



**MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE**

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM

MONITORING REPORT

2022

by EFJ – IPI – ECPMF

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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

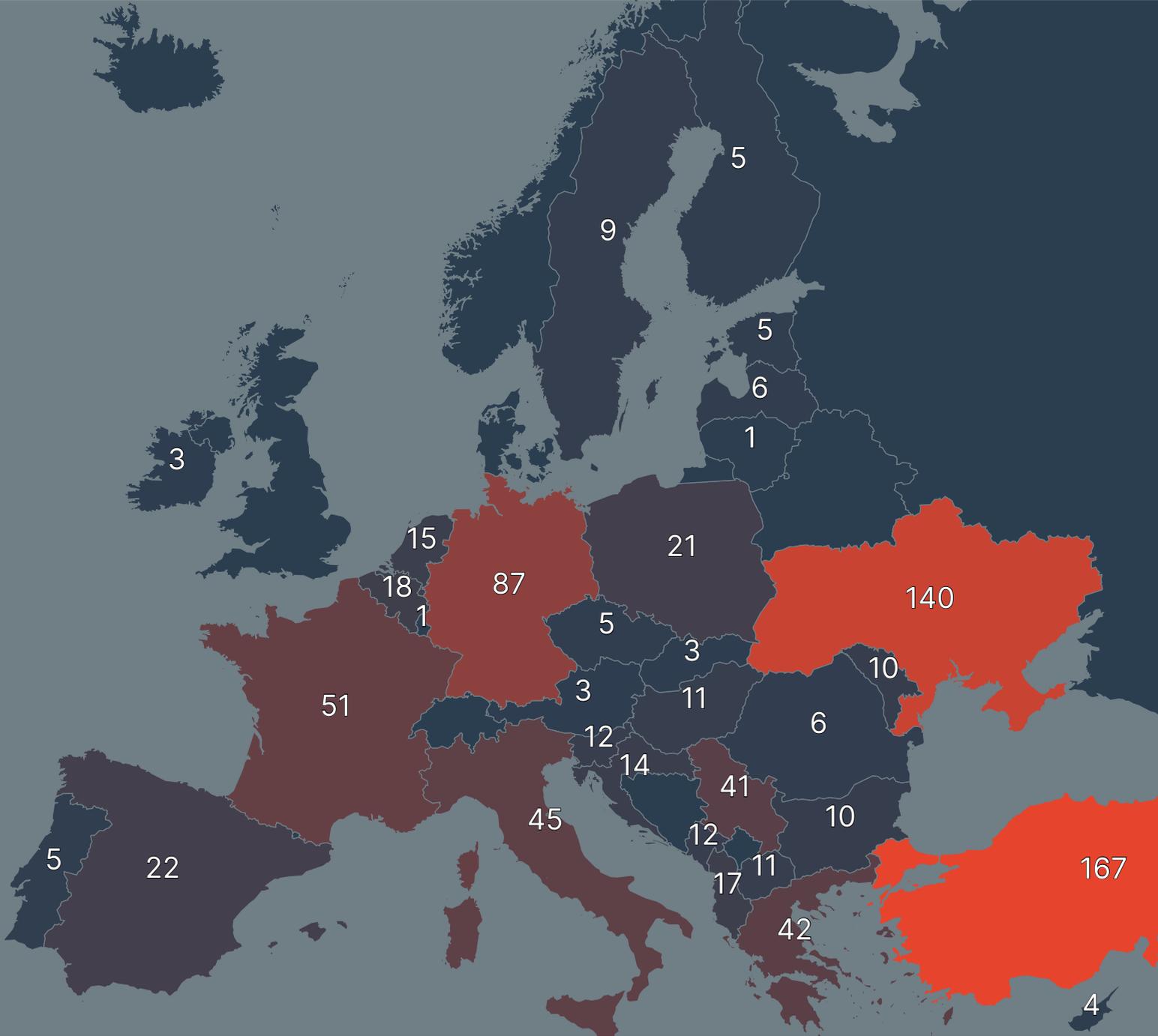
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MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM ALERTS

Introduction

Media freedom in Europe in 2022 was overshadowed by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February. During the first 10 months of the war, nine journalists lost their lives working on the ground, and many more were injured and attacked while reporting from front lines. The conflict has cast a dark shadow over press freedom in Europe, a continent where reporters were already facing attacks that hindered their ability to work freely.

From January 2022 until December, the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) recorded 813 media freedom violations in



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

EU Member States and candidate countries involving 1339 individuals or media outlets. In 2021, the MFRR recorded 654 alerts, although it must be noted that Ukraine and Moldova were only included in the 2022 report as they were not candidate countries the previous year.

The current monitoring report offers an overview of the media freedom situation across the EU and candidate countries in 2022, and it starts with a thematic chapter on the war in Ukraine and its repercussions on media freedom. The MFRR started monitoring the country immediately after the full-scale Russian invasion started in late February, and it recorded 140 media freedom violations, which amount to 17.2% of the total registered in all analysed countries in 2022.

However, concerns over the safety of journalists and media workers in the continent were not constrained to those professionals working in a war zone. In 2022, reporters across Europe faced many forms of pressure and attacks, ranging from death threats or having their phones hacked with spyware, to being targeted with vexatious lawsuits by private companies or prevented from accessing press conferences.

415 alerts were recorded in European Union Member States, while 398 were registered in candidate countries. In the EU, the main

type of incidents were verbal attacks (involving 42.4% of all alerts) – such as intimidation and threats (24.6%) or insults (13.3%) – followed by legal attacks (27.2%), to which this report dedicates an extensive chapter on the year that the European Commission put forward a proposal for an EU anti-SLAPP directive.

After legal incidents, physical attacks were the third most common type of attack against journalists and media workers in the EU (20.5%), followed by attacks to property (15.7%) – such as equipment (8.7%) – and censorship incidents, which rose from 8.6% of the total attacks in 2021 to 14.5% in 2022. Private individuals remained the main perpetrators of attacks against journalists in the EU (37.8% of cases), but that represented a decrease from 50% of cases in 2021. Government and public officials were the second most common source of attacks (17.1%), followed by police and state security (11.3%).

As for context of incidents, it is relevant to mention that while in 2021 protests were the most frequent place for journalists to be attacked (39.8%) – mostly those against COVID-19 measures or vaccination programmes – 2022 data shows that protests only accounted for 21% of the alerts, while attacks taking place online rose from 14.1% in 2021 to 20.7% in 2022. The current report dedicates its third thematic chapter to the

rise of these types of online incidents, such as insults on social media or phones being hacked to spy on journalists and their sources.

Additionally, a fourth thematic chapter focuses on the threats faced by journalists covering climate and environmental topics (12 alerts in the EU in 2022). In the past year, as these protests became more disruptive, journalists covering these actions were subjected to obstruction of their work, and, in some cases, suffered worrying legal consequences.

The Monitoring Report also covers the media freedom situation in candidate countries, where the MFRR registered the most severe violations of media freedom: 10 deaths of journalists. Nine of them took place in Ukraine and affected media workers covering the war, and another one in Turkey, where GÜNGÖR Arslan, managing editor of the Turkish newspaper *Ses Kocaeli* was murdered.

The report is divided into the following chapters: an overview offering data and

graphics about the press freedom situation in the EU and in candidate countries in 2022, four thematic sections with quantitative and qualitative analysis regarding the aforementioned topics, and country reports offering a summary of the most relevant threats in the following EU countries: Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden; and in the following candidate countries: Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey.

The report has been compiled by the International Press Institute (IPI), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), as part of the joint Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) project which monitors and supports journalists, media workers, and platforms that have been threatened. The project is funded by the European Commission. Past reports can be downloaded on the MapMF website, and the alerts for this report can be accessed through the Alert Explorer [here](#), which is constantly updated and collects and visualises all alerts documented by the monitoring partners. ■

Main types of attacks in EU Member States



Spotlight on the European Union

Journalists and media actors in European Union member states face several different types of attacks. Sometimes they even face several types of attacks at the same time, such as a verbal and a physical attack performed within the same incident by the same aggressor. This section shows how many alerts involved a certain type of attack. The types of attacks are grouped into five main categories with detailed information provided below.

Physical: In 1 out of 5 incidents (20.5%, 85 alerts), media actors were physically attacked. In 20 incidents (4.8%) media actors were injured.

