinges on the existence of decent working conditions, robust protections against legal threats, editorial autonomy from media owners and political entities, and the freedom for journalists to organise within trade unions or professional associations¹²’.
- 2.1.3 The Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4¹³ underscores the importance of labour and employment laws in protecting journalists from arbitrary dismissal, reprisals and precarious working conditions that may subject them to undue pressures and ethical compromises. However, the 2025 Media Pluralism Monitor¹⁴ highlights institutional neglect in addressing precarious conditions in most EU Member States.
- 2.1.4 According to the MPM2025¹⁵, only 7 of the 34 European countries analysed – Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden – provide good working conditions for journalists. ‘The working conditions of journalists are deplorable in most EU Member States, with low salaries and weak or absent social security schemes,’ the report states.

3. Background to the opinion

3.1 Initiative against abusive litigation targeting journalists and rights defenders

In this opinion¹⁶, the EESC points out that journalists are the most vulnerable to threats posed by strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP). Limited in scope, the anti-SLAPP directive provides only a very partial response to these threats.

3.2 Securing media freedom and diversity in Europe

In this own-initiative opinion¹⁷, the EESC points out the increased social insecurity of journalists and their vulnerability to SLAPPs.

3.3 Employment status

- 3.3.1 According to the latest statistics¹⁸, there are at least 400 000 journalists in EU Member States, representing 0.2% of total EU employment. Freelance journalists account for between 20% and

¹² Europe Press Freedom Report, written by the partner organisations of the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, March 2025.

¹³ Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors, <https://search.coe.int/cm/?i=09000016806415d9>.

¹⁴ <https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/6f582946-bb17-49fc-ab81-9a4b79b4d0ce/content>.

¹⁵ <https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/6f582946-bb17-49fc-ab81-9a4b79b4d0ce/content>.

¹⁶ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/initiative-against-abusive-litigation-targeting-journalists-and-rights-defenders>.

¹⁷ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/securing-media-freedom-and-diversity-europe-own-initiative-opinion>.

¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20200503-1>.

30% of the total¹⁹. Freelance journalists continue to be among the most vulnerable practitioners in the sector²⁰. However, growing insecurity also affects employed journalists: the number of collective agreements, particularly at the sectoral level, is tending to fall²¹.

3.3.2 In certain countries, the status of freelancer is misused by media outlets to minimise costs and responsibilities towards their workers²². False self-employment is an increasing problem in the sector in some countries, as these journalists lack social security, such as sick leave, paid maternity and pension²³.

3.3.3 One of the few countries where working conditions for freelancers have improved is the Netherlands, where the collective labour agreement increased journalists' salaries, including the fees of freelancers working for major newspapers.

3.4 Job insecurity

3.4.1 Journalism is known for creating a high emotional load and pressurised working conditions²⁴. Evidence from OSHWiki shows that job insecurity is one a factor which can be linked to workers' health and well-being. Workers who worry about the continuation of their jobs report stress, burnout and depression to a greater extent²⁵. As changes in the media landscape have led many media employers to cut staff, those who are left behind can be expected to pick up the work of their colleagues, which increases individual workloads. Journalist burnout is a significant issue according to an ETUI analysis²⁶ and a recent European survey²⁷, with high percentages of journalists reporting mental health struggles and considering leaving the profession.²⁸

3.4.2 Studies cited by research from the University of Limerick²⁹ have shown that work is becoming more intense in newsrooms. The disruption caused by the digital transition is also reported as a concern, with many fearing that their jobs will be replaced by generative artificial intelligence³⁰.

19 <https://transitionsmedia.org/2025/03/27/newtaktaksurvey/>.

20 <https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/6f582946-bb17-49fc-ab81-9a4b79b4d0ce/content>.

21 <https://www.etuc.org/en/speech/backing-journalists-etuc-stands-efj-collective-bargaining-and-quality-work>.

22 [Media Pluralism Monitor 2024](#), p. 91.

23 https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/77028/Media%20Pluralism%20Monitor%20Report_2024.pdf.

24 Together, stronger: a collective approach to mental health, UK & Ireland National Union of Journalists (NUJ), 2023.

25 https://oshwiki.osha.europa.eu/en/themes/journalism-and-psychosocial-risk-factors#_edn23.

26 <https://www.etui.org/topics/health-safety-working-conditions/hesamag/journalism-an-increasingly-precarious-profession/burnout-among-journalists-a-symptom-of-discontent-in-newsrooms>.

