



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

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

**DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND REPORTING ON  
ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS**

7 NOVEMBER 2022

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## *Foreword*

In December 2018, the Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation 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 line with her task to advocate and promote full compliance with OSCE principles and commitments regarding freedom of expression and free media (including those outlined in the 2018 Ministerial Council Decision) OSCE Representatives on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) Teresa Ribeiro has this year started a new project on the safety of journalists. The aim of this project is to take stock of existing policies and measures in OSCE participating States to promote and ensure the safety of journalists; to identify persisting gaps; and to develop recommendations based on good practice examples in the form of a toolkit at the end of the 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.

On 21 September, the first roundtable was held with the participation of five renowned experts: Guy Berger, former Director for Freedom of Expression and Media Development at UNESCO; Sarah Clarke, Head of Europe and Central Asia of Article19; Maria Ordzhonikidze, Director of the Justice for Journalists Foundation (JFJ); Renate Schroeder, Director of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ); and Sara Torsner, Research Associate with the Centre for Freedom of the Media of the University of Sheffield.

This report is a reflection of the contributions and discussions from the first 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*

“Gathering statistics on attacks against journalists is the foundation of any attempt to enhance the safety of journalists”

When attempting to enhance the safety of journalists in any given country, it is imperative to know the magnitude, character and causes of threats to the safety of journalists. Without this knowledge, a truly effective approach to further the safety of media workers will be extremely difficult to accomplish.

Systematic collection and analysis of data and reporting on attacks serve as the foundation for any system of prevention of threats and attacks against journalists; it provides insight into the safety situation in a given country and can identify gaps in mechanisms, legal rules and procedures. Based on the analysis of these data, policy and intervention mechanisms can be developed and implemented. Careful analysis can be used for the improvement and better allocation of prevention and protection mechanisms. Such statistics can also be used to create scenarios, patterns and trends, identifying situations in which media workers potentially face increased dangers and where they are especially vulnerable.

It seems that over the past decade a certain new norm has developed, recognizing the importance of monitoring and documenting attacks against journalists, especially after the UN General Assembly adopted resolutions calling for regular reporting and databases. Such norms evolve around data capture mechanisms to collect, alert and rapidly disseminate information, providing for a registry of disaggregated and contextualized information on attacks against journalists, with regular and up-to-date mapping of cases.

## *II. Establishing institutions*

In the Ministerial Council Decision 3/18, OSCE participating States have committed to establish or strengthen, where possible, national data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists. It is the primary responsibility of the State to collect data, relying on journalists to come forward and provide information when they are attacked. Unfortunately, there is a wide gap across the OSCE region regarding the systematic collection and analysis of threats and attacks against journalists.

The RFoM therefore recommends the participating States to establish an institution, national centre or other mechanism responsible for collecting data on incidents against journalists, preferably in the hands of one overarching institute or competent body. Such a structure could be newly created, but could also be added to an already existing institution, like a

national human rights institution, an ombudsperson, a department of a ministry dealing with media or justice affairs, or a statistical agency.

During the roundtable, the Italian example of the so-called “Coordination Centre on the Phenomenon of Intimidating Acts Against Journalists<sup>1</sup>” was mentioned, a body set up in 2017 which conducts monitoring, analysis and prevention work to improve journalists’ safety. Chaired by the Ministry of Interior, it is composed of the head of cabinet, the chief of police, the president and secretary general of the Italian Press Federation and the president and secretary general of the Order of Journalists.

It is imperative that any monitoring and data collection mechanism can work in an independent fashion. Close collaboration with civil society, including media and journalists’ organizations, and other (national, regional or international) actors in the field, like the Council of Europe, or the Centre for Freedom of the Media, is equally essential. Collaborating across disciplines is crucial, as part of a multi-stakeholder response - academia for instance can help improve methodologies, while in some participating States civil society organizations have long-term experience with the collection of data on threats and attacks against the media. As threats and attacks sometimes are of an international nature, cross border co-operation is strongly advised.

The established mechanism or structure should also function as the first point of contact for journalists who have been attacked, especially for freelance journalists who might otherwise lack the necessary resources and/or support structures.

As civil society organizations have a large role to play in reporting and shadow monitoring, the RFoM recommends to the authorities of the participating States to support and strengthen local and national-level civil society organizations on data collection, including through training on the collection of data. At the same time, some form of accountability mechanism should be established, in which civil society organizations can bring cases to the attention of the authorities and ensuring a proper response.