Verbal: In more than 4 out of 10 incidents (42.4%, 176 alerts), media actors were verbally abused. This includes intimidation/threats (24.6%, 102 alerts), insult/abuse (55 alerts), discrediting (31), harassment (13), sexual verbal harassment (5), and bullying/trolling (3) targeting media actors.

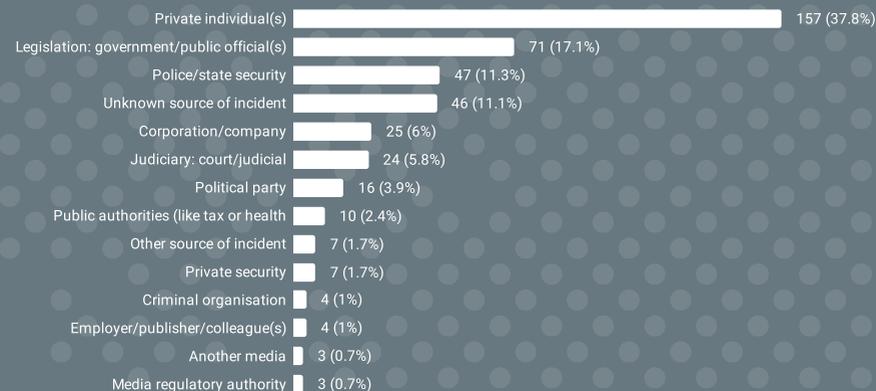
Property: In more than 1 out of 7 incidents (15.7%, 65 alerts), property was attacked. This includes equipment (36 alerts), attacks to general property like cars or houses (14), hacking/DDoS attacks (12), or personal belongings (4).

Legal: In more than 1 out of 4 incidents (27.2%, 113 alerts),

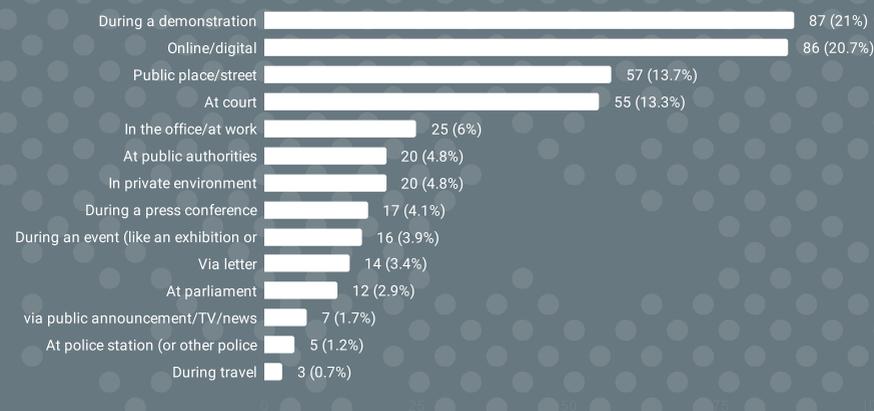
media actors faced legal consequences. This includes, amongst others, civil lawsuits (29), criminal charges (27), legal measures like laws restricting press and media freedom (16), and arrest/detention/imprisonment (12).

Censorship: In more than 1 out of 7 incidents (14.5%, 60 alerts), media actors faced censorship. This includes, amongst others, blocked access to information (e.g. blocked websites or no answers to enquiries) (27 alerts), arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration (including blocked access to events or press conferences) (20 alerts), disinformation (5), journalistic work not being published (5), or commercial interference (3).

Sources of attacks in EU Member States



Contexts of attacks in EU Member States



Source: mappingmediafreedom.org

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2022 and 31/12/2022 for European Union member states, based on the documentation status of 25/01/2023. 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.

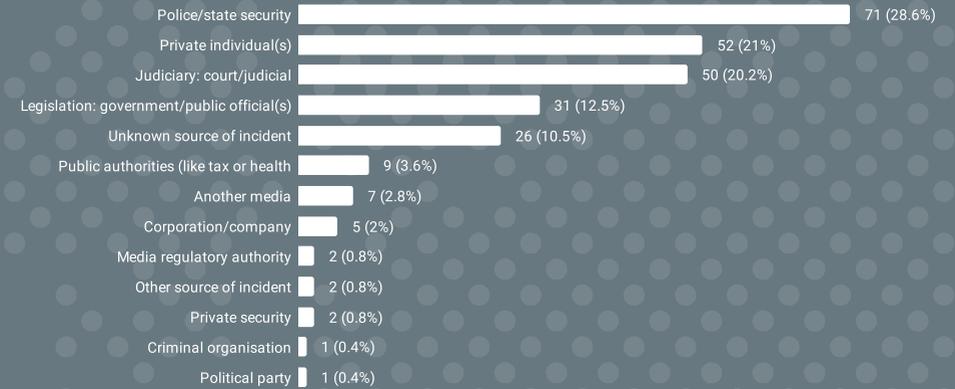
Main types of attacks in EU candidate countries*



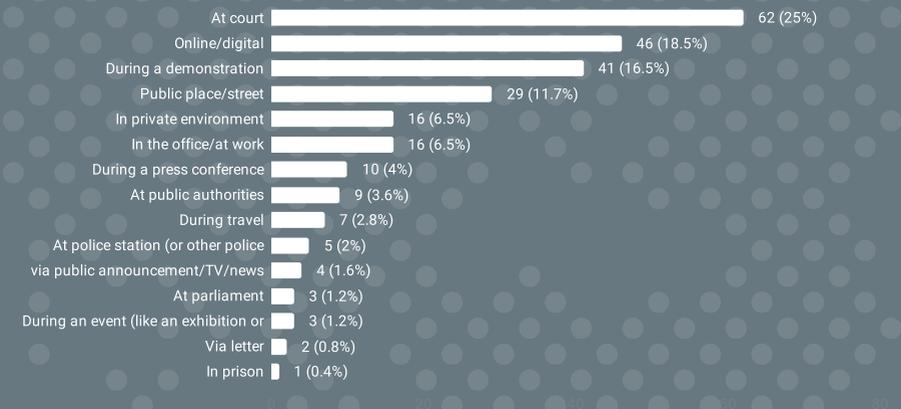
Spotlight on Candidate Countries

Graphs offer an overview of the main types of attacks that took place in states that had the status of candidate countries to the EU throughout 2022. They therefore do not include data from Ukraine, monitored by the MFRR from the start of the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022 and for which there is a separate graph and chapter of the report. Graphs also do not cover Moldova – monitored by the MFRR from June when it became a Candidate Country – or Bosnia, which became a Candidate Country in December and will start to be systematically monitored by MFRR in 2023.

Sources of attacks in EU candidate countries



Contexts of attacks in EU candidate countries



Source: mappingmediafreedom.org

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2022 and 31/12/2022 for European Union candidate countries, based on the documentation status of 25/01/2023. One incident and thus alert 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.

Thematic Analysis



Irpyn bridge – day 37 of russian invasion to Ukraine (1 April 2022)
Photo: Andriy Dubchak / Dobas Frontliner

War in Ukraine

Media freedom in Ukraine faced the greatest crisis in the country's modern history in 2022. Russia's full-scale invasion in February posed existential threats to the future of Ukrainian journalism and the country's democratic system. Russia's war of aggression also took a deadly toll on journalists and media workers covering the war from the front lines, making 2022 the deadliest year for journalists in Europe in many decades. The killings, threats, and pressures facing the media in Ukraine have cast a dark shadow over press freedom in Europe and brought into focus the devastating effect war has on journalism.

The MFFR began monitoring Ukraine as soon as the invasion began on 24 February 2022. During the reporting period, Ukraine officially became a candidate country for the European Union in June 2022. During the 10

months of 2022 in which the MFRR recorded alerts in Ukraine, the MapMF platform documented [140 attacks and violations of media freedom involving 220 different targets](#). The majority of these alerts (60.7%) were documented during the first three months of the conflict, with attacks persisting through the summer but then steadily decreasing in autumn. Overall, journalists and reporters were attacked in 65% of the recorded cases, while photographers and camera operators accounted for 25% of alerts, and media outlets/broadcasters a further 22.8%.