27 <https://taktak.media/2025/03/27/new-survey-of-europes-journalists-finds-more-than-60-are-forced-to-work-other-jobs/>.

28 https://europeanjournalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/SUJ_Stronger-Minds-Stronger-Media_10.2025-1_compressed-1.pdf.

29 [Labouring the news: Management control strategies and work intensification in the digital newsroom](#), 2023.

30 [‘We need to set the terms or we’re all screwed’: how newsrooms are tackling AI’s uncertainties and opportunities](#), Michael Savage, [The Guardian](#), 22 March 2025.

Cost-cutting measures have become a constant for many journalists, who are often faced with pay freezes, pay cuts and staff cuts³¹.

3.5 Working hours and work intensity

3.5.1 National³² and European³³ surveys have shown that a majority of journalists have had to take on extra duties and responsibilities, with most of them not receiving a commensurate pay rise. Work overload has become the norm: journalists often work on multiple stories with tight deadlines, which can lead to feelings of excessive pressure³⁴.

3.5.2 Many freelancers have to take on non-journalistic work to make ends meet. A huge proportion of journalists have considered leaving journalism for a better-paid profession, making journalists' careers shorter³⁵.

3.5.3 Local and regional journalists are disadvantaged, frequently receiving lower salaries. Freelancers may have limited or non-existent access to social security schemes. Across all Member States, it is a trend that local media are more affected by the intertwining of decreasing advertising revenues and a biased allocation of state advertising and subsidies³⁶.

3.5.4 The 2024 MPM report³⁷ notes that negotiating collective agreements has become increasingly difficult. This makes journalists increasingly vulnerable 'to external influences such as commercial or political pressures'³⁸.

3.5.5 In France, unions have denounced the 'uberization' of young journalists, and media outlets resorting to the multiplication of short-term contracts, self-employment, payment in author rights, internships³⁹.

3.6 Working relationship

3.6.1 The intensification of work in newsrooms can lead to unacceptable behaviour. Bullying and harassment can happen, with significant consequences, including stress, depression, reduced self-esteem, self-blame and sleep disturbances⁴⁰. Sexual harassment can also occur. Studies

31 [Liberties Media Freedom Report 2025](#), p. 13.

32 The Impact of Changing Work Practices in Journalism in Ireland, Emer Connolly, 2024.

33 <https://taktak.media/2025/03/27/new-survey-of-europes-journalists-finds-more-than-60-are-forced-to-work-other-jobs/>.

34 [The impact of stress, anxiety, and burnout on journalists: a systematic review](#), 2025.

35 Hier, journalistes : ils ont quitté la profession, Jean-Marie Charon, Entremises, 2021.

36 LM4D study Uncovering news deserts in Europe – Risks and opportunities for local and community media in the EU, Verza & al., https://cmpf.eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/CMPE_Uncovering-news-deserts-in-Europe_LM4D-final-report.pdf.

37 https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/77028/Media%20Pluralism%20Monitor%20Report_2024.pdf.

38 <https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/b0fef1e3-043a-5880-93ce-cb3ee9ed5d54/content>.

39 https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/77028/Media%20Pluralism%20Monitor%20Report_2024.pdf.

40 https://oshwiki.osha.europa.eu/en/themes/journalism-and-psychosocial-risk-factors#_edn28.

have also highlighted the prevalence of burnout in the profession and increasing stress.⁴¹ Journalists most at risk of burnout are younger females with fewer years of experience, in small-circulation newspapers. A European survey reveals that 60% of surveyed journalists report having experienced burnout⁴².

3.7 Third-party violence and online threats

Europe has seen an increase in incidents of violence against journalists⁴³. The latest MFRR Monitoring Report documented 1 548 press freedom violations targeting 2 567 media-related persons or entities in 2024⁴⁴.

3.7.1 Journalists' mental health can be affected by the exponential increase in online threats and attacks (harassment, intimidation, doxing, discreditation via fake accounts, etc.), which particularly target female journalists and journalists from minority backgrounds. At the end of 2023, the OSCE issued guidelines⁴⁵ to help female journalists better cope with this new form of pressure. In 2024, the Council of Europe Platform⁴⁶ identified new forms of digital attacks, with the use of deep fakes featuring journalists.

