



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media**

**SPECIAL REPORT ON THE SECOND ROUNDTABLE  
OF THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS PROJECT**

**SECURE WORKING CONDITIONS  
FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS**

13 JANUARY 2023

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## *Foreword*

In November 2018, the Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) adopted Decision 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists. In this landmark document, the participating States committed themselves to improve the safety of journalists on different inter-related aspects, including physical, legal, economic and online threats and attacks, with a special focus on the distinct risks faced by women journalists.

In 2022, the year in which we marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), the current RFoM Teresa Ribeiro decided to devote special attention to the topic of safety of journalists and launched a new project.

The project consists of seven roundtables, each covering another aspect of the topic of safety of journalists: (1) data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists and promotion of journalistic work; (2) secure working conditions; (3) safety of journalists in conflict situations; (4) intersectional perspectives; (5) digital safety; (6) legal harassment; (7) police prevention and fight against impunity.

The second roundtable took place on 16 November 2022, with the participation of six distinguished experts: Trond Idås, Special Advisor from the Norwegian Union of Journalists and National Focal Point (NFP) of Norway for this project; Filipe Lamelas, Legal Advisor with the Portuguese Union of Journalists; Tatjana Ljubić, Media development expert; Prof. Bjørn von Rimscha, Professor of Media Business at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz; Dr. Inaki Garcia-Blanco, Senior Lecturer from the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Culture; Allan Boye Thulstrup, Deputy Chairman of the Danish Association of Journalists.

This report is a reflection of the contributions and discussions from the second roundtable, with additional information from supporting material and literature. It does not suggest to be complete in its coverage, but rather aims to provide guidance to the participating States in their endeavor to further journalists' safety.

## *I. Introduction*

“The current model is not working and we cannot afford for it not to work.”

Journalism is a dynamic, but also a notoriously precarious profession. The proliferation and convergence of media, combined with the economic crisis and the pandemic, and a deterioration in trust in the media lead to a declining status of journalists in many OSCE participating States.

The Global 2021/2022 UNESCO report titled “Journalism is a public good: World trends in freedom of expression and media development” found that 65% of journalists – out of 1.400 journalists from 125 countries – feel less secure in their jobs. At the same time, an analysis based on data from the Varieties of Democracy Institute showed that 85% of the world’s population experienced a decline in media freedom in their country over the past five years.

So, while contemporary challenges vividly illustrate why journalism is greatly needed to provide citizens with access to information, at the same time, journalism’s survival is more and more jeopardized, even in countries with a long tradition of respecting media freedom.

Journalists and news organizations have been challenged by the rise of internet and social media. Nowadays, news organizations are operating across more platforms than ever before and journalists are required to engage with audiences in different and more sophisticated ways than in the past.

To reduce organizational budgets, news organizations more often rely on independent professionals, making freelance journalism a key employment alternative in the current media landscape. The conditions under which journalists have to perform their work are changing and, in most cases, worsening.

Universities, trade unions and professional journalists’ associations that have studied the development of journalistic practices over the past decade have observed that freelance and precarious work is not just a problem for individual journalists, but a problem for the media system as a whole: a decrease in economic safety of freelancers and precarious workers in the media field is strongly linked with a decrease of editorial freedom.

## ***II. Job (dis-)satisfaction***

According to the 2020 research report on journalist' job satisfaction titled *Illusio and disillusionment: expectations met or disappointed among young journalists*, the main concern of journalists nowadays is to keep their jobs, while a number of difficulties make them question the prospects of working long-term in the media sector. Moreover, those intending to leave the profession mention that they are frustrated with fundamental issues that comprise an enjoyable work environment, such as lack of job satisfaction, low salaries, family issues and decrease in the quality of news. This trend also affects younger journalists, who are highly susceptible to burnout, and feel uncertain about their intentions to work in the industry long-term.

Empirical evidence suggests that journalists' satisfaction with their work environment is declining. According to a research conducted by the *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*, journalism is more and more associated with increased levels of exhaustion, including increased job demands, increased workload or work pressure, reduced sense of autonomy, and reduced capacity for innovation. The same review concludes that young females with fewer years of experience in journalism, working in small circulation size newspapers are most at risk of burnout. The precise nature, extent, and consequences of these changes are still poorly understood, partly because empirical research on the changing nature of journalistic work is still limited.

During the roundtable, it was mentioned that greater vulnerability has a negative impact on job satisfaction among journalists. The enhancement of journalists' safety, which includes personal and digital safety, is therefore particularly recommendable to improve working conditions of journalists and therefore increase the quality of journalistic work, especially in the context of freelancers.

It is therefore recommended for the authorities of participating States to ensure that freelancers have access to the same support system that journalists with steady jobs would have. Next, experts underlined that sustainable funding for unions' and journalist associations' members, such as capacity building, consultations, implementation of internal guidelines/protocols or psychological support (e.g. a hotline) would be of relief to all media workers

## ***III. The way forward***

It is clear that the changes occurring in journalism have significant implications for the working conditions, whether journalists remain in traditional employment or pursue careers as freelancers. Many of the changes in journalism promote the rise of more

flexible and often precarious forms of employment, a greater variety of requested skills, as well as a greater diversity in the risks and rewards for journalists. A reduced audience, with people spending more of their time on social media, and less profitable business models endanger both the independence of the news media and their editorial integrity.

All experts at the roundtable agreed that improving working conditions of media workers would lead to higher quality content. At the same time, they noted that an increase in high quality journalistic content is strongly linked to the receptiveness of audiences for such content. In this regard, media literacy plays a crucial role.

Emerging means of organizing and financing journalistic work, such as journalism co-operatives, news start-ups state aid and crowdfunding were also discussed during the roundtable, noting that such initiatives can offer sustainable alternatives to the waning employment opportunities in the big news organizations or to the model of freelancers,.

One of the biggest challenges for independent journalism is precarity, as well as low income, which is also associated with precarity. State aid can depend on the country and the context, as it might not be accessible everywhere, especially not for independent media. Oftentimes, aid depends on external sources and different audience models. One of the suggested ways proposed by the experts is to use state aid to support journalists directly, rather than supporting media organizations, to provide safety, trainings and possibly also minimum wage, including for freelancers. Close collaboration with journalists' unions is strongly advised.

Another important issue that came across is that journalists' unions in the OSCE region should include freelancers in their work and advocate to improve their rights, as their precarious conditions might ultimately affect the quality of media produced in their countries. Lastly, it is advised to include freelancers into a national action plan on the safety of journalists, to secure a systematic approach to the issue.