Nine Journalists and media workers, both Ukrainian reporters and international correspondents, are confirmed to have been killed in the line of duty or as part of their journalistic work in Ukraine in 2022, according to MFRR monitoring partners: [Ihor Hudenko](#), [Yevheniy Sakun](#), [Brent Renaud](#),

Main types of attacks in Ukraine



[Pierre Zakrzewski](#), [Oleksandra Kuvshynova](#), [Oksana Baulina](#), [Maks Levin](#), [Mantas Kvedaravičius](#), and [Frédéric Leclerc-Imhoff](#). Five were killed by gunfire, three by shelling, and one in unconfirmed circumstances. In some cases, there is evidence that Russian troops targeted the journalists and their crews despite clear PRESS insignia on vehicles or safety gear. In others, MFRR partners were unable to independently identify the source of the fire. All of these killings occurred during the first four months of the conflict when fast-changing frontlines exposed war reporters to the most serious physical harm.

There is partial evidence that at least three more Ukrainian journalists and media workers may have been killed or executed by Russian troops in occupied territory in apparent connection to their profession, though these cases have not yet been verified and the motive remains unclear. Further investigations by Ukrainian authorities are

needed to confirm the details. The data of the MFRR partners excludes Ukrainian journalists who were killed while fighting in the military and Ukrainian journalists who were killed in their homes during indiscriminate Russian shelling of Kyiv and other cities.

MapMF data shows that the first three months of the war were by far the most dangerous. In total, 60.7% of all documented attacks occurred between February 24 and May 24. Overall, this includes 21 cases of domestic and foreign journalists in Ukraine suffering serious [injuries](#) since the start of the war due to shelling, airstrikes, or gunfire from military forces. An additional 30 cases were documented in which reporting crews or individual journalists were physically attacked, including being caught in artillery fire or being shot at but [escaping unharmed](#). In addition, at least eight journalists were [kidnapped or abducted](#), with some undergoing torture and other abuses at the hands

of Russian soldiers before being released or transferred to detention centres. Overall, physical attacks made up almost half (47.1%) of all documented alerts (66), and military forces were assessed to be the source of 37.1% of all documented alerts in 2022.¹

Journalists reporting from or near the front lines of the war were unsurprisingly at most risk. In total, 53.6% of all documented media freedom violations occurred within an active warzone, while a further 7.9% occurred while journalists were travelling between locations or on their way to or from the front lines. Online attacks against journalists made up a further 18.6% of documented cases, as Ukrainian journalists became the target of threats and intimidation from anonymous people, often sending emails or messages from Russian territory, over their reporting on the war. The MFRR also [documented 13 cases](#) of Ukrainian media outlets facing cyber-attacks, including distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, often attributed to Russian hackers. In the 90 alerts involving individual journalists or media workers in which the gender was known, male journalists were involved in 70 alerts (77.8%) and women journalists in 30 alerts (33.3%).²

Some cases were documented in Ukraine that were not linked to the war, including the [beating](#) of four journalists and media workers by Ukrainian law enforcement officials as they were reporting on a protest. While the vast majority of media freedom violations recorded in 2022 were attributed to Russian military forces, the Ukrainian authorities were responsible for some cases. These involved wartime restrictions on the press, including the [revocation of accreditation](#) for journalists who allegedly broke rules on operating in combat areas in reporting on the recapture of Kherson, and the [merging of all nationwide TV channels](#) into a single government-run service. Media freedom groups have also raised concern over a bill which would [hand the national regulator powers](#) to invalidate online news outlets' registrations, issue fines against them, and shut them down without a court order.

While overall 2022 has been a devastating year for media freedom, the country's media sector remains afloat. While the war drags on and an end to hostilities does not appear in sight, safety, financial, and psychological pressures on Ukrainian journalists remain intense. However, the country's journalistic community has also won acclaim across the world for the courage shown in rising to the challenge of covering the war in their home country. ■



Photo: Ro Ma / Pixabay

Abusive legal actions against journalists and media outlets

In 2022, the MFRR partners documented [237 legal incidents](#) against 388 different media actors, including arrests and detentions of journalists and civil and criminal lawsuits. 113 of these press freedom violations were registered in the European Union and 124 in candidate countries. The EU Member States where the highest number of legal incidents were registered were Greece (21), France (15), Spain (12), and Italy (11). Turkey (89) was the candidate country with the most recorded legal incidents in 2022, illustrating the severity of the ongoing crackdown on all forms of independent media ahead of the 2023 election. The threats posed to media freedom across Europe by legal actions, including Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and abusive lawsuits continued to crystallise in 2022.

In the last year, the MFRR partners documented at least 47 vexatious lawsuits and threats of proceedings against journalists:

[39 in European Union Member States](#) and [eight in candidate countries](#). These included both civil and criminal lawsuits. Many journalists were sued by powerful or wealthy individuals aiming to silence legitimate public interest journalism and investigative reporting. Many lawsuits were filed as an act of retribution for damaging revelations, while others appeared to have been filed in an effort to financially destroy an individual journalist or slowly drain funding from a media outlet.

France emerged as a particular area of concern in this area in 2022. A [controversial gagging order](#) issued against Mediapart raised major concerns over censorship and media freedom. Other cases included frivolous defamation [claims](#) against Le Monde Diplomatique by Bolloré Africa Logistics, a [lawsuit](#) against La Tribune by Italian ship-builder Fincantieri, and [three separate lawsuits](#) against ASI, Mediapart, and Reflets by

1 The Ukraine War Tracker by the International Press Institute has identified that the Russian military was responsible for 94.3% of all violations against journalists and media perpetrated by armed forces in Ukraine during the conflict.

2 It must be noted that some alerts track more than one person being attacked at the same time. A number of those include both men and women, which is the reason why one alert can be counted as affecting both male and female journalists, and therefore the overall percentage is over 100%.

Avisa Partners. French telecom company Altice, owned by Switzerland-based businessman Patrick Drahis, as well as companies owned by the group, were responsible for the other three alerts.

Italy moved further onto the radar for SLAPPs after the formation of a new hard-right government led by the Fratelli d'Italia Party and Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in October. In addition to the continuation of a previous lawsuit filed by Meloni against journalist and writer Roberto Saviano, the new PM also initiated a [lawsuit](#) against Emiliano Fittipaldi, one of Italy's best-known investigative reporters and the editor of the left-wing daily newspaper Domani over an article written on 19 October 2021, regarding an alleged abuse of office.

SLAPPs also remained a concerning issue in Greece. The [most prominent SLAPP](#) was filed by Grigoris Dimitriadis, the nephew and former General Secretary in the office of the Prime Minister, who stepped down shortly after investigative media outlets published revelations about his connections with a spyware company. The [lawsuit](#) was filed against newspaper Efimerida ton Syntakton (EFSYN), Reporters United, and their reporters Nikola Leontopoulos and Thodoris Chondrogiannos, and freelance financial journalist Thanasis Koukakis, who was himself surveilled by Predator spyware. Fotini Lampridi and her media outlet tvxs.gr were targeted in [civil and criminal defamation lawsuits](#) by the former Vice President of UNICEF Hellas in Greece; and Thodoris

Chondrogiannos was [targeted in a SLAPP](#) by a recycling company. These claims included disproportionate demands for financial compensation.

While some vexatious lawsuits resolved in 2022 resulted in the cases being dismissed by a court or judge, a handful of cases ended in the journalists or media outlets being found guilty and ordered to pay damages. The most worrying examples here occurred in Poland. In October, Polish journalist and writer [Piątek](#) was initially sentenced to eight months of community service after losing a defamation trial in a SLAPP case, while in May a court found investigative journalist [Grzegorz Rzeczkowski](#) guilty of defamation in a lawsuit involving a series of articles he wrote for Polityka. Outside the EU, in November the Crime and Corruption Investigative Network (KRIK) in Serbia was [found guilty of defamation](#) by a judge over a report it published about evidence presented in court involving the Interior Minister, which was widely condemned as a SLAPP.

Though much rarer, journalists and media outlets in some EU countries faced threats of criminal prosecution linked to their work. Worrying cases were documented in Greece, including the arrest warrant issued against journalist [Petros Kousoulos](#), criminal charges filed against photojournalist [Nikos Pilos](#), and the [serious criminal charges](#) brought by a special court against four Greek journalists and publishers linked to their investigative reporting on the Novartis scandal. Another prominent case in the EU

involved criminal charges against [Alin Cris-tea](#), Editor-in-Chief of the local online news outlet debrăila.ro in Romania. The charges against him were later dropped.

In addition to civil and criminal lawsuits, the MFRR also documented 64 cases involving the arrest, detention, or imprisonment of journalists in the EU and Candidate Countries. 40 of these alerts were recorded in Turkey, which remains by far the most problematic country in Europe for criminal prosecution and imprisonment of journalists, with [41 currently in jail](#). 22 out of all 29 convictions journalists recorded in 2022 were in Turkey, which was also the country where the highest number of legal incidents were registered (89).