3.8 Artificial intelligence

3.8.1 AI both presents opportunities for journalists and threatens their role. Generative AI tools, like ChatGPT, pose a threat to journalists' position, with many fearing they will be replaced by AI. In October 2024, OFF Radio Krakow in Poland faced controversy after replacing its human journalists with AI-generated presenters⁴⁷. An investigation by Belgian public broadcaster VRT News⁴⁸ showed that more than half of the articles published in the fashion magazine Elle's website were attributed to AI-generated journalists. AI models trained on large datasets of journalistic content may generate outputs that are very similar to copyrighted material, potentially leading to copyright infringement.

3.9 Disinformation

3.9.1 The massive spread of disinformation via social media, whether of foreign or domestic origin, forces journalists to be constantly on alert, including outside working hours. This pressure comes on top of the increased workload. The right to a better work-life balance and to be able to

41 Rafter, Kevin & Wheatley, Dawn., Irish Journalists at Work: Values, Roles & Influences, Dublin City University, Ireland, 2023. Available at: https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/full_irish-journalists-at-work-11122023-1.pdf.

42 <https://wan-ifra.org/2025/04/new-survey-finds-europes-journalists-marked-by-burnout-fearful-of-ai-yet-still-passionate-professionals/>.

43 <https://www.mfrr.eu/>; <https://fom.coe.int/en/accueil>.

44 <https://www.ecpmf.eu/mfrr-monitoring-report-2024/>.

45 https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/0/554098_1.pdf.

46 CoE Platform Annual report 2025, p. 59.

47 <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/10/24/media/polish-radio-ai-presenters-scli-intl>.

48 <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2025/06/26/modeblad-elle-gebruikt-nepjournalisten-voor-online-artikels/>.

disconnect is seen as a new challenge. Some EU Member States have put legislation in place to allow workers to disconnect, as is the case in Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, France, Spain and Italy⁴⁹.

3.9.2 Reports reveal a growing loss of trust in the media, driven by the extent of misinformation. This loss of credibility has an impact on journalists' morale and self-esteem. A survey found just 40% of the respondents across the 47 surveyed markets say they trust most news⁵⁰. Faced with the poisoning of public debate by disinformation, many journalists feel powerless in the face of the threat that the profession could be stripped of its fundamental roles of accountability and oversight.

3.10 Public service media

3.10.1 Although they generally enjoy better working conditions and greater job stability, journalists in the public broadcasting sector are increasingly subject to financial restrictions, restructuring and political interference⁵¹. Nearly half the EU Member States do not guarantee the governance and financial independence of their public service media (PSM)⁵². Only 14 countries have fully independent public broadcasters: Sweden, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Denmark, Latvia, Finland, Ireland, Austria, Czechia and Estonia.

3.10.2 The EESC calls on the European Commission to ensure a strict and timely implementation and enforcement of the European Media Freedom Act to ensure the managerial independence of PSM, as well as the long-term sustainability of its funding. Operational independence and sustainable funding have a direct impact on the working conditions of PSM journalists.

3.10.3 The EESC supports the call of 14 EU Member States advocating for sustainable financial support for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and welcomes the decision for EU emergency support after the US government has halted its grant⁵³. RFR/RL can only play its crucial role of providing multi-lingual independent journalism to autocratic states if they aim to provide journalists with decent jobs and good working conditions.

3.11 Self-censorship

3.11.1 In a study commissioned by the Council of Europe⁵⁴, 37% of survey respondents from the 47 member states of the Council of Europe and Belarus claimed that 'unwarranted interference' affected the way they went about their work, with self-censorship a highly prevalent theme. 69% claimed that they had experienced psychological violence, mainly at the hands of public authorities. Psychological violence primarily included belittlement and humiliation by public

49 https://oshwiki.osha.europa.eu/en/themes/journalism-and-psychosocial-risk-factors#_edn31.

50 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2024>.

51 [Monitoring Media Pluralism in the European Union](#), 2025.

52 [Monitoring Media Pluralism in the European Union](#), 2025.

53 <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/filling-the-gap-left-by-rfe-rl/>.

54 <https://rm.coe.int/168070ad5d>.

authorities (48%), intimidation by public authorities (56%), threats of being hurt by public authorities (41%) and slandering or smear campaigning by public authorities (43%).

Brussels, 3 December 2025.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee
Séamus BOLAND