These days, in which State authorities are not the sole holders of information, internet companies possess a lot of important data that could be beneficial for monitoring attacks against journalists. Especially since data on online harassment, intimidation and cyber-attacks is more difficult to collect, it is advised to co-operate with the tech industry. During the roundtable, it was noted that the Digital Services Act of the European Union might provide a possibility to shape public opinion and to drive internet companies to open up and be more transparent. Gaining access to more data (under certain conditions) would in turn make it possible to carry out big data analysis. It was mentioned during the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/ministero/osservatori-commissioni-e-centri-coordinamento/centro-coordinamento-sul-fenomeno-atti-intimidatori-nei-confronti-dei-giornalisti>

roundtable that some of the victims had collected and stored all their attacks received on Facebook. Such data could provide an insight into the kind of attacks being carried out and the networks behind them, which in turn would help inform State's responses. This was especially important as attacks online often escalate into physical attacks.

### *III. What and how to collect*

The monitoring and data collection regarding the safety of journalists can be roughly divided into two categories: on the occurrence and details of threats and attacks, and on the possible follow-up by the different authorities, including the progress of criminal investigation and judicial procedures. Both categories should be monitored in a systematic and complementary manner. Although such mechanisms can take many forms in different national contexts, their functioning shares some basic principles.

All experts at the roundtable agreed that any monitoring system should be based on a detailed categorization of incidents, to define and analyse trends on the different types of violence that journalists encounter. Such categorization should include location, gender and employment status of the media workers being threatened or attacked and characteristics of the perpetrator(s). The collection of data on legal harassment (Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation, or SLAPP) cases was also mentioned as important to collect.

The experts recommended to use internationally recognized methods for data collection and analysis (partly based on the violation category definitions of the SDG indicator 16.10.<sup>2</sup>, but also including other attacks on the physical safety and integrity of journalists and on threats against and harassment of journalists) to be able to harmonize data, including cross-border comparison. In this light, the Council of Europe platform was mentioned, which collects data on attacks on physical safety and integrity of journalists; detention and imprisonment of journalists and harassment and intimidation of journalists. In addition, the Mapping Media Freedom initiative of the European Centre for Press & Media Freedom was named, with a quite detailed categorization, including physical assault; attack/threat to property; harassment/psychological abuse (or verbal attacks); legal incident; and censorship, all with more detailed subcategories.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.

<sup>3</sup> Mapping Media Freedom is part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) 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).

Several experts expressed their support for more enhanced, granular, detail-oriented and disaggregated data, with more categories added, as in some cases a variety of methods and hybrid attacks are employed against journalists. Such data can be used for in-depth studies aimed at identifying prevention measures and to create media risk maps to visualize and localize the various attacks in a certain region/city, as well as by date and type, possibly leading to a warning mechanism to those interested in a specific region and wishing to travel to report from there. Some experts mentioned the fact that some authorities examine the alerts from a purely quantitative perspective rather than qualitative, while such data should be used to provide a comprehensive understanding of violations and attacks.

Monitoring and information gathering should be based on the reporting by media workers under threat or attack themselves, but alerts and verification should also be received from other trusted sources such as trade unions, professional associations and press freedom organizations. Next, any monitoring institution should establish close co-operation with law enforcement and judicial authorities.

When looking at attacks and violence against women journalists, it is important to mention that female journalists face a double-burden, being attacked for their work and for their gender. Despite the pervasiveness of gender-based violence against women journalists, such violence is oftentimes invisible as women often hesitate to come forward and report incidents, especially when those collecting information are men. This reporting bias needs to be taken into account when setting up any mechanism or structure on data collection and reporting, in order to reduce the barriers for women journalists to report.

In this light, it is good to note that the RFoM has commissioned the development of a Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) monitoring tool, with indicators for gendered online violence escalation. This document, helping to develop methods and tools to detect, predict and ultimately help prevent the escalation of online violence against women journalists, into even more serious situations both on- and offline, will be included in the final toolkit of this Safety of Journalists Project.

During the roundtable, some experts expressed their concern regarding data collection by authorities, as this might lead to reprisals, especially since some authorities or public officials (including law enforcement officers, parliamentarians, members of government, etc.) are oftentimes the perpetrators of threats and attacks against journalists. It is therefore recommended to provide for a functioning form of anonymity and protection for people who want to report, including for whistle-blowers wanting to provide information. While bearing this in mind, monitoring bodies should be transparent in the way they process information and should report about their findings on a regular basis.

Lastly, it was advised to institutionalize monitoring into a national action plan on the safety of journalists, to secure a systematic approach to the issue.