Inside the EU, 12 cases of unjustified arrests of journalists and media workers were [documented](#) in nine Member States in 2022. Arrests of those covering environmental protests and demonstrations remained the main context. Problematic examples included the arrests of Spanish journalist [Joanna Giménez](#) and a photojournalist colleague as they covered a protest by environmental activists at the Prado Museum in Madrid; the arrest of Swedish journalist [Markus Jordö](#) while he covered a climate demonstration in Stockholm; and the detention of [two Italian journalists](#) as they reported on a climate protest by environmental activists at an airport near Rome. In the vast majority of cases, the journalists were quickly released and police did not press charges. The MFRR did not document any cases of journalists in the

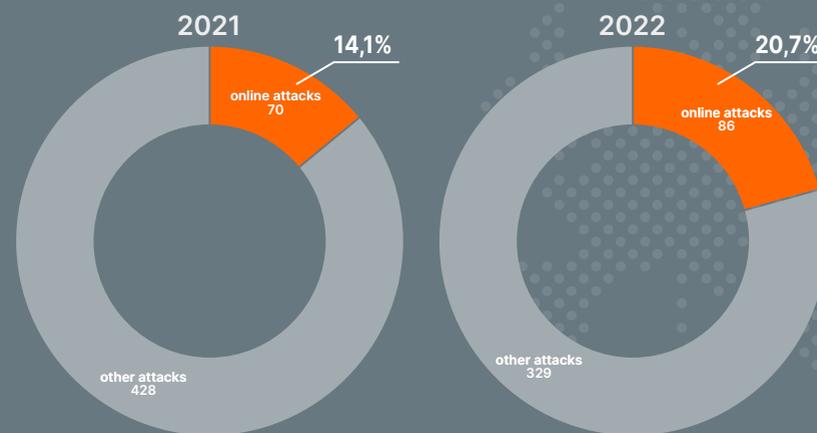
EU being sentenced to imprisonment due to their journalism in 2022.

Overall, the figures on legal threats documented in 2022 further underscore the need for the decriminalisation of defamation laws, a strong anti-SLAPP directive by the European Union, and other measures at national level which would protect journalists and media from unfounded lawsuits. Figures about detentions of journalists also illustrate the need for additional training for police about the role and rights of journalists and photojournalists reporting from protests and demonstrations. ■



Photo: Sora Shimazaki / pexels.com

Online attacks in the EU



Online attacks

During 2022, the MFRR recorded 158 online attacks, [86 of which took place in the EU](#) and [72 in candidate countries](#). They affected 261 journalists and media outlets.

2022 saw a rise in online attacks against journalists and media workers in the European Union. While in 2021 online attacks made up 14.1% of all attacks in EU member states (and were far behind protests, which accounted for the context where 39.8% of incidents happened), in 2022 online attacks rose to 20.7%, almost on par with protests (21.0%). One out of five recorded incidents happened online.

The MFRR recorded 86 alerts in EU member states from January to December involving online attacks, ranging from harassment to disinformation campaigns. A large majority of cases were classified as [verbal abuse](#) or online harassment (73.3%, 63 alerts). Of

those, the most common subtypes registered involved intimidation and threats (37 alerts), followed by discrediting (19) and insults (14). While online attacks affected journalists all over the EU, the MFRR registered the most cases in Greece (11), Italy (9), and the Netherlands (9).

In Italy, out of the nine online attacks that took place in 2022, nearly half were linked to the far-right. Paolo Berizzi was the first reporter in the country to need round-the-clock police protection for his investigations into right-wing extremism, for which he received [death threats online](#). In August, journalist Antonella Napoli revealed that she had received [rape and death threats](#) following the publication of an article criticising racial hatred instigated by the far-right. The same month, journalist Karima Moual received [insults and death threats](#) from a self-proclaimed right-wing Facebook account,

identifying as a supporter of Giorgia Meloni, leader of the national-conservative political party Brothers of Italy and current Prime Minister of the country. Moual is well-known for her reporting on immigration, complexity of integration, and minority rights.

In Romania, journalist Emilia Sercan [became the target of a smear campaign](#) after investigating how Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă had plagiarised his doctoral thesis.

In the EU, there was also a rise in online attacks against property, including 11 cases recorded by the MFRR involving [hacking attacks and Distributed Denial-of-Service \(DDoS\)](#). Investigative media outlet [Inside Story's](#) website was slowed down and sometimes inaccessible to the readers as a result of a DDoS attack in July, after the publication of an investigation into Turkish businessman Yasam Ayavefe. No one

claimed the attack. Following an investigation on the same topic, the [Balkan Investigative Reporting Network \(BIRN\)](#) and the [media outlet Solomon](#) were attacked by an unknown source. Both websites were temporarily suspended. In this case too, no one claimed the attack.

The MFRR platform also recorded 5 cases linked to online surveillance of journalistic data in the EU. In Spain, [four journalists](#) connected to the Catalan pro-independence movement were reported to have had their mobile phones infected with the Pegasus or Candiru spywares. Earlier in the year, famous Spanish journalist Ignacio Cembrero was revealed to have been a [potential target of surveillance](#) using the Pegasus spyware. It is not known whether the spyware infected his device. In Greece, Documento [published an investigation](#) showing that at least

six people connected to the media had been targeted by the Predator spyware.

In the EU, one out of three online attacks (33.7%, 29 alerts) were performed by [private individuals](#) (29). For a considerable amount (30.2%, 26 alerts), the perpetrator of the attack was [unknown](#). However, the MFRR recorded several cases in which [government and public officials](#) were the source of online threats (18). In Latvia, a Member of Parliament from the right-wing party "National Alliance" [insulted a journalist on Twitter, calling her a "political prostitute"](#). In Slovakia, Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the country Igor Matovič [attacked and smeared the editor of newspaper Denník N, Matúš Kostolný](#), in a post published on Facebook. The post came as a reaction to an opinion piece by Kostolný about Matovič and his political party, to which Matovič reacted by calling the editor "a disgrace".

[Companies and corporations](#) were at the source of 5 alerts regarding online attacks in the European Union. In April 2022, [Facebook blocked two posts from the media outlet Euractiv](#), which were describing Meta's fight against EU data legislation.

While the MFRR registered online attacks against men and women journalists, it is important to mention that all registered cases where the online attack included sexual harassment were targeting women. Additionally, women journalists have a higher

probability of suffering online harassment. While verbal online attacks against men only accounted for 14.2% of the total of attacks suffered by this group, for women they represented 28.4% of the total. In Sweden, TV presenter and journalist [Welmoed Sijtma](#) raised the alarm on the risks of using technology to denigrate journalists and media workers, based on a personal experience her image had been used to create deep fake porn videos. In Italy, journalist Lucia Piemontese, Deputy Director of the newspaper Quotidiano l'Attacco [received multiple sexist and misogynistic attacks related to her work](#). One message she received said a video with "explicit content" that would concern her would be released. Most messages aimed to delegitimise her work in the hope she would stop reporting on certain topics.

Attacks were not always directed towards the journalists or media companies directly; close family members of journalists were targeted on 5 [occasions](#) and the same happened to their sources: some were [threatened with death](#) or were the targets of [spyware attacks](#). In Poland, the daughter of TV anchor Tomasz Lis, [received death threats over the phone](#).

The MFRR platform reported 72 online attacks in candidate countries in 2022. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia strongly impacted the figures related to online violations in candidate countries, with 25 alerts identified by MFRR in Ukraine during the year. Cases in Ukraine included targeted on-

line harassment, threats, hacking, and disinformation. Additionally, it must be noted that disinformation campaigns linked to the war not only affected Ukraine but [also other countries in Europe](#). Campaigns emanated from Russia and were part of a propaganda operation to promote the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine.

In Serbia (13 alerts regarding online attacks), [daily newspaper Danas'](#) staff and the Editor-in-Chief Dragoljub Petrovic received violent anonymous emails, in which they could read that "salvos of bullets" could be fired at them and it could "end up" in an attack such as the one at Charlie Hebdo's office in 2015, in which twelve people were murdered.

The chance of online threats turning into physical violence is underlined by the Turkish case of a journalist from Sokak Kedisi TV Uzun Oruç and cameraman Barış Oruç,

[who were attacked by armed assailants](#) after they had received thousands of threats through social media. They had recently published an episode on the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli. Uzun Oruç underlined that they were openly targeted on social media by a number of MHP officials and that the majority of the threats under social media posts were leading to accounts related to an ultra-nationalist group called "grey wolves". Turkey registered 22 alerts regarding online attacks in 2022.

Therefore, it must be noted that online violence is often the first step that can lead to physical violence, and the common narrative normalising online insults and threats against journalists and media workers has to be challenged as it can have severe physical and psychological consequences for the journalists and media workers targeted. ■



Photo: H. Hach / Pixabay

Environmental reporting

During 2022, the MFRR recorded 17 incidents that took place while journalists were covering environmental issues, such as reporting on climate protests or investigating pollution in cities. Of those, [12 took place in EU Member States](#) and [5 in candidate countries](#). Types of attacks related to environmental reporting vary, and range from physical assault to verbal abuse or arrest.

In the EU, half of the cases (6) happened while journalists were [covering protests and demonstrations](#). As for perpetrators of environmental reporting alerts, the MFRR identified police and state security as being the source of alerts in 5 cases. In Germany, the police tried to intimidate journalist Danni Pilger while he was covering a co-organised Extinction Rebellion and Letzte Generation protest in Berlin. They [stopped, searched, and harassed](#) him and he was held for about 60 minutes.

In France, three journalists [were asked by the police to stop recording interviews](#) with activists blocking Total's General Assembly in Paris. In Italy, [two journalists were held for four hours](#) after having been arrested alongside activists at Rome airport during a climate protest, even after showing their accreditations.

[Flammans journalist Noa Söderberg and Getty freelance photojournalist Jonas Gratzer](#) were covering a climate protest in Stockholm when the police arrested them, allegedly in accordance with section 13 of the police act to „prevent criminal activities“. Two months later, journalist Markus Jordö was also [detained for six hours](#) by the Stockholm police, and his equipment was confiscated. He was covering an action by a group of activists that were blocking a motorway, reporting for the public broadcaster STV. In both cases, the Swedish Union of Journalists (Journalistförbundet) blamed a

lack of knowledge and understanding of the work of journalists by the authorities.

In the EU, private companies were registered as the perpetrators of environmental reporting attacks in 3 cases. In Poland, TVN24 and Fakty TVN teams were [excluded from a press conference](#) held by the energy association Towarzystwo Gospodarcze Polskie Elekrownie, while other journalists were not allowed to record it. In Germany, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) was [denied accreditation](#) for the opening of Elon Musk's new Tesla plant, one of the most important industrial projects in Eastern Germany, whose impact on regional biodiversity was at the centre of a ZDF investigative report in 2021. In written correspondence with Tesla, ZDF was told that the broadcaster, „due to earlier reporting by the investigative magazine Frontal 21“, was no longer enjoying „trust“ from Tesla. The ZDF team was therefore only able to report from outside the premises.

Some of these cases reached the courts. In Spain, [journalist Joanna Giménez and a photojournalist were arrested](#) as they tried to cover a protest by environmental activists at the Prado Museum in Madrid. Giménez was held in detention overnight and charged by the National Police for property damage, damage to historical heritage, and disturbance of public order. The photojournalist, whose name was not published, was also held overnight and charged with the same three offences.

In France, freelancer [Grégoire Souchay](#) was on trial as his press credentials were not taken into account while he was covering an activists' action and the authorities decided

that he would be prosecuted as an activist. In Germany, journalist Marco Brás Do Santos was [found guilty of trespassing](#) in a trial initiated by the energy company Mitteldeutsche Braunkohlengesellschaft (MIBRAG), after he had covered an action by activist group Ende Gelände in late 2019.

In candidate countries, the MFRR recorded five alerts linked to environmental reporting, ranging from physical assaults to intimidation. In Turkey, two journalists who were investigating a lead related to imported waste treatment across an Industrial Recycling Plant in the southern Turkish city of Adana were [assaulted by a group of workers](#) from the companies Akbulut Recycling and Akgöl Recycling. The injuries sustained by the journalists required treatment in hospital.

In Serbia, the MFRR reported two cases of intimidation attempts. In June, four journalists investigating environmental pollution in Bosilegrad were [assaulted by the director and several employees of the mine](#) they were doing a report on, who threw rocks at them and their equipment. In July, editor Dragomir Blagojević received [anonymous death threats](#) on the phone following the publication of an article on the logging industry.

In April, three employees of the news portal soinfo.org were [charged with misdemeanour](#) after covering an action by activists protesting against the Rio Tinto company's plan to open a lithium mine in western Serbia. In May, 021.rs's portal journalist Dragan Prica Kovacevic was [asked to leave an open trial](#) against Dragana Arsic, an activist from "Let's Defend the Forests of Fruska Gora". ■

Country Reports

This chapter provides deeper insights into the press freedom situation in selected countries. Monitoring is performed systematically and relies on diverse sources, including established networks across countries, individuals reporting directly through ReportIt, and through the use of an innovative tool based on Artificial Intelligence detecting reported press freedom violations in news articles and Tweets. To interpret the media freedom situation of a country it is important to take into account that reporting of alerts might vary slightly between states due to different conceptions of what constitutes a severe media freedom violation. The goal of the MFRR is to identify violations and trends in all countries, and therefore it is important to analyse topics and countries quantitatively but also qualitatively.

European Union

Belgium

🔔 18 / 👤 23³



The MFRR recorded 18 alerts for Belgium involving 23 journalists and media outlets. Like in France and Germany, during the first half of the year media professionals in Belgium were the target of physical and verbal abuse, including death threats from opponents of government measures to combat the spread of the [Coronavirus](#). The second half was marked by violence against TV crews covering the outbursts in Brussels that followed the Belgium-Morocco football game during the 2022 World Cup. At least four teams of journalists working for RTBF, VRT, RTL, and VTM Nieuws were [punched, hit by fireworks in the face, pelted with stones, and had their equipment destroyed and stolen](#) by individuals.

Cases of verbal abuse remained a concern with 11 serious cases registered. They include online harassment against female journalists, insults, discrediting, and intimidation practices. Two of the most severe cases involved two prominent journalists. De Morgen's Samira Atillah faced [death threats](#) of racist and misogynistic nature: she received anonymous calls, as well as messages and photos with sexual content. Journalist Safia Kessas, responsible for diversity and equality at the public broadcaster RTBF, received police protection after she was targeted by an [online harassment campaign](#) on social media as she prepared to host a debate with the American feminist writer Angela Davis.

Journalists working on political issues were also highly exposed. Polsat EU correspondent Dorota Bawolek was targeted by a [smear campaign](#) fueled by Poland's state broadcaster TVP, which resulted in numerous hate messages sent on social media.

The harassment was connected to video footage of an interview that Bawolek was filming in Brussels for Polsat TV with Donald Tusk, the leader of the Civic Platform. In Flanders, editorialist Kurt Vandemaele discovered [Flemish flags planted in his garden](#) in the morning of the Belgian National Day, while in Wallonia, a local politician threatened L'Avenir journalist Caroline Viatour [with legal action](#) and pressured the publisher to stop investigating suspected financial malpractice surrounding a local festival.

Estonia

🔔 5 / 👤 9



The MFRR recorded 5 alerts in Estonia involving 9 targets. The war in Ukraine heavily impacted Estonia, one of Russia's closest neighbours. On 24 February, the first day of the war in Ukraine, the Consumer Protection and Technical Regulatory Authority (TTJA) in Estonia [ordered the closure](#) of broadcasting services of four Russian TV channels and one Belarusian TV channel. The TTJA decision was based on the grounds that the channels allegedly disseminated propaganda of the Russian government.

In April, journalists Tarmo Vahter and Sulev Vedler, working for the media Eesti Ekspress, [were fined by](#) the Harju County Court judge after the publication of an article revealing that the Office of the Prosecutor General was investigating Swedbank Estonia. They were fined for disclosing information about criminal proceedings without the approval of the prosecutor's office.

Additionally, anti-COVID-19 measures protests were still organised at the beginning of the year. One of the biggest incidents of 2022 took place when Postimees journalist Sander Punamäe was covering one of these protests. The protest was held in Tallinn, the country's capital, by the ultra-traditionalist leader and jurist Varro Vooglaid. There, the reporter [faced public humiliation, was called a liar and a propagandist, and had to leave the premises](#). On the same day, Estonian far-right Conservative National Party (EKRE) MPs Peeter Ernits and Urmas Reitelmann targeted Punamäe online. In a post published on his profile, MP Ernits called Punamäe a ["propagandist"](#) and said that „propaganda should be thrown out the door.”

France

🔔 51 / 👤 77



The MFRR recorded 51 alerts involving 77 individuals and media outlets in the country in 2022. The most common type of incidents in France were verbal attacks (22 alerts, 43.1%), which included intimidation and threats (17 alerts) and insults and abuse towards journalists (5), amongst others. For the majority of these cases, private individuals were the perpetrators.

While many of these verbal incidents took place during demonstrations or on the street, verbal abuse online remained at a consequential level. [Fact-checkers and journalists](#) Julien Pain, Tristan Mendes (France Info), and Rudy Reichstadt (founder

³ 🔔 Number of alerts / 👤 Number of individuals or media entities

of the website Conspiracy Watch) were insulted and threatened on Twitter. Libération journalist Pierre Plottu was directly [targeted by the social media influencer 'Papacito'](#) who, in a video, said he would have a discussion with him and that he would come „equipped“.

[Physical assaults](#) (21.6%, 11 alerts) – more than half of them (6) resulting in injuries – were an important feature recorded in the MFRR platform. Many of them took place while journalists were covering demonstrations, such as journalist [Zakaria Abdelkafi who was](#) wounded while covering a strike in Paris for the media Al-Arabiya.

The electoral campaign for the presidential and legislative elections, which took place over the months of April, May, and June 2022, resulted in five [incidents](#) ranging from physical assault to denial of accreditation. Several journalists were prevented from carrying out their watchdog role during the campaign. On 2 April, journalists from the independent media Blast, QG, and Reporterre were [refused access](#) to the only political rally Macron held during his election campaign. A week later, during a “Yellow Vests” protest, a journalist from Nouvel Obs [was fined while following „Yellow Vests“](#) supporters during the French election night. On 24 April, a far-right supporter [physically attacked](#) journalist Fany Boucaud from Radio France Bleu Creuse.

One of the most striking examples of legal incidents in the country concern three media outlets (Mediapart, Reflets, and ASI) which received threats from the firm Avisa

Partner and [eventually launched legal proceedings for defamation](#).

Germany

🔔 87 / 🗣️ 143



In 2022, the MFRR recorded 87 violations of media freedom in Germany involving 143 targets. While the number is lower than last year, it remains concerning, and it confirms a trend in the deterioration of press and media freedom in the country, especially when it comes to the coverage of demonstrations, an issue that was already prominent [last year](#).

The demonstrations against the COVID-19 pandemic measures marked 2022's landscape for the third year in a row together with the rise of the Monday-night demonstrations against the cost-of-living crisis. They are an important factor when it comes to harassment and abuse towards journalists and media workers. More than 2 out of 3 attacks against journalists in the country (69.0%, 60 alerts) took place during protests. In this context, the most common types of attacks were verbal abuse (32), physical attacks (30), and attacks to equipment (19).

Private individuals were the source of a vast majority of the attacks during demonstrations (47 attacks out of 60, 78.3%) followed by police and state security (9 out of 60, 15.0%). Journalists and media workers were regularly [intimidated](#) and [insulted](#), their [equipment hit](#), and they were [physically as-](#)

[saulted](#) during protests, often by Querdenken (Lateral Thinking) members, an anti-pandemic regulation movement. Two out of three incidents during demonstrations were related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hostile sentiment towards the press brought journalists and media workers to be accompanied by security, in an effort to reduce the number of attacks.

A large majority of the 2022 alerts were directed at individual journalists and media workers, but 9 incidents were directed at media companies. The MFRR also recorded 6 cases of arbitrary denial of accreditation to cover events and press conferences such as one in which [journalist Tobias Wolf was denied press accreditation](#) to cover a congress of the party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).

Accessing information held by public authorities was complicated in the country too. In June, the Tagesspiegel [lost a Freedom of Information dispute](#) with the German Chancellery, after the Berlin-Brandenburg Higher Administrative Court decided that the Chancellery did not have to provide information about past off-the-record meetings between Angela Merkel and journalists.

Greece

🔔 42 / 🗣️ 63



Press freedom in Greece continued its marked deterioration in 2022 amid a sprawling spyware scandal as well as several serious criminal charges and violent attacks on

journalists. MapMF recorded a total of 42 violations involving 63 persons or entities related to media. The safety of journalists remained a serious concern after multiple physical attacks.

[Legal cases](#) made up half (50%, 21 alerts) of the documented press freedom violations, including hefty financial demands filed by private individuals and public officials. In January, multiple journalists and publishers [were charged](#) as part of a major criminal probe in relation to their revelations about the Novartis scandal.

In April, investigative outlet Reporters United revealed that financial journalist Thanasis Koukasis was [spied on](#) in summer 2021 using the spyware tool Predator. As the situation unfolded, multiple other Greek journalists were allegedly [surveilled and monitored](#) in connection with the spyware scandal. In November, Greek newspaper Documento then reported that [numerous journalists](#), media owners and figures connected to the Greek media industry were among people to have been targeted using Predator. Journalists and newspapers who reported on spyware were also targeted with [lawsuits](#) and [criminal investigations](#).

Some of the most disturbing attacks on press freedom in the country involved makeshift bombs detonated in front of the homes of journalists [Aris Portosalte](#) and [Dimitris Kampourakis](#). In July, [a major arson attack](#) on the headquarters of Real Media Group claimed by an anarchist group further underscored concerns about the physical safety of journalists.

Several physical attacks towards journalists by the [Greek riot police](#) were also recorded, as well as by [private individuals](#). The arrest and serious criminal charges against photojournalist [Nikos Pilos](#) underscored further concern about [police actions](#). The ability of journalists to access information from state authorities [remained challenging](#), while some of those reporting on sensitive topics such as alleged pushbacks of migrants and refugees faced serious [online harassment](#).

Hungary

📍 11 / 🗣️ 13



Media freedom and pluralism in Hungary remained highly challenging in 2022. While MapMF recorded a total of 11 press freedom violations involving 13 targets, these alone do not capture the wider and systemic challenges facing independent media. Over half (54.5%) of the documented cases were legal incidents (6 alerts).

The ruling Fidesz party of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has overseen a systematic erosion of media pluralism in Hungary over the last decade, and used pandemic restrictions to hinder independent journalism. In January, the Hungarian government [passed a decree](#) which ensured journalists from independent news outlets could continue to be barred from reporting inside hospitals amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Traditional media capture tools used by Fidesz to undermine independent media continued. In November, the owner and

CEO of the Central Media Group in Hungary, Zoltán Varga, [was questioned](#) by the National Tax and Customs Administration (NAV) as part of an investigation into alleged budget fraud, sparking concern over pressure on the owner of the largest remaining independent news site, 24.hu. In April, Hungary's Media Council initially [blocked](#) the frequency license renewal of independent station Tilos Rádió. However, the license was eventually granted by the Fidesz-controlled regulator. Capture of media by vested interests continues to lead to [censorship](#)

While physical attacks and threats against journalists in Hungary overall were rarely reported, a few serious cases were documented in 2022. In July, veteran Formula 1 photographer Mark Thompson [was assaulted](#) by a trackside security guard as he was working at the Hungarian Grand Prix. In October, reporter Márk Móna from Hungarian private broadcaster Hír TV was [pushed off a platform](#) by a protester while he was speaking live from a protest in central Budapest. In November, a far-right extremist website published an opinion piece which suggested that all journalists at one of Hungary's leading independent news platforms, 444.hu, [could easily be beaten to death](#).

In 2022, Hungary was criticised for the lack of accountability for state surveillance of Hungarian journalists. In March, Hungary's National Data Protection and Freedom of Information Authority (NAIH) [launched an investigation](#) into Direkt36 journalist Szabolcs Panyi, claiming that he was illegally storing the telephone number of a secret service officer and was therefore carrying out ille-

gal data management. Panyi was one of the people targeted with Pegasus by state intelligence services. New revelations about monitoring of the press emerged in June, when investigative media outlet Direkt36 revealed that Hungarian diplomats working in EU countries had been [carrying out monitoring](#) on the visits of Hungarian journalists to foreign media outlets abroad.

Italy

📍 45 / 🗣️ 71



In Italy, verbal and physical attacks on journalists remained the most concerning threats to press freedom in 2022. MapMF recorded a total of 45 cases involving 71 attacked persons and entities related to the media. Anti-vaccine groups repeatedly [threatened journalists](#) over their reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic, and vandalised [property and offices](#) of several news outlets. Defamation lawsuits and SLAPPs also continued to pose major threats to media freedom.

After the outcome of the Italian elections in September, which led to the Italian far-right party Fratelli d'Italia forming a governing coalition, a number of Italian journalists [received serious death](#) and [rape threats](#). The daily newspaper Domani faced [lawsuits from Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni](#) and a serious [legal threat by the new defence minister, Guido Crosetto](#). In another major legal threat, in October a prosecutor in Lecce requested that three journalists be [jailed for six months](#) in connection with their factual

reporting on a labour lawsuit involving a former government minister, Teresa Bellanova.

[Attacks of private individuals](#) towards journalists made up nearly half (40%, 18 alerts) of the documented cases. Media personnel [were verbally abused, insulted, and threatened](#) online and in person for their reporting on several occasions. Threats escalated into physical violence when in April a camera operator of Rai2 was [physically attacked](#) by a local resident. In July, [demonstrators physically attacked](#) journalists in Rome and in October journalists of Canale 5 were [assaulted and robbed](#) while on assignment in Florence. In July, unidentified perpetrators [set fire](#) to a car owned by the partner of Informare H24 journalist Francesco Digiorgio, which the journalist believes was retaliation for his reporting.

Journalists reporting on the mafia and organised crime continued to face death threats and [intimidation](#). In March, a [letter with death threats](#) was addressed to journalist Maria Bertone, director of the newspapers Cronache di Napoli and Cronache di Caserta. It was allegedly sent on the order of Giovanni Cellulare, who is sentenced to life in prison and believed to be affiliated with the Casalesi clan.

Law enforcement confiscated journalists' phones and computers in [two disturbing cases](#), possibly violating the confidentiality between reporters and their sources. Reporting on sensitive issues such as the arrival of migrants and refugees from the Mediterranean continued to be met with [obstruction](#). In November, two Italian jour-

nalists were wrongfully [detained by police](#) as they covered a climate protest by environmental activists at the Ciampino Airport near Rome.

Poland

📍 21 / 🗣️ 28



The MFRR recorded 21 alerts involving 28 targets in Poland. Legal threats to journalists remained a grave concern in Poland in 2022, accounting for nearly half (42.9%) of the press freedom violations on MapMF registered in the country. Journalists were threatened with [defamation lawsuits](#), and in three cases the lawsuits [led to convictions](#).

[Access to information and arbitrary denial of accreditation](#) remained a major challenge, particularly for media perceived as opposition by the government. In an illustrative case in April and May 2022, a Freedom of Information request by newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza [was repeatedly rejected](#) by the Regional Prosecutor's Office in Krakow without legitimate justification.

In late December, Poland's broadcast media regulator KRRiT, which is widely seen as being controlled by allies of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, [opened an investigation](#) against television network TVN over a documentary it broadcasted, claiming that the documentary about the Smoleńsk air disaster „propagated false information” and „threatened public security”. TVN has long been targeted by the PiS-led government, and the investigation could lead to major

fines and even a revocation of TVN's broadcast licence.

Several relatives of investigative journalists reporting on the Pegasus spyware revelations became victims of spoofing and threats, and in January [family members of journalists were again harassed](#) in two disturbing attacks.

A migration crisis on the border of Belarus and Ukraine at the start of the year led to heightened tensions and multiple violations of media freedom. In January, an article from the Polish news outlet Onet was [reported to the police](#) by a far-right, pro-government institute for picturing migrant children in the yard of a border guard facility. In a serious case in March, TOK FM radio journalist Piotr Maślak was [charged by the military prosecutor's office](#) with defaming and insulting Polish Border Guard officers.

In a major case in February, Spanish journalist Pablo González, a freelancer working for multiple media outlets including newspaper Público, [was arrested](#) in Rzeszow, near the Ukrainian border, where he was reporting on the refugee movements sparked by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. González has been charged with conducting espionage for Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU. His pre-trial detention has been repeatedly extended. González faces up to ten years in prison under Polish law and is taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

Spain

📍 22 / 🗣️ 33



Serious defamation lawsuits, additional spyware surveillance revelations, and discriminatory fines given under the controversial “gag law” posed a serious threat to press freedom in Spain. In 2022, MapMF recorded a total of 22 press freedom violations involving 33 persons or entities related to media.

In April, it was revealed that at least four Catalan journalists had their [mobile phones targeted or infected](#) with Pegasus spyware, with extensive circumstantial evidence pointing to the Spanish intelligence bodies. Another case of possible surveillance came to light in May as it was reported that Spanish journalist Ignacio Cembrero was a target for potential surveillance [using Pegasus spyware](#), allegedly by the Moroccan intelligence or security services.

Journalists covering protests faced sporadic incidents of physical and verbal abuse from the public and [the police](#). In September, TVE freelance photojournalist [Lorena Sopena](#) was hit and her equipment was damaged during a pro-independence demonstration in Barcelona. In November, journalist Joana Giménez and a photojournalist [were arrested and charged](#) as they tried to cover a protest by environmental activists at the Prado Museum in Madrid. In April, journalist Jesús Rodríguez and photojournalist Victor Serri, both from Directa, were [detained and searched](#) by police officers from the Catalan police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra.

[Legal incidents](#) made up over half (54.5%) of recorded violations on MapMF. In February, energy company Iberdrola [filed a SLAPP lawsuit](#) of more than 17 million euros against Titania, the publisher of newspaper El Confidencial, for the coverage of the investigations into the alleged relations between the company and a convicted former police agent. Another lawsuit [was filed](#) by Francisco Serrano, the far-right Vox party's former candidate, against InfoLibre after they published an article about the politician and his business interests.

The Law on the Protection of Public Safety, also known as the “gag law”, continued to pose a serious threat to press freedom in Spain. In January, photojournalist Mireia Comas [was given a €601 fine](#) for refusing to remove a photo of a police checkpoint she took seven months earlier. In June, photojournalist Javier Bauluz [received a fine of €960](#) for “disrespecting an agent” and “refusing to identify himself” relating to an incident in November 2020, when Bauluz had been documenting the arrival of a rescue boat at the port in Arguineguín in Gran Canaria.

Sweden

📍 9 / 🗣️ 18



2022 was marked by the general elections: Sweden now has a coalition government backed by the far-right party Sweden Democrats. During 2022, the MFRR recorded 9 violations of media freedom in the country, involving 18 individuals and media outlets.

In the run up to the general election, the MFRR registered several media freedom incidents linked to far-right political parties. On 8 September, the far-right party Sweden Democrats (SD) [refused accreditation](#) to their election night's event to many national and international media outlets. The same party was at the root of [another violation](#) when their leader publicly said that he would like to play "journalists rugby", meaning pushing journalists.

In November, the Parliament voted through [a new law on foreign espionage](#) that came into force in 2023. The law, designed to

prevent spies from giving information about Swedish international cooperation, could have a negative effect on investigative journalists and their sources.

Three incidents reported on the platform were directed against the Turkish journalist Ahmet Dönmez, a former Ankara correspondent who used to work for the newspaper Zaman, now living in exile in Sweden. Dönmez, who had received [death threats](#) via WhatsApp, was also [physically assaulted](#) by unidentified people while he was driving his daughter to school, and had to be taken into intensive care.

Candidate countries

Albania

🔔 17 / 🗺️ 30



The MFRR recorded 17 alerts involving 30 targets. Physical violence and verbal attacks on journalists were the gravest threats to press freedom in Albania in 2022. Especially worrying was the number of incidents of police violence towards journalists, which was linked to 7 out of the 17 violations (41%) recorded on MapMF. Rhetoric towards journalists by the country's Prime Minister, Edi Rama, including calls for sending journalists asking critical questions for so-called "re-education" and [banning them from future press events](#) was worrying. Overall, the environment for independent and watchdog journalism or media pluralism remains challenging.

Albanian [police](#) were the perpetrator in 41.2% of the documented violations. In multiple disturbing cases, police [physically assaulted](#) journalists covering demonstrations. In January, Ledio Guni from the channel Fax News was hospitalised after [being assaulted](#) by police officers as he was filming a protest in Tirana. In addition, journalist Simon Shkreli was [forcibly obstructed](#) by police while filming a special forces operation in Shkodra, and in Tirana photojournalist Gent Shkullaku was confronted by police who confiscated his camera and [ordered him to delete photographs](#) of football hooligans clashing with police, claiming his photos were harming the country's image.

In November, investigative journalist for Report TV and Shqiptarja.com, Adriatik Doçi, was [physically attacked](#) by unidentified persons. Doçi was followed by several

people who reportedly hit him from behind with hard objects close to his apartment in the Albanian capital. Another journalist was [threatened by a man](#) allegedly linked to organised crime.

Various online media in Albania became [victims of cyberattacks](#) in January, after they published a tape of Tirana mayor Erion Veliaj speaking coarsely to local football officials in an alleged election scandal. Between July and September, Albanian state servers were targeted with multiple serious cyber-attacks. The Prosecutor's Office of Tirana [banned media from publishing](#) any data or information from the files hacked during the cyberattacks, threatening criminal sanctions and website blocking for those that violated the restriction.

Journalists covering high-profile public hearings of the vetting process of Elizabeta Imeraj, Head of the Tirana Prosecution Office, faced [intimidation](#), smear campaigns, [a defamation lawsuit](#), and discovered a [suspicious breach](#) of their personal data.

Journalists in Albania work in a restrictive climate for [accessing information](#) from government sources, and journalists viewed as representing "opposition" news outlets were [denied accreditation](#) or barred from asking questions at press conferences. These included journalist [Klevin Muka](#) of CNN affiliate A2 and [Ambriozia Meta](#) of Syri.net TV. [Proposed changes](#) to the law on Freedom of Information (FOI) published in October were criticised by international media freedom organisations.

North Macedonia

🔔 11 / 🗺️ 11



In 2022, MapMF documented 11 alerts for North Macedonia involving 11 individuals or media outlets. Following a trend across Europe, a vast majority of these incidents concerned cases of verbal attacks (9), including intimidation, followed by physical assaults (3) against press workers.

Insults and verbal threats were issued against journalists by [public officials](#), including insults against Macedonian journalists as a group, who were called "[prostitutes](#)" on Facebook by a Member of Parliament as a sign of dissatisfaction with media coverage of the start of EU accession negotiations in July 2022. Intimidation also came from the police who [summoned](#) journalist Sonja Kolevska-Delevska for a hearing in relation to an article published the month before. Another "[official conversation](#)" with the police was reported by journalist Vicky Klincharova as a "warning" following a complaint by a person who was cited in the journalist's article. In both cases, individuals dissatisfied with the media coverage managed to threaten the journalists through police officers who followed inappropriate procedures. A third alert documents wrong behaviour from a police officer who ended up damaging [24 Vesti TV reporter's camera](#). The journalist was not hurt.

Four reporters suffered violent physical assaults. Journalist Zoran Bozinovski was violently [attacked and beaten](#) outside his home by masked men. The assault left him hospi-

talised with an injured nose, a swollen eye and head injuries. TV24 cameraman was also insulted before being [hit in the head and in the neck](#) by the owner of a house (an ex-politician) the journalist was filming. Two more journalists working for the regional television in Polog were also insulted and pushed down the stairs, then [chased with an axe](#) while reporting from in an elementary school.

Turkey

📍 167 / 🗣️ 362



2022 was another devastating year for press freedom in Turkey, as systemic repression of independent media continued. MapMF recorded a total of 167 press freedom violations in Turkey, involving 362 persons or media entities. Turkey continues to be one of the biggest jailers of journalists in the world. At the time of publishing, [41 journalists](#) were imprisoned.

Journalists who report critically on the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) face arrest and prosecution. Meanwhile, growing physical assaults on journalists are contributing to a hostile and dangerous work environment. Pro-Kurdish media in particular face immense pressure due both to their journalistic work and their ethnicity.

In February, Güngör Arslan, the owner and managing editor of the local Ses Kocaeli newspaper, was [shot and killed](#) in front of his office. He wrote articles critical of Ersin Kurt, the former Kocaeli provincial president

of the far-right extremist group Grey Wolves, who ordered Arslan's murder to silence him.

[Legal persecution](#) was systematically used to silence independent media and critical journalists, accounting for more than half (53.3%, 89 alerts) of the documented cases. [Arbitrary detentions, imprisonment, deportations](#), and police raids made up nearly a quarter (24.0%, 40 alerts) of the documented cases for Turkey.

[Court convictions](#), including different types of terrorism charges, made up 13.2% of the recorded violations (22 alerts). Journalists were also regularly subjected to harassment campaigns and received threats of physical violence and death online.

Another major blow to press freedom came in October, when Turkey's parliament ratified a sweeping [new law](#) that would see those accused of spreading disinformation jailed for up to three years. As part of the same package law, online news portals are recognised as official news media, which also requires them to publish "corrections" issued by the authorities. Additionally, a directive titled the [„Press Morality Principles“](#) came into effect in July, allowing authorities to censor media content based on "morality", which would affect LGBTQ+ related reporting in particular.

Turkey's government-controlled media regulator, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), continued [sanctioning](#) media outlets and [blocked access](#) to their websites in a discriminatory manner. Turkish courts issued [access blocking orders](#) on

hundreds of news articles, and due to the large volume of these violations, not all of them could be recorded on MapMF. Following the Istanbul bomb attack in November, Turkish authorities [issued a media blackout order](#) and restricted access to social media.

Journalists in Turkey were often subjected to [physical violence by police](#) (21 cases with 66 targeted journalists), most (16 alerts with 59 targeted journalists) while covering [protests](#). From all of the cases of physical violence recorded on MapMF (33 alerts), nearly two third (63.6%) were perpetrated by police or state security. Women journalists were also [sexually assaulted and harassed by police](#).

Serbia

📍 41 / 🗣️ 60



MFRR recorded 41 alerts for Serbia involving 60 attacked persons or media outlets. The majority of these alerts concerned cases of [verbal attacks](#) (32 cases, 78.0%) taking place mainly [online](#) (13), [in the workplace](#) (5), or in public places such as while [covering demonstrations](#). The toxic environment in which journalists work remains a concern. Constantly fueled by politicians and other media outlets, the labelling of journalists as "traitors" or "enemies of the state" encourages and legitimises additional intimidation from the public.

Independent daily newspaper Danas was targeted at least five times by serious threats raising fears for the physical safe-

ty of the journalists working there. They included [insulting](#) and [threatening](#) messages on social media, as well as anonymous emails containing death threats referring to ["salvos of bullets"](#) that could be fired against journalists. This latest anonymous threat was taken very seriously by the authorities who provided permanent police security in front of the editorial offices in Belgrade. In addition, [two bomb threats were made within 10 days against the offices of Adria Media Group](#), where almost ten media outlets are located. They were false alarms but the buildings had to be evacuated. Two journalists, [Nenad Kulačin](#) and [Veran Matić](#), were intimidated with posters plastered in the streets of Belgrade and Vranje. They revealed personal residential addresses in the case of Kulačin and a photo with denigrating comments in the case of Matić.

With seven alerts, physical assaults were the second most frequent type of attack on journalists in Serbia. A total of ten journalists were assaulted while reporting from the field – three of them during [the EuroPride's march](#) in September 2022. Legal incidents followed with [two lawsuits against journalists](#) on defamation grounds and [one civil lawsuit for alleged violation of public order](#).

Conclusion

The 2022 MFRR Monitoring Report has analysed media freedom violations taking place in European Union Member States and in candidate countries. The year has been marked by the war in Ukraine, which has been covered in the first thematic chapter. In 10 months, the MFRR recorded 140 violations of media freedom in the country, including the death of nine journalists and media workers working on the front lines.

The report has also focused on another threat that journalists are increasingly facing: attacks perpetrated online. During the past year, reporters suffered increasing attacks in the digital sphere, from having their phones hacked with spyware to receiving online death threats against themselves and their family members. Legal threats have also been highlighted by the report. In 2022, the European Commission published an anti-SLAPP directive proposal to tackle the problem affecting journalists all over Europe.

The MFRR has also highlighted the increasing challenges faced by journalists covering environmental topics such as climate protests and the difficulties they have faced, from being arrested by police when covering demonstrations to being physically assaulted when trying to report on the environmental policies of private companies.

While overall Europe continues to be one of the safest places in the world to be a journalist and legal frameworks for free and independent journalism in EU states remain relatively strong, emerging threats to media and journalists by mercenary spyware and increasing pressures from SLAPPs and online attacks continue to create serious challenges for media freedom on the continent. The following MFRR Monitoring report will analyse the main issues affecting journalists and media workers during the first six months of 2023. All alerts are updated and published on [Mapping Media Freedom](#). ■

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 2022, published before 25 January 2023. If cases are reported and published after this date, 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. ■

MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE



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